

Historic, with a Modern



The National Western looks forward to a facelift.

by **Shelby Mettlen**, assistant editor

Since 1906, the historic Denver stockyards have been home to the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo. Thousands of sets of hooves have made their way from the Yards to the showing on the Hill in 111 years, but it's time for the National Western to get a serious makeover.

Plans are in the works for several partners to begin construction of what will be called the National Western Center to build on and improve the National Western Stock Show facilities.

"It's the only home the Stock Show has ever had," explains Kelly Leid, executive director of the mayor's office of the National Western Center in Denver. "As an organization that's been around for a hundred years, the site feels 100 years old. It is essentially obsolete. It no longer meets the needs of both the customers or the vendors or the participants, and it really needs a substantial modernization."

History and innovation

Leid, who has been involved in the project since 2013, says that just five years ago there was concern of the NWSS leaving Denver because facilities just couldn't keep up with the show's

growth in entries, entertainment and audience.

The National Western Complex that's used today is the original home of the Denver Union Stockyards Co., which essentially created the event. Leid and his team wanted to make sure the NWSS kept its original home and its historic feel. Five partners have come together to make sure that happens — the City and County of Denver, Colorado State University (CSU),

History Colorado, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and the Western Stock Show Association.

Denver's city council adopted the plan in 2015, which will expand the site from 130 acres to 250. During the next decade, Leid says the site will be transformed from its current condition to a modern entertainment complex with all new, adaptively redone buildings that will feature the historic elements and character of the original facilities.

The National Western Center will transform the stock show grounds into a year-round destination that will do three things, Leid says: Celebrate the stock show and allow the stock show to grow substantially in both livestock and equestrian events with partners like CSU adding experiential learning and research to the site, and growing agribusiness, "really creating the catalyst by which Colorado could become the 'Silicon Valley of ag,' bringing public and private interest together to solve some of the world's biggest food issues that are in front of us."

The City of Denver is acquiring land now, and Paul Andrews, president and CEO of the National Western Stock Show, says he's hopeful the task



► National Western Center proposed site plans from an aerial view.

Twist

Stock Show



Proposed Stadium



Proposed Stockyards

will be completed soon and construction can begin. Next year, exhibitors and attendees can expect a show similar to this year's — with the exception of parking.

“One advantage we'll have in 2018 is the city will have bought most of the land, and we can start parking on that land,” he explains. “Our parking in 2018 will be more plentiful than ever.”

Moving forward

Leid says one of the project's greatest challenges is that the show can't shut down or move to another facility while construction begins.

Over the course of 2017, Leid and his team will design a construction schedule for the site to share with vendors and associations that are actively participating in the annual show. The schedule will give details about what they can expect during the early phases of the project and how exhibitors and attendees will navigate the site during its redevelopment.

Collectively, the project will raise more than \$1 billion to make the National Western Center the global destination for agricultural heritage and innovation, Andrews says.

“Denver truly is a place where Western heritage started and where Western heritage should be celebrated year-round,” he says.

Necessary improvements

The National Western Center will allow for expanded livestock show entries, growing the number of possible entries by an anticipated 30%. Gone will be the days of too few power outlets to plug in blowers, bringing your own generators, waiting on wash stalls and trailer lines.

“What vendors and folks are going to start to see is modern amenities that make their experience on the site substantially better,” Leid says. He encourages exhibitors to share their input and specific needs.

“This is the fun part of the project,” he says, “because you really do start to have real conversations with folks that are affected by the improvements that we make, and then show them that we've heard them, and we put into practice what we've heard from those folks.”

Leid calls the NWSS the “Super Bowl of the livestock industry,” adding that the new improvements will set the event apart even further from other events of its kind.

“There won't be anything like it in the country in terms of sheer volume or breeds that we'll be able to support in the new facility,” he says.

The National Western Center will allow the facilities to expand the level and volume of regional, national and international shows at the site.

Mixing old and new

“Our new vision statement says that we are the global destination for agricultural heritage and innovation,” Leid says. “The site is historic. It's got the old pens that are remnants from the old stockyards themselves, so one of our really big goals is to try to blend old and new.”



PHOTO BY SHELBY METTLER

► “I think we've really got to remember that Denver truly is a place where Western heritage started ... where [it] should be celebrated year-round,” says Paul Andrews, president and CEO of the National Western Stock Show.

Several of the original buildings will be restored to the original grandeur, including the 1909 Stadium Arena building. The building's brick will be exposed for the first time in nearly 100 years.

“We will be very thoughtful about blending old and new,” he assures. “People will see pieces of the old yards that they've always known, but with a very modern twist.”

Cody Sankey of Sankey's 6N Ranch, Council Grove, Kan., has been attending the National Western since he was just 6 years old and calls the National Western a “historic place to exhibit cattle

and livestock.” From sleeping on show boxes to coaching the Oklahoma State University Livestock Judging team to victory at the Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Competition, Sankey has racked up quite the bank of memories at the NWSS. Even so, he's looking forward to the future.

“It's exciting times to look forward to the new event center that's being planned, but a little piece of history hopefully comes along with it as it's being planned,” he says. “There's not another place in the world that does it better than the National Western. When we come here in the future and see the new facility, I think it's just going to be awesome.”

Learn more about the National Western Center's expansion plans at www.nationalwesterncenter.com.

