

CIAA, city looking to 2007

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around on foot, by Gold Rush or take a \$5 cab."

"The main complaint I heard was parking," CIAA Commissioner Leon Kerry said. "But the fans are going to have to cooperate, too, by leaving their cars at the hotel and taking the (shuttle). I walked to the arena every day."

Since this was a new concept to longtime CIAA visitors, many fell into the familiar pattern of driving from hotels to restaurants and the arena. That's what happened in Raleigh, the tournament's home before Charlotte, where the RBC Center is on the outskirts and driving is essential. With restaurants and clubs in Center City, officials hoped fans would walk to and from the arena.

"That was one of the things that the CIAA liked, but the fans didn't take advantage of it," Quinn said.

Figures from the Charlotte Bobcats Arena show that more than 124,000 fans attended games last week. Though a total tally of the economic impact of the weeklong event hasn't been done yet, officials estimate that the CIAA left at least \$12 million in Charlotte. ESPN, which aired tournament games on ESPN2 and ESPN Classic, saw growth as well.

In an e-mail from Paul Melvin, assistant manager for sports communications at the network, viewership rose 188 percent.

"In 2006, the viewership was 130,551 households, compared to 42,255 in 2005," he said.

Though there won't be an official review of the tournament procedures until mid-month, Quinn said educating visitors on parking and the location of eateries in Center City is something that the city will have to work on for next year.

"I think when people get their hotel conformation or their tickets, they should get an information sheet telling them about parking and restaurants," Quinn said.

When Center City Partners and local CIAA organizers meet to discuss the tournament, they're going to look at areas where adjustments should be made.

"We're happy with the way (the tournament) went," Quinn said.

Mike Kitchen, a Charlotte party promoter and longtime CIAA tournament regular, said Charlotteans don't seem used to having so many celebrities in town.

"People lost their minds when they heard P. Diddy (music impresario Sean Combs) was having a party here," he said.

Kitchen said his only complaint is that fans didn't seem to start partying until Thursday.

"I was out from Monday to Saturday and I didn't find a crowd until Thursday and that was at the AKA (Alpha

Kappa Alpha Sorority) party," he said. "I know people get here late, but why couldn't the Charlotteans come out and take advantage of the parties?"

Some tournament visitors are already looking forward to next year.

North Carolina Central University graduate Edward Cook was making plans Sunday to get a hotel room in Center City and tickets for himself and his wife.

"I had a wonderful time, the hospitality was great and I can't wait to come back," he said.

Johnson C. Smith University President Dorothy C. Yancy said this year's tournament was the best ever.

"The cooperation we

received from the hotels and the people of Charlotte was like an all out welcoming committee," she said. "It was a great community effort."

Yancy said it would be a good idea to give visitors maps of uptown that shows where restaurants and parking lots are as soon as they arrive.

"It's nice to have the maps in the newspaper but people need something they can put in their hands," she said. "I saw a lot of people wandering around looking for places and not knowing where to go and it was a case of it being right around the corner."

Charlotte has a three-year deal to host the tournament through 2008.

The Triangle Tribune contributed to this report.



Kerry

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