

VENUES**today**

The news behind the headlines

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"If a member needs to step up to the bar and order their own drink, we have failed." — *Angela Drummond* of the new Collaborations premium dining club opening at the Verizon Center in Washington.

CONCESSIONS

VERIZON CENTER LAUNCHES COUNTRY-CLUB APPROACH TO PREMIUM INVENTORY

A group of Washington business consultants are teaming up with the Verizon Center to top business establishment.

The club will be called Collaborations and is being launched by Washington business consulting firm SiloSmashers; named for their ability to smash the vertical structures (i.e. silos) that stifle efficiency in the workplace. Using the new club at the Verizon Center as a model, SiloSmashers hopes to soon create a network of country-club-style premium spaces at facilities across the U.S. for members to use while traveling.

"The idea is to develop a business club for peak performance networking for the top executives in the Washington, D.C., area. We're really looking to build an environment of people who are prominent," said SiloSmashers' CEO Angela Drummond. "A major element of Collaborations will be fine dining within a sports environment. Executives love to go to nice restaurants, they love to go to sports events and they love to build a business environment."

Admission to the invitation-only club will range from \$50,000 to \$350,000 annually, with the typical membership averaging about \$250,000 for four-people, explained Collaborations President Bruce Higgins. The new club will be in a 5,000-square-foot space on the third floor Lexus Suite Level of the Verizon Center and is planned to be opened by the beginning of the 2007/2008 basketball season.

Officials with Washington Sports and Entertainment, which manages the Verizon Center, said the new facility is a good fit for the arena, which is seeing an increase in demand for premium seating access for lobbyist and corporate interests.

"We're always searching for creative and exclusive ways to provide outstanding benefits to our clients," said Washington Sports and Entertainment Chairman Abe Pollin. "Our facility has become a destination for businesses throughout the region to host and entertain their clients and the new Collaborations club will provide a first class space for some of the region's top companies."

Drummond emphasized that the space will be a departure from the typical premium suite experience and feel more like a country club, decorated in dark mahogany and plush leather chairs. The layout of the club has not been finalized, but Drummond explained the space will include a large dining area, a viewing area and business and conference spaces.

Levy restaurants will handle food services for the space, which will be divided between chef stations with small items like lobster cocktails that will be included in the membership. Larger meals will be served in a private dining setting and will cost extra.

"In fact our a la carte menu will change for every event because one of the things we hear from our clientele is that they're sick of the same food," Higgins said. "The food will be very premium and very seasonal."

Clients can even reserve their own table for the entire season that exclusively belongs to them, as well as access to a food locker to store extremely high-end items like wine and spirits.

The high-end food will come with high-end service, explained Drummond, who said Collaborations would be well staffed with returning employees who are trained to learn the individual tastes of the clientele.

"Our waiting staff will be taught to know what our clients want and need. We envision creating a profile of each client outlining their favorite drinks and food preferences, as well as food allergies," Drummond said. "We're looking at very heavy staffing per person. If a member needs to step up to the bar and order their own drink, we have failed."

Membership to Collaborations includes access to every single event at the Verizon Center, which hosts the National Basketball Association's Washington Wizards, the Women's National Basketball Association's Washington Mystics, the National Hockey League's Washington Capitals and Georgetown's men's basketball team, as well as concerts.

The club is also set to include access to conference rooms with the latest in high-tech communication including video-conferencing and wireless devices that can instantly charge the lithium batteries in cell phones and PDAs once the user enters the room. Higgins said the facility will also offer a concierge service with access to local golf courses, limo services and private jets. Members will have their own private parking spaces at the Verizon Center, as well as access to a full range of seating inventory including some courtside seats that can be purchased through the concierge.

Collaborations will be governed by a board of directors consisting of members who nominate and sponsor other members interested in applying to belong to the club.

"We're duplicating the country club concept at the premium sports level," explained Drummond, "It's going to be so exclusive that not many people are going to get in because there's not going to be much turnover."

Ultimately, Drummond said she would like to roll out the Collaborations model into other sports facilities across the U.S. Her firm has patented the design of the club and envisions a network of Collaborations clubs at sports facilities across the U.S.

"We're looking very broad, not just at NBA facilities, but all types of sports," she said.

— Dave Brooks