



Philly makes 3 stadium combo work for fans, neighbors



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PHILADELPHIA -- Andrew Dankanich is a hulking figure right out of central casting.

"I think this is the best area in Philadelphia," he said as he sat on his front stoop in a neighborhood known as Packer Park. "It's a very unique, diverse place."

His row house once had a view of Veteran's Stadium. Dankanich celebrated that stadium's demise in 2004 with an implosion party. "It came down – boom – boom – boom."

Now, all he sees on game day is the guy in a red jacket named Shawn Jalosinski.

On any major event day, the executive director of the **Philadelphia Special Sports Complex District** walks around the neighborhood, looking for trouble. "It's about the neighborhoods, and protecting their quality of life, and not only protecting it, but improving it, and promoting efficient operation," Jalosinski said.

The former civil engineer said the four major sports franchises that play in Philadelphia's sports district spend \$1 million a year funding his office, which works as a liaison between the neighborhoods and teams. Residents have a seat on the board, and decide how money is spent.

"We have a full time residential cleaning team," said Jalosinski, "Six people working Monday through Friday, cleaning their streets and sidewalks."

It's just one duty taken on by the quasi-government agency -- created in 2002 just before the Phillies and Eagles moved into their new homes. Today, four teams play next door to each other, unlike any other major city in the country. The NFL Eagles play at Lincoln Financial Field, the NBA's Sixers and NHL's Flyers play in the Wells Fargo Center, and the Phillies play in Citizens Bank Park.

The District, in cooperation with its neighbors, has set limits on how many people can attend events in one day (84,000), and can levy fines against teams who try to circumvent the rules. For instance, the Phillies and Eagles are not allowed to play on the same day (exceptions can be made during the playoffs). Jalosinski puts out a schedule of events at least a month in advance to warn commuters, and residents about the possible impacts.

Traffic is a major issue here. There are two freeways (I-76 & I-95) passing through, while the Philadelphia Port Authority operates nearby and the Delaware River borders it to the East.

"It's a little difficult getting out of here," said Fiorella Mirabito, an Eagles Fan from Bath, Pa. "It's all congested."

"[I-95] can get backed up for a long time," said Dan Hilferty, another Eagles fan, who said he still believes multiple stadiums in one area can work. "It seems to work here, it seems to work here."

Comcast Spectacor, which runs the Wells Fargo Center, said the situation was helped by the creation of a Traffic Management Center inside the Arena. It is led by former Philadelphia Police Lt. Mike Hasson.

"You can see the traffic how it's coming in and floating off the streets," said Hasson, the VP of Security for the Arena. He said the District helped pay for Variable Message Boards to direct people out of the parking lots onto the freeways, and he said his team has been able to adjust to conditions based on what they see from the on-site cameras.

"The infrastructure needed to change to make sure this is working," said Eagles Vice President Leonard Bonacci. He said the franchise also worked over time to develop a mobile app to help mitigate traffic.

The App allows a fan to plug in a particular parking lot, or their home address, to find the best route in and out. The Eagles said it has been downloaded 700,000 times.

The Stadiums are surrounded by 22,000 parking spots, more than double the accessible parking near Seattle's Stadium District, home to Safeco Field, Century Link Field, and the proposed basketball and hockey Arena site.

"If there are daytime games during the week, there can be a problem," said Joe Menta, spokesperson for the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority.

The PRPA's Packer Avenue Terminal, the its largest, is less than a mile from the stadiums. The 103-acre site is also key for the Hyundai Distribution Center, a major importer and employer. The PRPA said it provides a little more than 5,200 jobs, and between 35,000 and 45,000 are Port-Related "river wide."

"We're deepening our river 45 feet, so we can welcome those ships coming to our region as a result of things like the Panama Canal being widened and deepened," said Menta. "You have to be ready to welcome those ships."

However, Menta said a few minor changes have or will help traffic flow. The changes include a soon-to-be-installed road sensor near the Packer Avenue Terminal that will stop traffic for large trucks, and freight-only ramps to the nearby Walt Whitman bridge are on the drawing board.

Sysco Philadelphia President Bill Tubb has an major distribution center across the street from Citizens Bank Park. He said the company moves 70,000 cases of food every day in and out of the building, which at 460,000 square feet is bigger than the size of Seattle's Key Arena.

"We have to work around, if there are multiple events at the same time," said Tubb, "But we don't run into much of it." He said the company's trucks typically leave between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m., and are off the road prior to 5 p.m. "Coming from other cities with other stadiums, stand alone stadiums, you experience traffic 10 times worse," said Tubb.

Neighbors say a bigger issue may be the new Xfinity Live! Entertainment Complex, which opened earlier this year. The 50,000 square foot building features multiple bars and restaurants, and is located between the three stadiums. Neighbors have complained about outdoor concerts, which have echoed through the neighborhood.

Dankanich said his District leaders are now working to address neighbors' concerns. "I worry more about the economy than if I can hear Pink Floyd the Wall," he joked.

As far as the traffic?

"You have problems with traffic," Dankanich said, "and you can't deal with it, you live in an inner city, so it's inevitable. It's like saying you don't like water, and you live by the beach."

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