

Marketing firm tackles 'super' sports projects

BY JIM FREER

The feeling is 'super' at Sports Management Research Institute this month.

The Fort Lauderdale-based consulting firm helped train about 1,000 employees at New Orleans' Superdome for the rebuilt arena's first event since Hurricane Katrina hit that city in late August 2005.

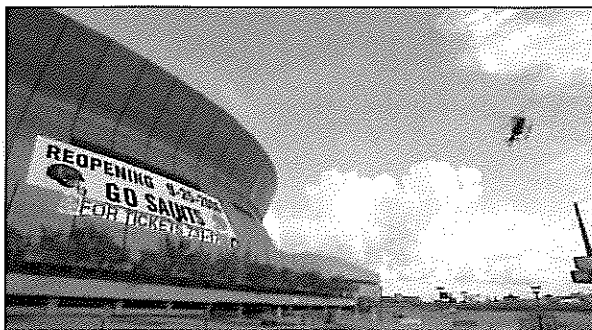
The matchup between the New Orleans Saints and Atlanta Falcons will be ESPN's Monday Night Football game on Sept. 25.

In mid-September, the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee awarded SMRI the contract for the economic impact study on the Feb. 4 game and surrounding events. SMRI did those studies for the last two Super Bowls played at Dolphin Stadium in Miami, in 1995 and 1999.

SMRI is hiring temporary staff and volunteers who will visit and monitor the stadium, off-site parties, hotels, restaurants, airports and other sites during the weeks and days prior to the game. It will use that research to estimate how much money visitors spend and where they spend it in South Florida.

The study will indicate which industries benefit, and to what extent, from the Super Bowl and help organizers prepare for the 2010 Super Bowl at Dolphin Stadium, said Kathleen Davis, SMRI's president and CEO.

**SPORTS MANAGEMENT
RESEARCH INSTITUTE**
Web site: www.go-smri.com
Address: 800 Cypress
Creek Road, Suite 200, Fort
Lauderdale 33334
Phone: (954) 389-9095



Sports Management Research Institute helped train about 1,000 employees for the Superdome's Sept. 25 reopening.

Civic spirit in New Orleans is receiving a vital benefit from the Sept. 25 game.



Davis

"People in New Orleans are very upbeat about the rebirth of the Superdome," Davis said. "We are happy to be part of the effort to help the employees deliver exceptional service at this important game."

Rocks groups U2 and Green Day are expected to perform as part off the festivities and President George H. W. Bush will be in attendance, according to national media reports.

Davis spent almost a week in New Orleans helping Philadelphia-based SMG, which operates the Superdome, train workers for the concession stands, park-

ing lots and other service areas. Most have not previously worked at the Superdome.

Before she started SMRI in 1995, Davis taught sports management at Tulane University in New Orleans, and conducted training and operational assessments at the Superdome.

SMRI has done studies for the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) on the impact of media coverage of Super Bowls, the annual professional tennis tournament on Key Biscayne and races at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Her national clients include the U.S. Open tennis tournament.

In 1999, SMRI estimated that Super Bowl visitors' spending produced a direct economic impact of \$240 million on South Florida. That figure is for spending that includes hotels, meals, and local

transportation and entertainment - but not game tickets.

By adding follow-up spending by employees of hotels, restaurants and other tourist spots, the total impact was \$398 million.

"I am not making predictions, but I anticipate it will be higher this time if you just include the increase in the cost of living," Davis said.

"The long-term effects will far outweigh the short-term effects," she said. "People will take information and use it in helping plan for more Super Bowls."

By the end of this year, Miami Dolphins' management expects most of a \$250 million renovation will be completed at Dolphin Stadium.

That includes the opening of extensions on the stadium's north and south sides, with areas where corporate parties will be held the week before the game.

Dolphins executives hope those changes will add to the attractions they can offer the NFL as they seek more Super Bowls.

Economic impact numbers that can be trusted "are critical in organizing sponsorship and obtaining contributions and renewals for sports events," said Bill Talbert, president and CEO of the GMCVB.

He expects Davis will continue to gain national and local contracts, because "I have never heard anyone challenge any of her findings."

E-MAIL STAFF WRITER Jim Freer
[at jifreer@bizjournals.com](mailto:jifreer@bizjournals.com).

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NEIL EFRON

Senior Vice President,
Commercial Mortgage Banking
Office: 954-940-5313
Mobile: 561-379-5807
NEfron@BankAtlantic.com

RANDALL GILBERT

Assistant Vice President,
Commercial Mortgage Banking
Office: 321-263-2122
Mobile: 321-297-5887
RGilbert@BankAtlantic.com