

# Philips Arena goes full-service



**RED:** The new restaurant will help Philips Arena win dollars from ticket holders who might otherwise have had dinner at a downtown restaurant.

By **Lisa R. Schoolcraft**  
STAFF WRITER

**T**he owners of the **Atlanta Hawks** are spending \$2 million to create the first full-service restaurant at **Philips Arena**.

The renovation will remove seven rows of seats, extending the former **Headlines Bar & Grill** into the seating bowl of the 20,000-seat arena, said Hawks and Arena President **Bob Williams**.

The Hawks ownership group, led by majority owners **Bruce Levenson** and **Michael Gearon Jr.**, are paying for the renovations, **Williams** said.

The restaurant will be called **RED**, named for one of the Hawks' team colors.

It is the final phase of a \$4 million upgrade to all the food and beverage

facilities at Philips Arena, which included the **Georgia's Own Credit Union** club level and concession area, he added.

"The most compelling design element [at RED] is tiering all of the tables and booths so you will have a view of the Hawks basketball court while dining or having a beverage," **Williams** said. "People in the back of the restaurant will have a sight line to the court."

But **RED**, which should open in early February, won't be open just for Hawks games, it will be open for every ticketed event at the arena, and for Philips Arena, that means about 200 events a year.

The new restaurant, which will be reduced from 14,000 to 10,000 square feet but will seat 250, will also have a stadium kitchen, much like those on

popular food television shows, he said. "As a result, people can watch chefs prepare the food in an exhibition space in the middle of the restaurant."

That's a far cry from **Headlines Bar & Grill**, which used to have two concession stands where customers ordered before taking their food to a table, **Williams** said.

Full-service restaurants at sporting venues are fairly new, but there are a lot of reasons to have them, said **Eric Giandelone**, director of food-service research at **Mintel International Group Ltd.**, a consumer research firm.

"Over the past 10 years, you have seen a lot more stadiums going back into the city, especially smaller arenas," he said.

Those arenas are moving out of the

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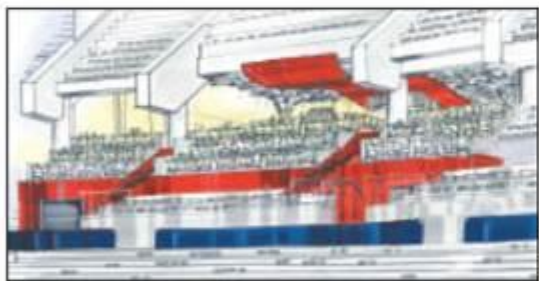
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suburbs and back into denser populations "and when they do that they are competing with everything around them," Giandelone said.

For Philips Arena, that means its food offerings were competing with nearby Taco Mac, McCormick & Schmick's and other restaurants, he said.

A full-service restaurant at the arena isn't going to affect concession sales as much "but if you are looking to get a little more money from people in the seats, then a restaurant is the way to do that," Giandelone said. "Fans are going to restaurants before and after a game, and that's money [the arena is] not getting."

The trend of adding amenities at sporting venues really started with upgrades to suites and club seating, he said, but those have higher ticket prices.



**RED hot:** Tiering all of the tables gives diners a view of the basketball court.

A restaurant allows Philips Arena to get more revenue from every ticket holder, not just those paying for premium seats. "It's a better revenue play to get incremental sales from every piece of real estate in the stadium."

One of the first venues to add amenities was the Toronto SkyDome, now called

**Rogers Center**, which opened with a hotel and restaurants in 1989.

"Now whenever there is a new stadium, you see those," Giandelone said.

But even older sporting venues, such as Philips Arena, are being retrofitted with amenities, he said. Wrigley Field in Chicago now has a restaurant in center field.

"It's to make sure sales happen in the arena, not outside of it," Giandelone said.

**Turner Field's** 755 Club is a full-service restaurant, but open only to season and premium ticket holders, while its The Chop House is a full-service restaurant that is open to all ticket holders.

**Johnson Studios** in Atlanta designed RED, and owner Bill Johnson said his firm has designed the suites at Philips Arena, and designed its club-level food venues.

"We've done a couple of things in sports venues that are different than a normal restaurant, but a lot of things are the same," he said. "We are making a space for people to enjoy themselves."

But there is a key difference with RED.

The restaurant, unlike its traditional brethren, "is not the main show," Johnson said, "which is the arena and what happens there. That definitely plays into the design."

Adding a full-service restaurant to Philips Arena is not unlike what is happening at airports and other venues, he said.

"People are realizing the competition is so strong in the restaurant world," he said. "There are so many options available. If you are in the business of attracting customers and selling food, you have to give them something worthwhile. Everyone is competing for the same dollar."

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