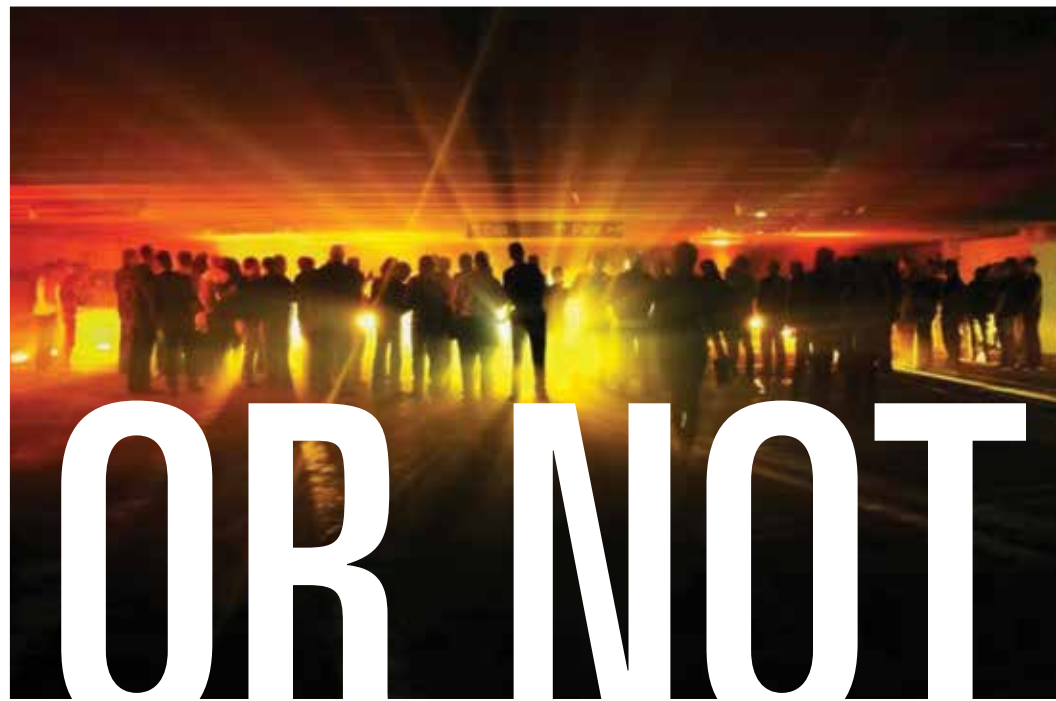




LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED



OR NOT

Leasing garages for special events.

By Larry J. Cohen, CAPP

"And the winner in the category of Parking Innovation in a Parking Program goes to...The Lancaster Parking Authority, for their garage rooftop events!" So went the annual awards banquet of the Pennsylvania Parking Association last September.

That night, I accepted the award for innovation in a parking operation in the form of a beautiful Academy Award-like trophy that I cherish and proudly display in my office. The next morning I was brought back down from the euphoria of the win with a presentation about the potential dangers of hosting events atop garages. What a dichotomy.

With just a mention of special events in our authority newsletter, we generated a lot of interest and have been very successful leasing out the roofs in our various garages for different events, including a birthday party, political fundraiser, viewing party for downtown fireworks, a tailgate party with antique cars, and a fire island-themed fundraiser with dancers, fire breathers, cabanas, D.J., and many bright lights.

We decided some time ago that using our parking assets during off-hours in support of community events would be a win-win proposition. The events would generate lease revenue along with parking revenue during off-hours. We'd also enjoy the personal satisfaction of seeing people in celebration on the decorated rooftop of a garage, most of whom were amazed that a parking garage was transformed into a social area and wasn't just a concrete building to park their cars. The adulation from attendees who were not used to such an event would also bolster our image and brand. We were right—many kudos and thanks followed from organizers and attendees.

Shortly after accepting our beautiful trophy, my winds started to deflate as an architect from a Philadelphia area consulting firm went through



Stating the obvious, make sure you emphasize with the event holder that having a party or function on the roof of a parking garage is not the same as having a function in a catering facility.

slide after slide of various garage designs and why they should not be used for anything but parking—you can read his thoughts on p 32. In one slide, he presented the total weight of people as compared to the total weight of vehicles in a garage, with the total weight of people being much greater than that of vehicles. Agreeing with his mathematical calculations, I had to ask, “Isn’t snow much heavier than both?” He said yes, which went a long way in alleviating the fears of my board members in attendance who were thinking “Are these rooftop events a good idea?” and questioning whether we should continue or not. I assured them that as long as we didn’t have hundreds of people jumping up and down in unison to a dance song, we should be alright.

Our facilities are old, but have survived a small earthquake and annual fireworks (launched from a platform) being set off from the top of one of our garages for years.

Knowing the millions of dollars I have spent on rehabbing garages over the years, I asked if there was any historical data on garages being severely damaged or collapsing as a result of special events on garage rooftops. The presenter stated, “No,” but showed several scenes from championship parades where hundreds of spectators crowded along the decks of a garage for a view of a championship parade. Could that number of people create structural damage? There is a strong case that it can. Could someone fall or be pushed over the side? More likely a possibility and liability situation.

So should you use your garages for special events and provide a public service to your community? I say

the pros outweigh the cons, and we took several steps to ensure our events’ safety:

- Our insurance company was involved to make sure anyone having an event in our facility has proper insurance coverage and provides a certificate of insurance. Our lawyers were also involved in drafting a good template agreement that anyone leasing the facility needs to sign and abide by.
- We have to think about liquor and confirm requirements for events that include it. Typically, commercial general liability policies provide “host liquor liability” coverage. That allows you to have an office party with alcohol, serve (free) drinks, and still be covered. However, as soon as there is any type of charge associated with liquor, host liquor liability no longer applies. The courts have determined over the years that selling alcoholic beverages at an event goes well beyond what the local state store or restaurant does. In fact, selling can mean a situation where there are drink tickets as part of the admission cost or where donations are requested to offset the price of the alcoholic beverages being supplied. To protect your operation, if the host intends to provide guests with alcoholic beverages and there is any type of cost or charge associated with that, they should purchase liquor liability. Most important to you is to make sure no garage personnel are involved with serving, carrying, or otherwise distributing liquor for the event.
- The fire marshal is also contacted to make sure the number of people attending the event is adequate and



not a major issue for evacuation. In the event of a fire, you would think anyone can walk down the ramps, but you also need adequate stair and elevator access.

- Our operations staff is involved to make sure the logistics of the event are right. Stating the obvious, make sure you emphasize with the event holder that having a party or function on the roof of a parking garage is not the same as having a function in a catering facility. Temporary bathroom facilities need to be provided if none are accessible.
- Security needs to be provided to watch that people are not hanging too close to the edge and not leaving drinks on the ledge. No glass products are allowed, except in poured bottles handled by catering staff. Everything must be paper and plastic because broken glass would be a major problem.
- We secure a cleaning deposit in addition to the lease to make sure the garage is left “broom clean.”
- Lastly, we ask clients to plan an alternate location based on weather conditions, which may include too hot or too cold temperatures, rain, wind, etc. Be prepared to relocate the event to a deck below the roof to stay out of the elements. There are better times than others to hold a rooftop event that minimizes the effect of weather conditions.

If you decide to move forward with events in or on your garages, taking these precautions will help to ensure you have successful functions that the community will be talking about long after the event is completed, while giving them a different outlook and perspective of parking garages in the future.



LARRY J. COHEN, CAPP, is executive director of the Lancaster, Pa., Parking Authority. He can be reached at lcohen@lancasterparkingauthority.com.

NEW PARKING SOLUTIONS by HAMILTON

Hamilton Manufacturing has been building reliable, economical equipment for 89 years.

Hamilton Transaction Kiosk (HTK)

- Parking Permits
- Hanging Tags
- Dual Bill Dispenser (optional)
- Customer Value Card Acceptance
- Email/Text Notifications
- Separate Locking Cash Chamber
- Special Event Times & Pricing

Gold Line Plus Parking Autocashier

- Single Bill Dispenser
- Cash, Coin, & Credit Card
- Customer Value Card Acceptance
- Tokenote Acceptance
- 5.7" Graphic Display
- Bonus Token Capability

Data Access Network (DAN)

- High Speed Credit Card Transactions
- Remote Access to Hamilton Units
- Event Pricing
- Email/Text Notifications
- Customer Value Cards

Bill to Bill to Coin Dispenser Series

- Dual Bill Dispenser
- \$1,000 Bill Stacker
- \$1,200 Quarter Coin Hopper
- Bill and/or Tokenote Dispensing
- Coin or Token Dispensing

Coin Entry Unit (CEU)

- Accept metal tokens and/or coins to open a parking gate

Card & Change Dispenser (CCD)

- Dispense Change
- Sell Customer Value Cards
- Recharge Existing Cards

Hamilton Manufacturing Corp.

Find more information about our comprehensive line of products at www.hamiltonmfg.com or call 888-723-4858.