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former Carlson CEO

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president and CEO, Meet Minneapolis



WINNING THE SUPER BOWL

Well, almost. The team is still on the way, but the city, state, stadium, local businesses and community are already basking in glory.

BY BOBBY HART

The stadium features the world's largest pivoting glass doors, a highlight of Carlson Nelson's presentation to NFL owners: "It's like opening its arms to welcome the community."

PHOTO AND RENDERINGS: MINNESOTA VIKINGS



When it came to pitching Minneapolis as the host city of the Super Bowl LII, the bid committee was faced with filling a blank canvas, equal parts gift and curse. Its final competitors, Indianapolis and New Orleans, had hosted Super Bowls in 2012 and 2013, respectively, so they could paint a familiar picture when presenting to NFL owners. Minneapolis' last successful bid was for Super Bowl XXVI in 1992 in the Metrodome. Suffice to say, Minneapolis was essentially starting from scratch, telling the tale of a transformed city and a new stadium that didn't yet exist. "The advantage of it is that it forced us to go into excruciating detail about what we could do to make the NFL feel as though this was the best site for Super Bowl LII," says Melvin Tennant, CAE, president and CEO of Meet Minneapolis.

The Minneapolis team also brought some hard-hitting presenters: Marilyn Carlson Nelson, former Carlson CEO; Richard Davis, chairman and CEO, U.S. Bank; and Doug Baker, chairman and CEO, Ecolab. It was no coincidence Carlson Nelson was chair of the host committee for Super Bowl XXVI. "Clearly she was the glue that bound us together because I think one of the story lines that really helped us to get the Super Bowl was the fact that even though it had been a long time since we had hosted it, we still had this community leader who was there and who was going to be with you again the next time," Tennant says. "That really made a difference."

Pitching a stadium that didn't yet exist was a unique obstacle, but one the bid committee embraced. Carlson Nelson gushed to the owners about her favorite feature of the stadium: the world's largest pivoting glass doors made of 60,000 square feet of glass—five of them—the tallest standing 95 feet tall. "I said it's like opening its arms to welcome the community and that's just going to be spectacular," she recalls. "No one has seen anything like that. During the presentation, I had them stop, rewind and do that a second time so people could just look at it and wonder at it because there's no other stadium that has something like that."

Without U.S. Bank Stadium, it's safe to assume there would be no Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis. The city hadn't been asked to bid since 1992 because the modern Super Bowl had become such a large attraction that the Metrodome wouldn't be equipped, according to Tennant, who added that Minneapolis was turned down in 2008 for a Final Four bid for that very reason. "So that just reinforced the fact that, yes, getting U.S. Bank Stadium up and running was absolutely pivotal," he says. "Pivotal."

Tennant and Carlson Nelson both vividly remember the suspense of the owners placing their votes after the final presentation, while a media scrum piled outside of where the New Orleans team was gathered in anticipation. It was clear who the favorite was. "One of my favorite moments when it was announced, there was this huge rush to get outside our room and interview us," Carlson Nelson remembers. "They were practically falling over each other to get back to our room because they had anticipated incorrectly. That was really fun."

Now the fun part is preparing for Feb. 4, 2018. "One of the big things we'll have to do now is get some [8,000-10,000] volunteers," Carlson Nelson says. "The community-wide collaboration is very exciting and many good things will come of that beyond the Super Bowl, particularly for event planners who want to bring people to our community." ■