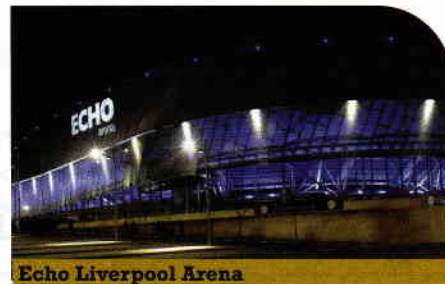




All meals at ACC Liverpool are freshly prepared, cooked and plated on site



Echo Liverpool Arena

Spinning plates: Catering for the ACC Liverpool in its busy inaugural year

2008 was the opening year for the new Arena and Convention Centre Liverpool (ACC Liverpool), which consists of the 11,000-seat Echo Liverpool Arena and the 4,342-capacity BT Convention Centre.

The five-year, £20 million in-house food and beverage service contract for the ACC was awarded to Heathcotes Outside (a division of the Lindley Group) in 2007. But the Heathcotes ACC Liverpool team didn't gain access to the venue until 27 December 2007 – less than two weeks before the arena opened its doors. By 4 January 2008, it was catering for an audience of 6,000 while providing a finger buffet menu for VIP guests in 18 private boxes at the Liverpool Ambassadors event. Eight days later, the team was serving supper canapés to VIPs in 20 boxes alongside managing kiosk catering

for a full-house audience at the arena as former Beatle Ringo Starr took centre stage for the ceremony marking the start of Liverpool's year-long tenure as European Capital of Culture. The catering team had to hit the ground running, setting the pace for a year that resulted in them winning one of the industry's top accolades – the Cost Sector Catering Event Catering Award 2009.

The Heathcotes team has taken on every aspect of event catering at the venue, from providing cafeteria-style public catering at exhibitions through to creating bespoke buffet menus and five-course gourmet meals. All meals are freshly prepared, cooked and plated on site according to co-founder Paul Heathcote's ethos of using local produce cooked in a modern British style (Heathcote established the event catering operation with

fellow chef Gary Bates, before teaming up with the Lindley Catering group in 2006).

In the first 18 months at the ACC, the Heathcotes team faced a number of different challenges in catering for a diverse range of events – including music concerts, the 2008 BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award, the MTV Europe Music Awards, the three-day British Shopping Centre Exhibition and the World Fire Fighter Games.

In October, an arena/convention centre double-bill saw the team managing the entire public and VIP catering for an Oasis concert staged in the arena (which involved operating a food kiosk service and eight mobile bars for 11,000 members of the public, plus catering for over 200 VIP guests), while simultaneously providing two pre-dinner drinks receptions, a formal three-course meal for 500 VIPs, and a post-awards bar at the UEFA Hall of Fame Awards Ceremony being held in the adjacent BT Convention Centre.

Field kitchen flexibility

The team says one of the biggest challenges is providing catering services in the multipurpose hall. "Because it covers such a large area, the best option is to cater from field kitchens specially constructed for each event," says Paul Heathcote. "This is where the company's 12 years' experience in outside catering has really come into its own, as operating out of field kitchens is something Heathcotes is well used to."

The company was involved in the kitchen design, selecting equipment that could be moved easily and adapted to create kitchens that can service the varying numbers to be catered for at the two venues. This solution also enables the team to develop the menu in tandem with the kitchen design each time, so that they can deliver the highest standard and quality of food, without compromise.

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