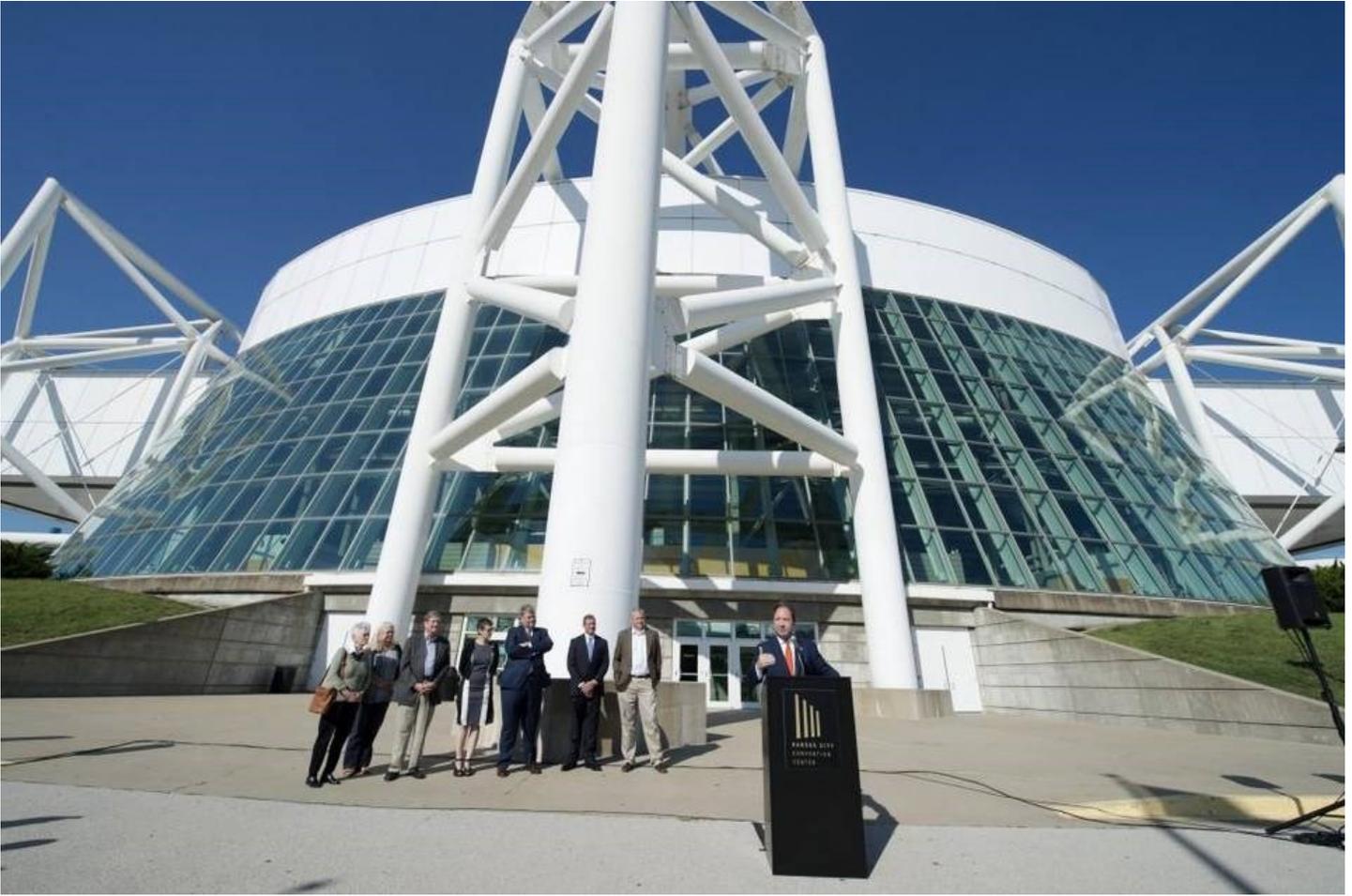


Kemper Arena's national historic designation likely a key to its future



Kansas City Councilman 6th District at Large Scott Taylor spoke during a press conference Monday with the announcement that Kemper Arena has secured a historic designation, which paves the way for historic tax credits that will help with the renovation of arena. **Joe Ledford** - jledford@kcstar.com

BY LYNN HORSLEY

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Kemper Arena's newly confirmed historic significance could help ensure the building's future, Kansas City officials said Monday.

City leaders and historic preservationists cheered the National Park Service's decision last week to list the West Bottoms arena on the National Register of Historic Places. That designation was essential to future development financing and marks a crucial milestone to preserving and repurposing the arena as a regional mecca for amateur sports and recreation.

"This was the key component," City Manager Troy Schulte said. "It allows us to move forward."

The city hopes to transfer ownership of the arena to Fouch Brothers by the end of this year. Fouch needs historic tax credits to finance the \$25 million to \$30 million redevelopment job.

The national historic designation makes the building eligible for those tax credits, company President Steve Foutch explained Monday at a news conference at Kemper Arena. He said he hopes to apply for those tax credits in the next three to six months. If all goes as planned, he said construction should take place during most of next year and the building can open for all sorts of youth and family amateur athletic activities in 2018.

"I'm excited to watch Foutch Brothers breath new life into the building," said historic preservation consultant Elizabeth Rosin, who prepared the application for national historic designation, which was processed through the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office and ultimately determined by the National Park Service.

At only 42 years old, Kemper wouldn't normally qualify for national historic significance. But Rosin said it represents "a specific point in time," in the late 1960s and early 1970s when many cities built such multipurpose arenas that became huge community gathering spots for concerts, sports and other entertainment. Kemper gained added significance because, unlike in many cities, it wasn't torn down when a newer more modern arena was built.

Demolition seemed to be Kemper's likely fate a few years ago, when the American Royal proposed replacing it with a new agricultural center. But that plan stalled. Schulte said Monday that after this year, the American Royal will not use Kemper anymore and will rely on Hale Arena and the rest of the American Royal complex adjacent to Kemper Arena.

While the arena has historic distinction, it will be adapted for a very different function and even with a different name. It will be renamed Mosaic Arena, under an agreement with Mosaic Life Care, which will operate a clinic out of the arena that will be open to the public and will have specialists in sports medicine. The value of that naming rights agreement was not disclosed.

The project aims to add a second floor and more than double the arena's capacity for indoor soccer, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, dance, fitness, running, biking and other sports. Foutch said future announcements are in store when the new sports team tenants get confirmed.

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