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Business



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Officials hope The Lawn on D will be a gathering place for activities like lawn games, live music, and Ping-Pong.

Convention center to open public green space

By Callum Borchers

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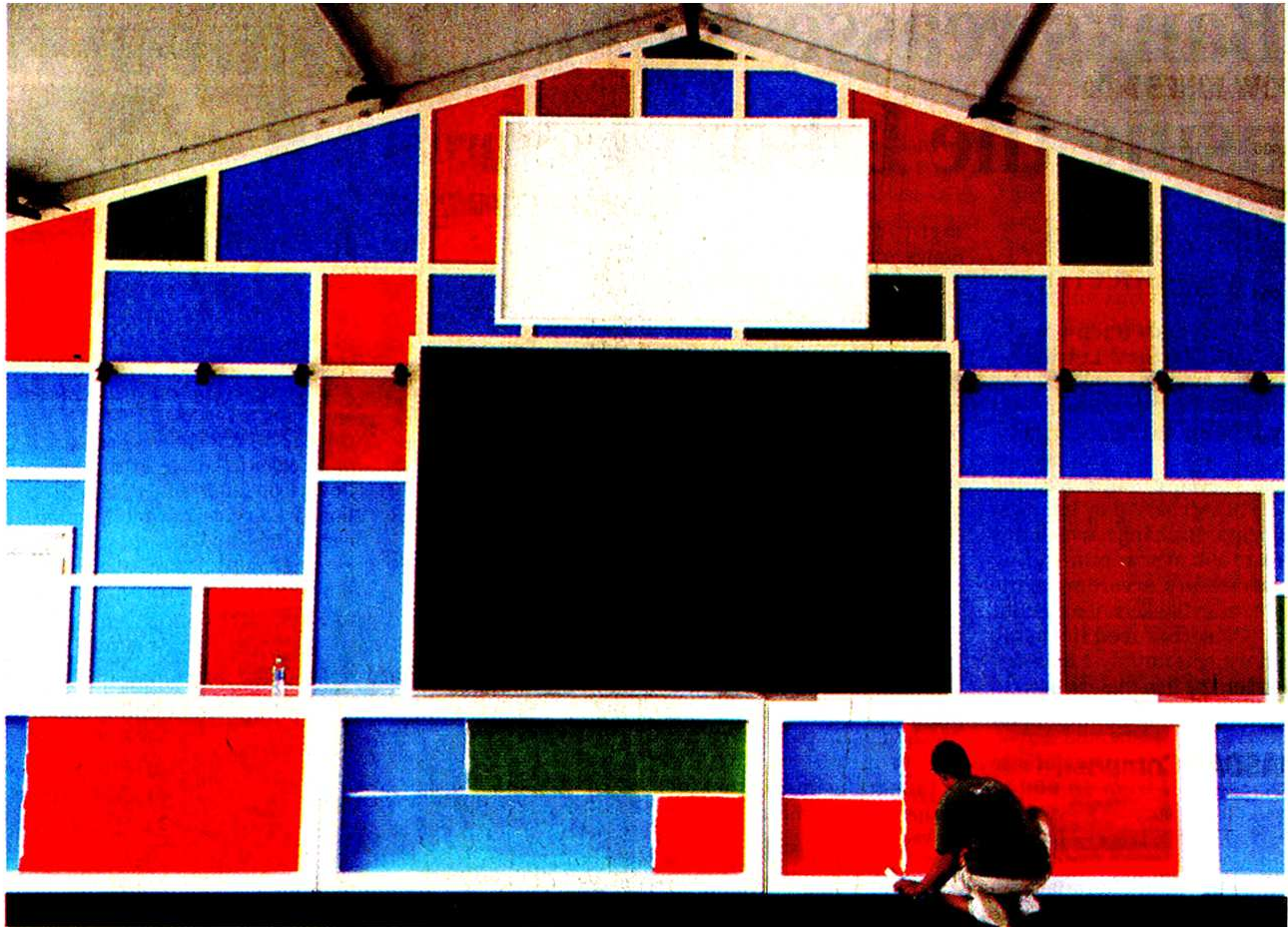
Events at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center typically require months of intensive planning, but now the facility is about to reveal a more spontaneous side — a 2.7-acre outdoor space where people can gather on a whim to play lawn games, sample food-truck fare, or listen to live music.

Dubbed the Lawn on D and located on D Street to the side of the convention center and the Westin

Boston Waterfront, the expanse is an effort to inject some of the laid-back spirit of the Innovation District into a facility that runs on a regimented schedule. Starting Friday, beer taps and Ping-Pong tables — hallmarks of the startup scene — will be found on a sprawling plot next to a building that usually hosts suit-and-tie conferences for large industry groups.

With new buildings sprouting everywhere around it, the exhibi-

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PHOTOS BY JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

John Page put the finishing touches on the bar area at The Lawn on D, which is set to open Friday.

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tion hall had become a “land island” that felt removed from the burgeoning Innovation District, said James Rooney, executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority. “As we envision its place on the waterfront, we want to be better integrated into the neighborhood.”

For the convention center, integration means becoming part of the neighborhood’s nightlife. A permanent bar positioned under a 5,000-square-foot tent will open daily at 5 p.m., turning one of the city’s top places for networking into its newest place for socializing.

The Lawn on D is an 18-month experiment that aims to help the convention center plan a permanent outdoor event space. Rooney said the convention center authority, which also operates the Hynes Convention Center, sees grow-



Officials hope the area will better integrate the convention center into the Innovation District, turning one of the city’s top places for networking into a new place for socializing.

ing demand for unconventional conference spaces that “break the mold of sitting in a meeting room, getting lectured to.”

The Lawn can be booked for private events, but on most days it will be open to anyone,

functioning something like a college quad or a communal hangout space with free Wi-Fi, lounge chairs, and room to play Frisbee, bocce, and cornhole. The convention center authority will even supply game equipment on select eve-

nings. Other days will feature concerts, theatrical performances, and art shows, most of which will be free.

The idea is to give people a reason to visit the convention center on a regular basis, not only for special events. For example: Hundreds of high-tech entrepreneurs in the nearby MassChallenge startup program visit the convention center once a year for an awards ceremony, but they seldom — if ever — stop by during the rest of the year.

Rooney would like to see that pattern change.

“We want to enhance the coolness factor of the waterfront,” he said. “We don’t want to be a place people just walk by.”

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