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ALERT

TOP STORY

ARIZONA ATHLETICS

Rio Nuevo partners with UA Athletics to promote ‘connectivity’ to downtown Tucson

Michael Lev

Feb 11, 2025



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The Rio Nuevo board of directors on Tuesday signed off on a marketing partnership with the University of Arizona athletic department that should bring increased exposure to downtown Tucson and UA Athletics.

The board voted unanimously to pay \$100,000 annually to the UA for signage, social media posts, radio spots and other advertising to promote downtown Tucson, as well as the ability to host Wildcat-related events such as watch parties and caravan stops.

“We are breaking the mold,” Edmund Marquez, vice chairman of the **Rio Nuevo** board, said while presenting the proposal during an online meeting. “We’re creating something the community has never seen as we partner with the University of Arizona and bring them to other areas of town.

“Any city you go to, you’ll judge the downtown based on how well it’s doing energy-wise. I just got done visiting Texas Tech and the University of New Mexico. They do not have a connection to their downtown. We’d be an anomaly.”

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Marquez, who wore a navy UA vest featuring a “Block A” logo over his left breast, suggested that the partnership would help bring fans, parents and students into downtown and the burgeoning Sunshine Mile district located on Broadway Boulevard between Euclid and Country Club. The primary objective, he said, is to “expand the brand and v



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Wilbur greets a row of Wildcat fans during the Arizona men's basketball game against Southern Utah at McKale Center, Dec. 7, 2024.

Grace Trejo, Arizona Daily Star

"We would be pushing eat, play, laugh (and) live downtown," Marquez said. "It wouldn't be Rio Nuevo logos; it would be all about generating traffic in the downtown area, in our restaurants, our bars, our theaters, etc."

Elements of the partnership include:

- Postseason watch parties for UA men's and women's basketball games at Rio Nuevo properties such as the Playground Bar & Lounge.
- Digital advertisements, including posts on UA Athletics' social media feeds and emails promoting the events.

– Two spots on the athletic department's annual statewide caravan tour. Possible locales include Chicago, The Monica Hotel Congress and the MSA Annex.



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- Thirty-second radio commercials during UA sporting events, as well as during the Tommy Lloyd and Adia Barnes radio shows.
- Signage on the outfield wall at Hi Corbett Field promoting downtown entertainment, with fans winning prizes such as gift cards if a batted ball were to strike the advertisement during a game.
- A “visiting team guide” promoting downtown restaurants and hotels that would go out to schools coming to Tucson to play games against the Wildcats.
- In-game advertising packages, including PA announcements, video-board features and signage at McKale Center that would be visible during TV broadcasts.
- Appearances by mascots Wilbur and Wilma at downtown locales such as the Children’s Museum Tucson.



Gigi Hand, right, hugs Wilma while waiting for the Wildcat Walk to begin before Arizona football’s game against North Dakota State at Arizona Stadium on Sept. 17, 2022.

Rebecca Sasnett, Arizona Daily Star 2022

- Intellectual-property rights to display UA banners throughout downtown and designate Rio Nuevo as a “Proud Partner of Arizona Athletics.”

“You would feel the University of Arizona and that fandom downtown and along the Sunshine Mile, really expanding the footprint of University of Arizona Athletics, not just around the stadium ... which would be great for our community,” Marquez said.

Added Fletcher McCusker, chairman of the Rio Nuevo board: “We’re really pleased with the athletics department’s interest in downtown. I think they see an opportunity for much m



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By Michael Lev
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