

## Study: Bowl brings in cash

Backers say the Citrus Bowl should get money from the county it helps.

By JASON CARCIA  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Less than a week before Orange County commissioners discuss how they might spend their lucrative stash of hotel taxes, Florida Citrus Sports executives revealed a study Thursday that says their signature event injects more than \$42 million into the local economy.

The Capital One Bowl — the New Year's Day football game staged each year at Orlando's Florida Citrus Bowl — attracts more than 60,000 out-of-towners, according to the study, which the sports association paid a Tampa-based company to do. The research was based on interviews conducted with 500 of the 70,229 spectators who attended this year's game.

Citrus Bowl backers, including the sports association and Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, want Orange County to use its hotel tax to help remake the aging football stadium. Without renovations, they say, the Citrus Bowl would be unable to attract more high-profile events and risks losing its existing ones.

PLEASE SEE **BOWL, B4**

Refurbishing the stadium could cost as much as \$142 million, according to city estimates. But others, from the Orlando Magic to International Drive hoteliers, have their own ideas for the cash.

County Mayor Rich Crotty and county commissioners are set to weigh potential projects for their tourist tax Tuesday for the first time since the tax rocketed to record levels. The 5 percent charge on hotel rooms and other short-term rentals raised almost \$115 million last year.

"As you discuss the possible uses for the tourist development tax, we urge you to think about the future opportunities available, as well as the historical precedent of the past successes when our stadium was competitive," Florida Citrus Sports President Dick Rivera wrote in a letter sent to county leaders Thursday. "Renovation of this facility is an excellent investment for Orange County..."

But such economic studies aren't without controversy, said David Scott, a University of Central Florida finance professor. It's difficult to ensure a study's credibility when the subject being studied pays for it, he said.

"Nobody publishes an impact study that's unfavorable to the agency which commissioned the study. You never see a bad one in print," Scott said, though he said he didn't want to comment specifically on the Citrus Bowl survey because he hadn't seen it. "The researcher doing the study wants to get paid."

Florida Citrus Sports Executive Director Tom Mickle would not say how much his organization paid for the study, though the Tampa researcher who did it said similar work typically costs between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

Another problem with such studies is that different researchers make different assumptions, Scott said, such as how much will be spent by the waiter who works for the restaurant at which the tourist ate. The studies can't compare to similar surveys about other events and organizations, he said.

"It's not a very useful number to decide if the Citrus Bowl should be renovated," said Scott, who said he is a Capital One Bowl fan.

Nevertheless, the study shows "the Citrus Bowl can tell a good story," Mickle said.

The timing is also important for Citrus Bowl backers because it comes as local leaders' attention seems increasingly focused on another big-ticket project seeking hotel taxes: a new or renovated arena for the Orlando Magic.

Mickle said he thinks the community can find a way to pay for both the arena and football-stadium upgrades — along with a new performing-arts center. But he also said Citrus Bowl supporters need to be careful not to get lost in the arena's shadow.

"We have definitely stepped up our conversations" with county leaders, Mickle said. "We certainly don't want to get lost."

Crotty, who has repeatedly ranked a renovated arena ahead of a renovated Citrus Bowl, said it makes sense that stadium supporters are launching a public-relations offensive.

"There is a risk that there's not enough money to go around for everything that has been contem-

## Bowl game brings in millions, study says

plated," Crotty said. "I think it's fully appropriate that they begin the process of making their case."

Dyer aide David Dix, who is working on plans for the Citrus Bowl, TD Waterhouse Centre and a performing-arts center, said the football stadium remains a vital piece of the city's plans for downtown.

"They're all three critically important, and they're all three interconnected," Dix said.

---