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Case study

# Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association Deploys Evolv Technology in the Aftermath of a Shooting

## Organization Overview

**LOCATION:** Sarasota, Florida

**NONPROFIT:** 501c3 Not-for-Profit with 25 Board Members

**ANNUAL EVENTS HOSTED:** Approximately 200

**SARASOTA AGRICULTURAL FAIR VISITORS:** Over 140,000

## Solution Overview

### Goals

- **Scan** all visitors entering Robarts Arena for weapons
- **Eliminate** long security queues resulting from manual wanding and bag checks
- **Rebuild** brand by delivering safety through touchless security scanning experience

### Solution

- Sales and Solutions Engineering Teams: Deployment, Configuration, and Training
- Fast Deployment of Evolv Express™ System
- 1 Evolv Express® System

### Outcomes

- **Rapid** 1-day deployment following shooting at annual fair
- **Returned** security staff to patrolling crowds instead of wanding guests
- **Eliminated** up to 15-minute or longer security queue wait times



## Reports of a Shot Fired

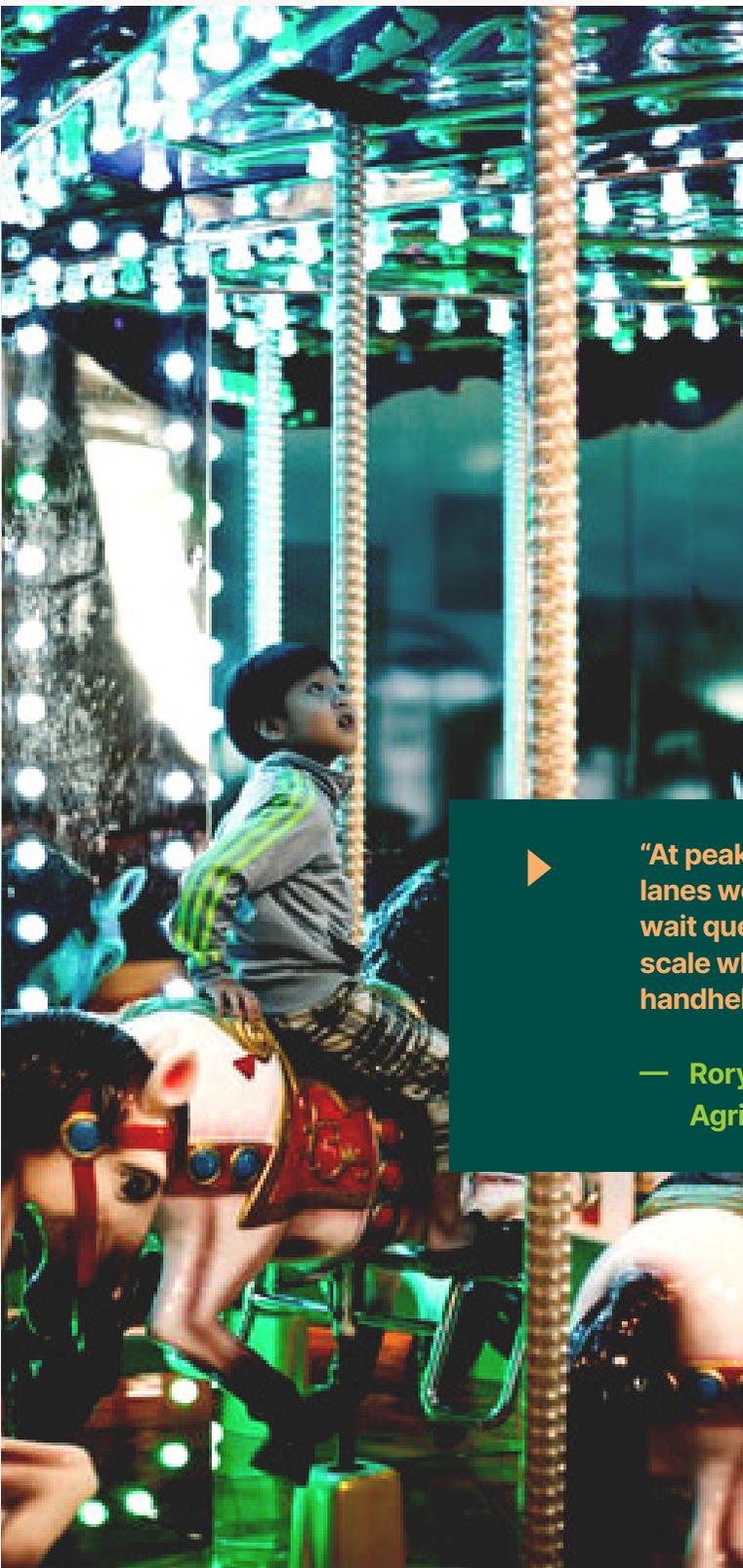
March 20 marked the second day of the 10-day 2021 Sarasota County Agricultural Fair.

Attendance was off to a great start—35% over 2019—following the cancellation of the 2020 fair due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At approximately 9:15 PM that evening, Rory S. Martin, the president and CEO of the Sarasota Agricultural Fair Association, Inc., received a radio call from a security guard at the back entrance to the fair, who indicated there had been reports of a shot being fired.

Martin and the Sarasota Police Department officers immediately went to the area where the shot had been reported and canvassed the area. On-site officers called for additional support with multiple units responding. They were unable to locate anything for approximately 20 minutes. But when they discovered a shell casing in the dirt, they initiated an incident response plan and ordered the park closed for the safety of visitors. Later, police arrested a 15-year-old suspect for sneaking a handgun into the fair and shooting an 18-year-old acquaintance during an altercation.

▶ **“We truly appreciate Evolv’s assistance in the aftermath of the shooting earlier this year. Not only was their technology impressive, but also their people.”**

— **Rory S. Martin, President/CEO, Sarasota Agricultural Fair Association, Inc.**



## Reopening of the Fair

To reopen the fair and welcome back visitors safely, Martin needed to assess the Fair’s overall security posture and identify what gap led to a handgun entering the premises.

“We had multiple layers of security in place, and we wanted to understand where the breakdown occurred,” Martin reports. “In addition to contracting with the local Sarasota Police Officers who were set up in zones across the park, we also had two third-party security providers on site. One was responsible for conducting bag checks for everyone entering the park. The second, which was staffed with off-duty corrections officers and guards from the state penitentiary, was charged with dealing with unruly visitors. We only have them onsite on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights.”

▶ **“At peak times between 6 PM and 8 PM, waits at the security lanes were as long as 15 minutes. To minimize the long wait queues, we needed a security solution that would scale while meeting or exceeding the accuracy rate of the handheld metal wands and bag-check process.”**

— **Rory S. Martin, President/CEO, Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association, Inc.**

During his assessment to identify the security gap, Martin discovered there was a breakdown with the bag checking process. He met with the Sarasota Police Department and concluded that security checks at the entrances would need to be enhanced—in addition to other security protocol changes. Corrections officers were assigned to supplement security staff from the provider currently responsible for the three entrances. Every person entering the park, and their bags, would need to be checked with metal detection hand wands to supplement law enforcement.



## Elevating the Security and Visitor Experience with Evolv Express®

A local account executive from Evolv Technology saw the news reports and immediately reached out to Martin with an offer.

An Evolv Express® system was being used for a proof of concept (POC) at a performing arts center in Tampa Bay, and he offered to transport it down to Sarasota, configure it, and allow Martin to use it without any obligation for a future purchase. The offer was made simply for the benefit of the Sarasota community and fairgoers.

The Evolv account executive had the Express system on site within days. However, the security team for the fair and local police department wanted to test it out before setting it up at Robarts Arena—the main entrance for the Fair.

They set it up for a test run and sent staff through it numerous times with weapons concealed. “It detected the weapons every time,” Martin remembers.

“This more thorough security check-in process slowed entry and created long lines,” Martin says. Each security lane could process no more than several hundred visitors in an hour. “Despite the inconvenience, we felt safety of guests over inconvenience was most important,” Martin adds.

## Measuring the Results of the Evolv Express System

The Evolv account executive then worked with the security team and a local Evolv solutions engineer to configure and set up the Express system at the entrance of the Robarts Arena.

“More than half of our visitors enter the fair through the Robarts Arena entrance, and we felt it was the best location for the Express system,” Martin explains. “With our prior security scanning process, we might see upwards of 7,000 visitors pass through that gate over an eight-hour period. At peak times between 6 PM and 8 PM, waits at the security lanes were as long as 15 minutes or longer. To minimize the long wait queues, we needed a security solution that would scale while meeting or exceeding the accuracy rate and detection of the handheld metal wands and bag-check process.”

Local media outlets and social media advertised the fair’s security change to Evolv Express, noting that it would deliver a touchless scanning experience while ensuring that no weapons got into the park. “The response was very positive,” Martin says. “The single lane on the Express system allowed visitors to walk through security scanning. Only those who were flagged—probably around 5%—had to go through a secondary bag and wand check. It eliminated the security queue.”

The good news is no visitor attempted to enter the park with an illegal weapon, as the Evolv Express system served as a deterrent for those who would have tried otherwise. “Before, we had some walk up to the security area, return to their vehicles, and then come back and go through the security scan,” Martin notes. “The Express system did detect weapons on a few people, but they all had concealed weapon permits, and we waived them on through.”

Security staff assigned to run the Evolv Express system were particularly impressed with the fact that virtually no training was involved. “Unlike manual checkpoints where fatigue begins to set in on security staff, the Express system delivers the same level of results—whether in the first 30 minutes or 10 hours later,” Martin explains. “Sustaining consistent results through peaks and valleys is really important when checking for weapons. There cannot be a dip in effectiveness.”

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## Assessing the Potential Results for Other Nonprofit Events

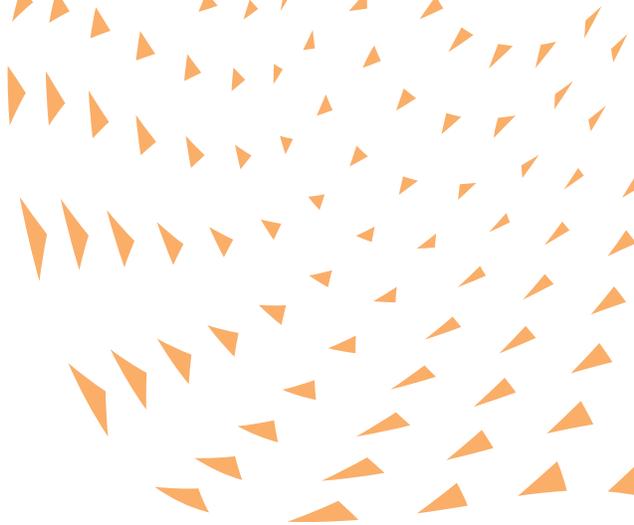
The very positive start to the 2021 Sarasota County Agricultural Fair quickly reversed course following the shooting on March 20.

“We ended up down about 25% from our revenue in 2019” Martin says. “This was a direct result of the shooting and the negative publicity and safety concerns that ensued.” This drop in revenue could have been even greater without the support of Evolv. According to Martin, the installation of the Express system and the associated news coverage bolstered the confidence of the public and helped diminish public concerns around safety.

In addition to the above costs, the Sarasota County Agricultural Fair also paid for an additional five police officers. “Putting aside the safety of guests, this directly translates into an immediate return on investment,” Martin adds.

Martin observes that fairs and other nonprofit events typically have significant challenges around security and staffing. “Rather than checking everyone, which can create long security lines, they will stop every 10th person,” he says. “But this can be discriminatory and moreover the other nine people aren’t scanned—a significant security risk.”

Protecting the safety of the visitors at nonprofit events is critically important. Traditional security screening approaches degrade visitor experience and struggle to deliver consistent scanning results. “Most nonprofit organizations don’t have the resources for large purchases,” Martin concludes. “Thus, leasing is a good alternative and something we’re investigating with Evolv.” He continues: “We truly appreciate Evolv’s assistance in the aftermath of the shooting earlier this year. Not only was their technology impressive, but also their people.”



Contact us to learn more about how to protect your workforce  
and facilities with touchless security screening.

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