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Hartford Hosts Most Successful Visa Championships to Date

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind., Aug. 18, 2010 – **The chalk dust has settled, and Hartford, Conn., has emerged as the host of the most successful Visa Championships ever.** While the Old State House is back to normal, and the XL Center, University of Hartford Chase Arena and the Connecticut Convention Center are getting ready for the next big event, Hartford has left an indelible stamp on the Visa Championships by proving to be an exceptional host and setting attendance records.

“Things could not have gone better for us last week at the Visa Championships,” said Steve Penny, president of USA Gymnastics. “We created a vision for something special, and we achieved our goals. Record attendance, incredible local support, and outstanding sponsor activation combined to set a grand stage for some exceptional athlete performances. The USA Gymnastics family felt welcome in Hartford, from the banners around town, to hospitality at the Old State House to the hotel staff wearing Visa Championships apparel. We wrapped our arms around the city, and it proved to be a very warm embrace.”

Chuck Steedman, senior vice president of AEG Management Connecticut and general manager of the XL Center, said, “This was a fantastic partnership. We enjoyed the sense of collaboration and creativity that USA Gymnastics brought to the Visa Championships. Each of us pushed the other to raise the bar for this event, and as a team, we were able to stage one of their most successful events ever.”

“Hartford is committed to bringing USA Gymnastics back to Hartford, and we welcome the opportunity to play host to other major national and international sporting events,” said Mayor Pedro E. Segarra. “This was our time to shine and we were ready. Connecticut's Capital City is ready to roll out the welcome mat -- or in this case the tumbling mat--- again for athletes and guests from all over the country and the world.”

Total attendance for the five day event was 29,298, besting the previous mark set in 2007 in San Jose, Calif. More than 5,000 room nights were booked throughout the city, from Aug. 9-14. The Visa Championships enjoyed three nights of live television coverage between NBC and Universal Sports, along with a delayed broadcast of the men's final on Sunday. One of the local activation elements was the Taste of Visa Championships involving nine local restaurants, with Carbone's Ristorante earning the “individual all-around” gold medal, and all nine receiving a team gold for their efforts and enthusiasm.

“The Visa Championships marked the **first time** that Hartford's XL Center and Connecticut Convention Center and the University of Hartford's Chase Arena were used for a combined major sporting event and the results were tremendous,” said Michael Van Parys, acting president of the Greater Hartford Convention & Visitors Bureau. “It exceeded the Greater Hartford Convention & Visitors Bureau's anticipated goals ever since the moment we first bid on the event. The biggest winners are the hospitality industry and workers at the packed restaurants, sold-out hotels and busy attractions, during a time in the summer that traditionally is slow for the city. To meet the demand, many businesses employed their staff extra hours. This was a true win-win for everyone!”

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"The business impact of this event was extraordinary," said Andy Rizzo, managing partner of Salute, a Hartford restaurant. "The Visa Championships brought incredible energy and enthusiasm to the downtown area, something we don't see that often. This was a special event, and we are very proud to have played a role in welcoming USA Gymnastics to our city."

From a visibility standpoint, it was hard not to know the Visa Championships were in town. The signs, banners and posters featured gymnastics images on backgrounds that used four pieces of artwork created by four-time Olympic gold-medalist Al Oerter. The imagery decorated store fronts, lamp posts, covered walkways, fences and sides of buildings.

The Old State House was transformed into the heart of the gymnastics community, serving as the place for gymnastics demonstrations, morning fitness, the Visa Fan Fest and sponsor/member/VIP hospitality.

"The Old State House was hopping from morning fitness at 6:30 a.m. to post-event activities that ran after midnight," said Penny. "This is the first time we have had one location for all of our hospitality and fan activities, and it was a hit with fans, the sponsors, and the gymnastics community. The Hartford model will serve as a benchmark for our future efforts, and we look forward to returning with more gymnastics events in the future."

Based in Indianapolis, USA Gymnastics is the national governing body for gymnastics in the United States. Its mission is to encourage participation and the pursuit of excellence in the sport. Its disciplines include men's and women's artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline and tumbling, acrobatic gymnastics and group gymnastics. For more information, log on to www.usagym.org.

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