



For Immediate Release

Washington County, Utah to Host Ironman Event

CONTACT: Brittany McMichael
St. George Area Convention & Tourism
Email: BrittanyM@atozion.com
Phone: 435-986-6657

St. George, Utah, 3/18/09 – Officials announced today that Washington County will host a new Ironman event beginning May 1, 2010. The Ford Ironman St. George will be a qualifier race for the Ironman World Championship held every October in Kona, Hawaii

“Ironman is an event tailor made for this area,” said Kevin Lewis, Sports & Events Director for the St. George Area Convention and Tourism Office. “The determination and tenacity of Ironman athletes represents the fortitude of the early settlers here. The course we’ve planned will highlight the striking scenery and contrasting landscapes that make this area so attractive. It will be a remarkable experience for athletes and spectators as they immerse in both the beauty of the land and the heart of the people. For the locals, the energy of the event and the economic benefit will be outstanding.”

“St. George is the ideal setting for our newest Ironman event,” said Steve Meckfessel, Chief Operations Officer for World Triathlon Corporation. “The community’s experience in hosting the popular St. George Marathon, the scenic landscape of surrounding Washington County and the proximity to core triathlon markets in the region will contribute to Ford Ironman St. George quickly becoming one of our most popular races.”

The race will be part of the Global Ironman Series that includes 22 events throughout the world. Nearly 2,500 athletes from around the world will participate in the St. George race which is one of only seven Ironman championship qualifier races in the United States.

Ironman races began in Hawaii as a challenge between a group of Navy Seals, and have since grown to one of the most recognized endurance events in the world. Ironman consists of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2 mile run.

The St. George race will start in Sand Hollow Reservoir, a picturesque setting in the southwestern end of Hurricane, Utah with deep blue water, sandstone rock formations and brilliant orange sand beaches. After completing the swim, athletes transition to the bike event, a 112 mile ride that traverses through the heart of Washington County.

“The bike course will be like an appetizer for the area featuring a juicy sample of the beauty and flavor found here,” said Lewis. The ride starts in Hurricane, turns west on Highway 9 and then south through Washington City, the first town established in the area. As riders make their way toward St. George they link onto Red Hills Parkway and traverse over the red sandstone bluff with a scenic view of St. George to the south, and Pine Mountain on the north. At the intersection of Red Hills Parkway and Bluff Street (Hwy. 18), athletes will begin the first of two beautiful loops that will take them west through the lava flow in Santa Clara, under the shadow of Red Mountain in Ivins and then north along the Santa Clara River through Gunlock to the town of Veyo and the highest point on the course (4,468ft). The descent on Hwy. 18 is a gliding stair step with views of Snow Canyon State Park as riders return toward town. Upon completion of the 2nd loop, athletes will continue south to historic Town Square in downtown St. George where they will transition to the marathon.

The two loop run course leaves Town Square on Main Street in St. George and heads northwest to Red Hills Parkway and climbs through the southern end of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve to the top of the Red Hill overlooking St. George. Athletes will appreciate beauty of this challenging course as it winds through Pioneer Park, the quaint neighborhoods along Diagonal Street back to the crowds at the turn-around at Main and Tabernacle Streets. The run finishes south bound on Main Street between Tabernacle Street and 100 South adjacent to Heritage Tower.

“What an exciting way to showcase our incredible surroundings,” said Lewis. About the only area untouched is the dramatic region of Zion National Park and Springdale. But maybe it’s better that way. When you see Zion, you don’t want to race through it. Zion is one of those rare places that neither words nor pictures can describe. You definitely want to take some time and take it all in.”

Washington County and World Triathlon Corporation, owners of Ironman, signed a five-year agreement to host the race here on the first Saturday of May each year. "This will be a major economic boon for our area," said Roxie Sherwin, Director of the St. George Area Convention and Tourism Office. "Based on data we've gathered from other host cities, we expect the event to generate 8 to 10-million dollars in economic impact, not to mention the media exposure and attention we'll receive. As a tourism-based destination we are thrilled to be associated with such an exciting event," she said.

St. George Mayor Daniel D. McArthur feels the same. "For over 30-years World Triathlon Corporation has been a world-wide leader in amateur and professional endurance events," said McArthur. "The City of St. George is pleased that they have selected our area as a home for the prestigious Ironman series triathlon. We welcome all those associated with the event including the athletes, officials, sponsors and media and look forward to a successful and rewarding partnership."

Washington County, through its Sports and Events Commission received support for the event from the Utah Sports Commission, St. George City, Sand Hollow State Park and each of the cities along the race course. But the process of bringing it here started long before the Sports and Events Commission got involved.

According to Lewis, It really got started several years ago when St. George resident and endurance athlete Daren Brooks tried to enter an Ironman race. "Daren kept trying to register for a race and couldn't get in because they sold out too quickly," said Lewis. "He finally decided if the races were that popular, why not start one here."

Brooks, who is a two-time finisher of the Leadville Trail 100 mountain bike race in Colorado, and this year completed the Ford Ironman Arizona, said he started contacting Ironman in November of 2007 and made several attempts to get their attention.

"I kept talking to different people at Ironman but I wasn't getting anywhere. Ironman is such an exclusive event they can pick and choose their locations," he said. I kept moving up the chain, but just couldn't seem to break through." Finally after several calls and conversations he connected with Steve Meckfessel, Ironman's Chief Operations Officer, and things started to open up a bit. "From that initial conversation with Daren, I knew St. George was a place that overflowed with community spirit, had a can-do attitude and would fully support an Ironman event," said Meckfessel. "In short, St. George would be the perfect fit for us. Daren's genuine passion for and commitment to his community won us over very early in the process."

"If it wasn't for Daren's tenacity, we probably wouldn't be here today," said Lewis.

In March of 2008, Brooks met with Lewis and Steve Bingham from the Sports Commission to share his vision. "Ironman was looking for a new spring race location," said Brooks, "they had some other cities in mind, but they were starting to show some interest in the area," he said.

"We were definitely interested," said Lewis, "and when Steve Meckfessel called, the machine started moving." Lewis calls it a machine, because of all the entities involved in pulling it together. "Steve Bingham and Kent Perkins from St. George City Leisure Services brought their marathon experience to the table, and that was a major factor," said Lewis. "Leaders from the lodging association got involved, and the pieces started coming together."

Brooks worked with local race organizer Jeff Gardner, also an Ironman finisher, to lay out a course. "They put together a few options, and we invited Steve Meckfessel to come see what we had to offer," said Lewis. "Once he saw the course, things really started to move." "To stage an event of this magnitude requires help from so many different agencies," said Sherwin. "We really appreciate the support we've had. The enthusiasm has been remarkable."

"At a certain point, I realized that the event was bigger than myself," said Brooks, but I knew it had to be here. Everything in this area speaks to an Ironman," he said, "all the way back to the persistence of people like my great grandparents who helped break the land. Ironman is the ultimate endurance event in the world, and St. George is the perfect location. There just couldn't be a more perfect fit."

Race Director Paul Huddle agrees. "As we've been working on the course I've been amazed at how spectacular it really is. I've ridden the bike course with our local race director Jeff Gardner, and there are some fantastic signature sections out there, I think the athletes are really in for a treat."

Registration opens at 10:00 am MDT. Information and additional details are available at www.ironmanstgeorge.com