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## **NEW CONVENTION CENTER ATTRACTING LOTS OF BUSINESS**

Like a pretty girl alone at a dance, the new Raleigh Convention Center is having little trouble finding suitors. In its first months of operations, the convention center will play host to at least 17 conventions expected to bring more than 18,000 people to Raleigh for an average of three to five days.

“This has been remarkable to see,” said Laurie Okun, the City of Raleigh’s director of sales for the Raleigh Convention Center. “This building started with just an idea. We’ve seen it constructed from the very first piece of steel to the last. So it’s extremely gratifying to witness the reception we’ve gotten so far.”

The first conference held in the new center will be the National Agents Alliance National Leadership Conference. The conference will begin on September 11 and is expected to bring at least 1,800 people to Raleigh for four days.

Other conferences scheduled for the fall of 2008, to name just a few, include the World Burn Congress, the North Carolina Community College System Conference, the Southeast United States/Japan Associations Joint Conference, the National Consortium on Health Science and Technology Education, and the American Association for Sustainability in Higher Education.

“Our sales team has teamed up with the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau and our hotel partners to work with our industry and business leaders to invite some of the most prestigious conference committees to book their events in Raleigh,” Ms. Okun said. “It has been a wonderful partnership and we have successfully lured and booked some of the most exciting state, national and international conferences in the meetings market.”

At this time, the Raleigh Convention Center staff calculate the number of room nights for the first four months of operation at nearly 20,000. Additionally, the staff has booked events with some of several local organizations including Wake Med, Rex Healthcare, RBC Centura, Harris Teeter, Ray Price Harley Davidson, YMCA, Junior League, and the Triangle Business Journal’s Fast 50 Banquet.

“Currently, we have over 350,000 room nights in our booking pipeline, of which approximately 200,000 are confirmed bookings with the Raleigh Convention Center and area hotels,” Okun said. “We have many other exciting conferences in the works and in various stages of contract negotiations.”

Looking ahead to coming years, the center will play host to several multi-year events:

- Animazement - Held each Memorial Day weekend from 2009 to 2018, the conference is expected to bring in more than 6,000 visitors. The group expects the number of attendees to reach more than 10,000 each year due to the capacity of the new Raleigh Convention Center;
- North Carolina Veterinary Conference – Scheduled for the month of November beginning in 2009 through 2014, the conference is expected to bring in more than 1000 people each year;
- The North Carolina Future Business Leaders of America – To be held in the month of April 2009 through 2013, the conference will bring in 2500 people and occupy more than 1200 room nights per year;
- The North Carolina Future Farmers of America – Held each June beginning in 2009 and running through 2013, the conference is expected to attract 2500 people and occupy 1100 room nights per year;
- The North Carolina Association of the Education of Young Children – Beginning in September of 2009 and running through September of 2011, the conference will attract 3000 people and occupy 1300 room nights per year;
- The North Carolina Technology in Education Society – Held in March beginning in 2009 through 2013, the conference will hold 1000 people and fill 800 room nights;
- The North Carolina Reading Association – Held each March from 2011 through 2018, the conference is expected to attract 1400 people and occupy 1000 room nights; and,
- The North Carolina Association of Educators – Beginning in March of 2009 and held every other year through 2023, the conference will attract 2000 people and occupy 1,200 room nights.

Also, several international conferences have been booked with special thanks to the staff’s partnership through the business community. Those conventions include:

- The International Association of Science Parks – Scheduled for June of 2009, the conference will attract 900 people and occupy 1800 room nights. The conference

was brought in through the efforts of Rick Weddle of the Research Triangle Foundation;

- The American Chamber of Commerce Executives – Scheduled for July of 2009, the conference is expected to attract 1100 people, for at least 3200 room nights. The conference was scheduled through the efforts of Harvey Schmitt of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce; and,
- The Southeast US/Japan Associations Joint Conference – The conference is expected to draw 800 people for 1400 room nights. Jim Fain, North Carolina Secretary of Commerce, made the conference possible.

The Raleigh Convention Center opens today at noon.