



FLORENCE CITY-COUNTY CIVIC CENTER

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For Immediate Release

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Florence Civic Center Earns Coveted Prime Site Award

Florence, SC. April 20 – The Florence Civic Center has been recognized for “genuine excellence in venue management” in 2006 with the Prime Site Award from The Facilities Media Group in New York. The announcement was made in the group’s publication, *The Facilities SuperBook*, where the civic center was featured on more than two pages.

The Prime Site Award is voted on by booking agents, promoters, talent buyers and other industry members. Only eighty-seven venues in North America were voted to receive the award for excellence. In winning the award this year, the center is in the company of such notable facilities as the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas, the Staples Center in Los Angeles, Madison Square Garden in New York and the RBC Center in Raleigh. The civic center was the only arena in South Carolina to receive the award.

Facilities associate publisher, Michael Caffin, explained, “ With few exceptions, the Prime Site venues improved their buildings and enhanced the audience experience in the past year and are already implementing new renovations for the year ahead. It’s the case of management and personnel dedicated to doing their best so their venue can be the best.”

Kendall Wall, general manager of the Florence Civic Center, said, “It’s a tremendous honor for us to be recognized by our peers in the industry. It acknowledges the successful guidance of SMG and the dedication of our entire staff. We also greatly appreciate the direction of our Civic Center Commission and the continuing support from City and County officials. This award is truly credit for a total team effort.”

During the past four years, the Civic Center Commission and its managing partner SMG have made great strides in establishing Florence as a favored destination for religious and educational conferences, national family shows and sporting events. In 2006, the Florence Civic Center had notable increases in all of the event areas including concerts, family shows, conventions, banquets and sports events. A number of capital improvements have been accomplished and marketing efforts have been revved up with a new newsletter program and web site materials.

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Gross revenues increased by 20% over the previous year to \$2,508,220. Attendance increased by 7% and gross ticket sales were up an impressive 47%. Also, the facility operating loss continued its downward trend with a nearly 30% decrease over the past three years.

Rene Josey, Chairman of the Florence Civic Center Commission, explained, "We value our partnership with SMG and it has created a win-win situation. Last year we developed a strategic plan for the facility. This plan provides both groups with a common goal and gives the facility a direction for future growth. Another important segment of the facility's recent success has been greater management stability." Josey added, "In June of 2006, SMG was rewarded with a contract extension through June 2009. We have worked hard to keep a good management team in place."

The civic center, built in 1993, has emerged as a cornerstone of a rapidly growing area adjacent to I-20 and I-95. During the past year, this area has seen the opening of a new Hilton Garden Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Spring Hill Suites, Home Depot, Kohl's, Olive Garden and Longhorn Steakhouse. Chili's Restaurant, Indigo Joe's Sports Bar and the Arbor One Center will be opening in 2007 and plans are underway for a new Veterans Memorial Park located next to the civic center's parking lot.

Capital improvements at the building are also continuing to keep abreast of business growth. Over the past four years, SMG has contributed \$350,000 in matching capital funds with the City and County Councils. New carpeting has been installed in all suites and offices, and the promoter's office, and the sports locker rooms have been refurbished. The arena's in-line concession stands have been completely redesigned and remodeled and a new pizza concession added. New portable concession stands, including beverage stations, have been placed on the arena concourse and in the VIP Club areas. Major upgrades in the main kitchen area have been made with the addition of new equipment, including a new "grill stove."

In the new fiscal year beginning July 1, the civic center plans to remodel the 15,000 square foot exhibit hall, adding carpeting to create a new ballroom. "This is a very critical step in the facility's future." Wall explained, "With competition for events so strong in the Carolinas, you have to be willing to upgrade your facility. We are fortunate to have great support from members of the City and County Councils."

Wall continued, "In the booking and sales areas, we've placed an emphasis on nationally known family shows and diversifying our event calendar. During the past fifteen months, we've hosted Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus, Disney On Ice, Wiggles, Bull Riding Finals, Arena Cross & Monster Truck Show, WWE Wrestling (TV taping), "Madea Goes To Jail" Gospel Play and Sesame Street Live. We've also diversified with such national shows as Casting Crown, Third Day and Kirk Franklin."

"Additionally for 2006, our sales team recruited eight state conventions with an attendance of more than 64,000, generating a rollover economic impact of over \$21 million. New conventions and special events coming in 2007 will be the United Methodist State Convention, the AME Youth Conference and the AIFA All-Star and Championship Game all in June, a major worldwide conference with Honda in October and the Southern Baptist Convention and Disney On Ice both in November.

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The current increase in revenue also coincides with accelerated marketing efforts. The civic center's web site has been completely revamped to include detailed information for promoters, meeting planners and patrons. The "In the Flo" e-mail club has more than 5,000 members that get first information on all upcoming events. A monthly newsletter goes out to 15,000 consumers. A new brochure targeting meeting planners was produced and used in a direct mail campaign to associations and meeting professionals throughout the state and the southeast. The brochure features graphics from the civic center's advertising campaign and expanded information on Catering By SMG, the center's in-house food service, as well as detailed facility floor plans. Additionally, new computerized lobby and outside marquees promote upcoming events.

The four-time Prime Site Award winning Florence Civic Center is a creatively designed facility making it ideal for a variety of uses. It features a 30,000-square foot, 10,000-seat arena with adjoining 15,000-square foot exhibit hall and three well-appointed meeting rooms offering 5,000 + square feet. The building offers high-speed Internet service throughout. The center has an optimal location at the intersection of I-95 and I-20 and there are five national chain hotels within walking distance, plus two major shopping malls and numerous restaurants.

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