

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Baseball contributes more than \$67 million to Lee County *Spring training study reports \$47 million impact*

LEE COUNTY, FL – The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) and the Lee County Sports Authority (LCSA) reports that spring training combined with amateur baseball events in the county throughout calendar year 2009 contributed more than \$67 million of direct spending to the area’s economy.

Amateur baseball events held in the county for calendar year 2009 accounted for \$20,619,994 of direct spending in Lee County and generated 44,992 room nights and 172 event days. The most significant single event that helped generate these numbers was the 28-day Roy Hobbs World Series that featured 181 teams from across the country, according to LCSA.

The rest of the \$67 million direct sports-related expenditures were reported in the findings of a study commissioned earlier this year by the VCB to assess the impact of spring training attendees on the county’s tourism revenues. That study concluded that “hosting spring training activities has a positive impact on the Lee County economy.”

Specifically, visitors to the destination attending spring training contribute more than \$47 million to the Lee County economy, which includes more than \$12 million spent shopping and more than \$11 million on food and beverages. The study also reported that spring training attendees support 970 jobs in Lee County and \$23.8 million in county household incomes, and they generate \$2.5 million in local government revenues and \$5 million in state government revenues.

“This important study interviewed a large number of baseball fans attending 2009 spring training to document the number of out-of-town visitors that came to Lee County,” said Gary Jackson, director of the Regional Economic Research Institute for the Lutgert College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University. Jackson consulted on the survey for the VCB.

-MORE-

Baseball contributes more than \$67 million to Lee County/Page 2

“More than 50 percent of those in attendance at spring training were out-of-town visitors, increasing the tourism expenditures in the county for food, lodging, gifts, and other goods and services,” he said. “These additional tourism expenditures provided a boost to the local economy during the current recession, helping to support existing jobs and income.”

The study, conducted by the VCB’s research partner Davidson-Peterson Associates, drew results from 1,154 surveys from on-site interviews at Boston Red Sox and Minnesota Twins spring training practices and games in the county from Feb. 18, 2009 through April 4, 2009. It strictly measured revenues from spring training attendees and did not factor in team revenues from in-stadium ticket and concession sales, since those monies do not necessarily stay in the county.

“We were surprised to learn how many surveyed said they visit our destination at other times of the year,” said Suya Davenport, VCB executive director, which markets the destination internationally to leisure and meetings travelers as The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. “Spring training attendees support tourism not only in March but in other seasons as well.”

Although spring training is often the reason for a visit to Lee County during March, with more than half of respondents saying spring training is the primary reason they first came to Lee County during spring training, half say they either definitely or probably will visit the county for reasons other than spring training both next year (50 percent) and in future years (51 percent). In addition, more than half of those attending spring training games and practices in 2009 previously had been to spring training games in Fort Myers, so they are frequent visitors to the county.

According to the study, spring training activities also are an important draw in influencing travelers to choose to visit Lee County. More than half of those attending spring training activities visited the destination for the primary purpose of attending spring training (57 percent). An additional one in 10 consider spring training to be either absolutely essential or extremely important in deciding on Lee County as a destination for their trip (11 percent).

Not surprisingly, many spring training attendees hail from the area where the teams are based -- New England (33 percent) where the Red Sox play and the Midwest (37 percent) where

-MORE-

Baseball contributes more than \$67 million to Lee County/Page 3

the Twins play -- with 18 percent from Massachusetts and 23 percent from Minnesota. With so many out-of-towners, a majority 73 percent of spring training attendees spend at least one night in the destination, 51 percent stay for five nights or more, and nearly one in five (17 percent) stay in the area for more than two weeks.

“Our baseball facilities generate year-round tourism business for our community, not just during spring training,” said Jeff Mielke, LCSA executive director. “To use these assets 172 event days for amateur baseball events, primarily in slower tourism months, is incredibly important to our sports tourism efforts.”

-30-

EDITOR’S NOTE: *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres.*