

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL FINALS RODEO
SELECTS LANCASTER EVENT CENTER IN LINCOLN
BRINGING MORE THAN \$64 MILLION IMPACT
TO LANCASTER COUNTY**

Lincoln, NE— The Lancaster Event Center (LEC) in Lincoln, Nebraska, has been selected to host the 2020 and 2021 National High School Finals Rodeo (NHSFR). The National High School Rodeo Association (NHSRA) board of national directors voted unanimously (47-0) on Saturday morning at their Mid-Winter Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. The event has rotated the past nine years between the Wyoming communities of Gillette and Rock Springs; making Lincoln only the third location to host the event in recent years. The selection is pending successful final contract negotiation over the next 45 days.

In a second vote, the NHSRA board chose Lincoln to be included in the next NHSFR site rotation with the two existing Wyoming locations. A second rotation at the LEC would be planned for 2026 and 2027.

“This will be a game changer for Lancaster Event Center, Lincoln and Lancaster County,” said Jamie Bauman, recently elected to the Lancaster County Agricultural Society which runs the Lancaster Event Center.

“We are very excited to be able to show how great a facility and community we offer here,” said Ron Dowding, Agricultural Society board president and board member for over 18 years.

The NHSFR is the world's largest rodeo from a contestant standpoint with 1,700 high school rodeo athletes competing in 13 rodeo specialties and two shooting competitions. Forty-three states, five Canadian provinces and Australia each send its top four qualifiers in each specialty. Contestants travel in mid-July each year to the NHSFR with their families. It is estimated the rodeo will bring nearly 50,000 visitors to Lincoln with many staying multiple days.

"Nebraska's central location and all the local community support were appealing factors in the decision to bring the finals to Lincoln. It will be exciting to share 'The Good Life' with the NHSFR contestants!!" said Tricia Schaffer, NHSRA national director for state of Nebraska who is based out of North Platte.

The 13 NHSFR rodeo specialties are Bull Riding, Bareback Riding, Saddle Bronc Riding, Tie-down Roping, Breakaway Roping, Steer Wrestling, Goat Tying, Pole Bending, Barrel Racing, Boys Cutting, Girls Cutting, Reined Cow Horse and a Queen Contest. The two shooting competitions are Trap Shoot and Light Rifle.

The High School Rodeo World Champions in each specialty will be crowned after 13 rodeo performances which will be open to the public over seven days at the Lancaster Event Center and shooting facilities in Lincoln.

Over 10,000 Lancaster County residents are projected to take the opportunity to watch some of the next stars of rodeo right in Lincoln. More than a hundred NHSFR alumni competed in the 2016 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo run by Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), including 2016 NHSFR contestant Ryder Wright, in Saddle Bronc Riding. Another 2016 NHSFR contestant currently leading the Professional Bull Riding (PBR) world standings is Jess Lockwood.

Past economic impact studies show the NHSFR brings millions of dollars of economic impact to the immediate host community and surrounding area. The rest of the state of Nebraska will also benefit as families drive to and from Lincoln.

"Extrapolating from the recent NHSRA economic study for the Des Moines Junior High School Finals Rodeo, this impact should be \$16 million per year for the Lincoln area alone," said Dr. Eric Thompson, UNL associate professor of economics and director of the Bureau of Business Research.

With its selection, Lincoln and Lancaster County stand to benefit a total of \$64 million over the four years of the event with added impact statewide. Local businesses and government entities will feel the impact of this event ranging from sales at hotels,

restaurants, gas stations, grocery and variety of retail stores, RV services, and attractions to the collection of state and local sales, lodging and other taxes.

Representing Lincoln and the Lancaster Event Center in the final presentations in Phoenix last week were Amy Dickerson (Managing Director, Lancaster Event Center), Derek Bombeck, (Sales Development Manager, Lincoln Convention & Visitors Bureau), Chas Skillett (Operations Manager & Arena Director, Lancaster Event Center), and Hoyt Kraeger (Special Events & Business Development Assistant, Lancaster Event Center). The final presentation featured special video messages to the NHSRA national directors from Governor Pete Ricketts who is a regular supporter of the UNL Rodeo Association and from Lancaster County Agricultural Society board member, Kendra Ronnau, who is the board's lead for equine and rodeo events.

"I'm thrilled about the NHSFR coming to Lincoln. This event gives some of the most talented youth in the nation a top notch facility to compete at. I can't think of a better way to showcase the Lancaster Event Center and the Lincoln, Nebraska area than sharing it with the future leaders of our world!" commented Kendra Ronnau.

The NHSRA vote follows a year-long site selection process that included Lincoln being chosen as one of three finalists along with Gillette and Rock Springs, Wyoming, at the July 2016 NHSFR in Gillette, Wyoming. A Lincoln site visit in October 2016 by the NHSRA Executive Director, James Higginbotham, of Denver, Colorado, sealed Lincoln as a finalist. Mr. Higginbotham's visit was hosted by representatives from the Lancaster Event Center, Lancaster County Agricultural Society, Lancaster County Board, Lincoln Convention & Visitors Bureau, the University of Nebraska College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the University of Nebraska Rodeo Association. A surprise tour of UNL's Memorial Stadium with a tunnel walk was also enjoyed by Mr. Higginbotham.

"The Agricultural Society and Lancaster Event Center team, along with the Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau, really poured their heart and soul into this bid and we appreciate their hard work to the benefit of Lancaster County. So happy and proud of them all!" said Roma Amundson, Lancaster County commissioner who has been one of the Lancaster County Board's recent liaisons with the Lancaster County Agricultural Society.

Critical to securing the NHSFR for Lincoln were \$3 million in planned improvements at the Lancaster Event Center officially approved by the Lancaster County Board in November 2016 to be committed out of the Lancaster County Visitors Improvement

Fund upon signing of a contract with the NHSRA. The fund is comprised of lodging taxes collected from visitors that are managed by the Lancaster County Visitors Promotion Committee to help add and improve attractions that will increase visitors to the county with oversight and approvals from the Lancaster County Board.

“The County Board has been very supportive of the investment of lodging tax dollars to further increase visitors to the benefit of all of Lancaster County,” said Todd Wiltgen, chair of the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners.

Improvements to be completed at Lancaster Event Center by 2020 include upgrading an existing outdoor arena to house the two main 150x250’ performance arenas with a new covered 3,400-person grandstand, as well as additions and upgrades to campsites. Campsite improvements include water and electrical service and completion of a loop driveway on the undeveloped portion of the Lancaster Event Center grounds.

“This decision by the NHSFR just confirms how all of the ongoing development and improvements continue to make the Lincoln area such a compelling place for national events of all kinds to call home,” said Jeff Maul, executive director of Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Another key partner in the bid proposal was the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR). “We are excited to work with the Lancaster Event Center on this bid which provides us an opportunity to showcase our University and the wide range of degree options in CASNR to these highly accomplished 1,700 high school contestants and their families,” said UNL CASNR Dean Steve Waller.

The Lancaster Event Center will team up with the Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau to identify hundreds of local volunteers and dozens of local businesses to act as advertising sponsors and on-site vendors.

“Folks who would like to be involved should go to our web site at LancasterEventCenter.org where we have a NHSFR interest form for community members to let us know how they’d like to be involved,” commented Amy Dickerson, managing director.

ABOUT THE LANCASTER EVENT CENTER

The Lancaster Event Center is located on the east side of Lincoln, Nebraska and known as the Midwest’s premier multi-use facility and home of the Lancaster County Super Fair with over 300 other events annually. Key features include 400,000 square feet across five inter-connected buildings, full catering and food/beverage service, multiple

sponsorship opportunities, 200-site campground, and 160-acre fairgrounds with ample, convenient parking. Founded in 2001 by the Lancaster County Agricultural Society, the Lancaster Event Center is a public facility that operates as a 501(c)(3) non-profit to be a key contributor to Lancaster County's youth, culture and economy by providing a professional, friendly and fun experience while showcasing the unique agricultural heritage and future of Lancaster County. For additional information, visit LancasterEventCenter.org or contact one of the media contacts above.

Additional information on the NHSFR bid can be found at Lancaster Event Center web site at: <http://www.lancastereventcenter.org/about-us/nhsfr>

Photos and video included with this press release found in DropBox include:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vwsqsziewx3ler1/AAACZXYPajZ4ckDs8jKGjOXZa?dl=0>

1. Lancaster Event Center staff gathered to invite the NHSFR at newly remodeled LEC street sign on 84th Street.
2. Final bid presentation video featuring State of Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and Lancaster County Agricultural Society board member Kendra Ronnau
3. Photo of Lancaster Event Center Operations Manager Chas Skillett (who helped with the bid) competing in 2001 in Bull Riding, the year he competed at the NHSFR.
4. Photo of Lancaster Event Center Special Events Assistant Hoyt Kraeger (who helped with the bid) competing in the NHSFR 2011 in Saddle Broncs.
5. Lancaster Event Center facility layout for NHSFR event.
6. Lancaster County Agricultural Society board, January 2017 (L to R: Ron Suing, Tom Messick, Karen Rutt, John Cooper, Ron Dowding, Kendra Ronnau, Jamie Bauman, Jim Swanson. Not pictured: Jay Wilkinson)