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Rodeo Association Melds Past with Future Hiring Marks

This year the Arcadia All Florida Championship Rodeo Association operated in its 87th year, but this isn't an old fashioned entity stuck in the past. Earlier this year the association announced plans to build a new arena in which the association intends to grow their traditional Pro Rodeo Association event and attract new events into the community. The increased tourism created will add to the \$1 million economic impact generated by the association's traditional annual rodeo in DeSoto County.

Leading this effort is the association's new Executive Director, Katherine Marks. She is the association's first fulltime executive director and will be responsible for the association's transition into the new arena and melding their rich history with their future growth. Marks' is uniquely qualified for this challenge. Raised in Kentucky, she participated in rodeos as a youngster in barrel racing, pole bending and breakaway calf roping. She graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in Equine Management. Marks' began her professional career as a sales representative with Brumfield Hay and Grain, soon attracting the attention of a major breeder who enticed her to change her career path to barn manager. In 2011, Marks moved to Florida following her husband's career and ultimately became the Communications Manager at Peace River Valley Citrus Growers Association. She served in this position for two years where she honed her experiences to include all the needed job acumens to become the Arcadia All Florida Championship Rodeo Association's executive director.

The Association has partnered with community individuals and businesses to make this dream a reality. Mosaic Arena, which will be located adjacent to the Turner Agri-Civic Center, is a state of the art facility, made possible thanks to a lead grant by The Mosaic Company Foundation, as well as other major donors and members of the local community. The Rodeo Association has partnered with the county to operate the two facilities with the intent of attracting larger multi-dimensional events to the area, thus benefiting DeSoto's economic landscape. Other major donors include Ben Hill Griffin, Inc., Doyle & Debi Carlton and the William G. Wells IV "Kayo" Family. Thanks to these and many additional supporters, the project is estimated to create 70 contractor jobs and \$9.5 million in economic benefit during the construction phase. The Capital Campaign has raised over \$5 million, with a goal of \$8 million.

Association president, Judge Don T. Hall and the other association directors have been looking forward to the new arena since the current facility was heavily damaged in 2004 during Hurricane Charley. He notes, "The association has been working towards this new arena for years. This year we have been focusing on assuring our business is prepared for this transition as a leading and cohesive community partner. Mrs. Marks completes this process and will be the point person for the board of directors in this landmark expansion."

Upcoming events include the DeSoto County Ranch Rodeo to be held July 31 and August 1. The event will begin at 7 p.m. with gates opening at 5 p.m. Tickets will be sold at the gate and will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. A Youth Rodeo will be held September 19, November 21 and December 122 at 10 a.m. Admission is free. A Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association Rodeo will be held October 17 and 18. Gates will open at 11:00 a.m., show starts at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are \$15.00 general admission with free admission for kids 10 and under. Junior High and High School Rodeo teams will compete in two upcoming events. The Junior High Rodeo will be held October 24 & 25. High School will be held November 14 & 15. More details for this and all events can be found at www.arcadiarodeo.com.