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## **Behind the Scenes of St. George IRONMAN Event**

*It takes a village; Cheers to the hard work of medical, transportation, etc.*

On Sept. 18, 2021, St. George offered a warm welcome to over 3500 athletes and 11,000 visitors from across the globe as it hosted the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship – no small feat. Now, the postponed 2021 IRONMAN World Championship is leaving Hawaii for the first time since its inception in 1978 and St. George was selected to host this granddaddy of them all – a huge testament to our local municipalities, public agencies, volunteers, and residents for working as one to make this remarkable event a success.

Over the course of these IRONMAN events – three World Championships in a little more than 13 months – Washington County is expected to reap \$80 million in economic impact.

Still, the million-dollar question remains: “How on Earth does our community make an IRONMAN appear effortless when there are so many moving parts?” That’s mindboggling, but the glimpse you’re about to see of what it takes to host an IRONMAN event, and the sheer amount of effort that goes into race day, will show you how the bonds of this community run deeper than the iron permeating our “red rock country.”

### **Showing Us the Way**

Dave Hughes is the regional manager of Utah Barricade Company, and like they have done for many previous IRONMAN races, Utah Barricade set up traffic control for the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship course in St. George. Last year, Utah Barricade divided the race route into six areas, and they had 13 certified technicians working the race all day, not including the laborers/flaggers.

Altogether, Utah Barricade monitored approximately 56 miles of roadway utilizing 27 electric arrow/message boards, 60 water barriers, 130 miscellaneous signs, 380 warning signs, 700 additional delineation devices, and 6,500 cones, as well as flags, bags, and reflective to dress the equipment up to Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) standards.

“During past IRONMAN events, SR-9 in Hurricane, near the start of the race would need nearly 500 pieces of equipment. During last year’s IRONMAN, we used nearly 1600 pieces of equipment in that same location and we experienced a similar demand throughout most of the bike course,” said Hughes.



### **UDOT Gets Involved in IRONMAN**

In addition to Utah Barricade, the Utah Department of Transportation came in to help. Matt Rhodes, permits officer at UDOT, said the agency's biggest role was making sure the state routes were functioning during IRONMAN to ensure the traffic was able to get to their destinations during the event.

"This was not only on the routes the event was impacting, but all of the routes in Washington County. We had a great team helping to ensure the traffic control was set up and functioning properly," said Rhodes.

UDOT's traffic operations center is nothing short of impressive; it monitors traffic using a live-fed, closed-circuit TV system. During the event, UDOT's operators keep track of the traffic flows and make adjustments if warranted.

Kevin Kitchen is the senior communications manager of UDOT Region Four. Kitchen said UDOT can detect migration patterns for major events between urban centers, such as Las Vegas and Salt Lake City. As such, their Traffic Operations Center works with their Communications Division to develop a traveler information plan to appeal to driver behavior and level traffic peaks when possible. The plan coordinates the timing and location of roadway messages, web and app channels, social media messaging and media outreach.

### **Local Police Departments and City Departments Play a Big Role**

Curtis Spragg is the captain of the St. George City Police Department, which was involved in IRONMAN in many ways. Last year, the department coordinated efforts with other law enforcement agencies and city resources to provide a safe venue for athletes and spectators. This included multiagency meetings to ensure the race route provided a safe environment for the athletes as they compete, while at the same time allowing for adequate traffic flow for local residents to get around town with the least amount of impact possible.

The department even worked with the Utah National Guard and the Utah Highway Patrol to bring in a special team with proper equipment designed to detect dangerous materials around the race venue. The Utah Highway Patrol also provides a helicopter to fly over the course throughout the event. "This allows a bigger view of the course which results in the ability to foresee potential dangers to the athletes, traffic congestion issues and overall security of the venue," said Spragg.

Spragg said there is no way the department could take on this type of event without the assistance of other important departments within the city. "For instance, Public Works provides terrific insight into current road conditions along the course, ongoing road improvement projects they are undertaking, traffic flow concerns, and other valuable ideas that are unique to their perspective based on their role within the city."

The Parks and Recreation Department are our local experts with all things pertaining to the beautiful parks and hosting athletic events within our city. Spragg said they play a huge role, which



entails maintaining our local parks in such a manner that they are well groomed, the trash bins are emptied to prevent litter and other debris from spilling out, restrooms are clean and adequately stocked, and the overall beauty of these public places is showcased for visitors and locals to enjoy.

"Think how incredible it is to be the first city to ever host the IRONMAN World Championships outside of Kona, Hawaii!" he said. "This speaks volumes about the beautiful area in which we live, but it also says even more about our local community members who come out to provide service during the event that starts with the 3 a.m. bus loading for the athletes and doesn't end until the athletes pick up their gear at the end of the day."

Jason Williams is the Chief of Police at the Washington City Police Department. Like the St. George Police Department, his department wears many hats during IRONMAN. He described last year's IRONMAN, and how it meant 48 road closures in Washington City. "We have nearly 60 staff that are needed to maintain the course with the closures. Traffic that comes to a hard closure will be re-routed to a controlled closure so that they can proceed to their desired destination without causing a great impact on the race course."

During last year's IRONMAN, Williams recalled a unique storm that blew in and unleashed some pounding rain. "This did not phase the athletes nor did it change our commitment to keeping the race course safe," he said. "We got a little wet and cold but we were able to dry out before the race was through our city."

"We want our city to 'feel like home' when these athletes arrive," said Williams. We are grateful to be considered as host and placed on a worldwide stage for an event that has a great reputation and true sense of accomplishment by the athletes when they compete and finish."

### **Managing the Health of Athletes**

David Blodgett, director of the Southwest Utah Public Health Department, shared how his department was one of the local organizations eager to get involved in volunteer efforts around the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship. They kindly provided a large number of volunteers for the event, including equipment that was used by healthcare and other partners. "Some of our staff were involved in planning efforts, and we serve on the medical event planning committee," said Blodgett.

Christian Millward, MD, was the medical director for the 2021 event, meaning he was in charge of helping to arrange staffing for the event, requiring him to work closely with other practitioners and medical staff. They needed to make sure they had qualified personnel for the swim and also at the transition areas and medical tent at the end, he explained.

"We never know quite what will come up during the race. Sometimes, it may just be a really boring and quiet day in the medical tent, and there are other times where you have major medical events, bike crashes, abrasions, dehydration, heat and cold-related illnesses, swim-in-water-related illnesses, etc. This can provide for an entertaining day," said Millward.



Millward spoke of a man who broke his collarbone on his bike and he continued to finish the run and the entire race. "A good example of endurance," he said. He said they have had really cold years where people are extremely cold coming out of the water, and have a difficult time communicating because they are chattering and shaking so much. He said it is always amazing to watch as they are struggling to even speak, and then be very articulate once they warm up.

Millward thinks the most important thing is how all of these medical personnel truly work great together. Even though many times they have never teamed up before, they create a great team and unified approach to truly taking care of the athletes. It's always remarkable to him to see that very few people are transported to the hospital as they triage and take care of most of the issues onsite, he said.

Sometimes, he said, even spectators get motivated to do something [e.g. participate in an athletic event] just by watching others complete and IRONMAN event. "The overall camaraderie and interaction with IRONMAN, the community, the athlete, etc. is just amazing. That, in and of itself, is inspiring."

Steve Ikuta works with Intermountain Healthcare as the medical liaison officer between the medical team and IRONMAN staff. He collaborates, communicates, and teams with race staff, medical directors, the Utah Health Emergency Response Team, Rocky Vista University, various EMS agencies, and various city and county emergency operations centers during the event. During last year's IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship, Intermountain Healthcare provided clinical and non-clinical support.

Every IRONMAN is supported by two Intermountain Healthcare providers serving as medical directors, said Ikuta. They provided telemedicine capability with their on-duty emergency department physicians and medical directors via iPads. They also provided non-clinical personnel to track the disposition of athletes as they enter either the T1 medical tent and/or the finish line medical tent.

With last year's IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship bringing athletes from different countries who speak different languages, his team provided onsite interpreters who used either video and/or audio interpretation. The application they used has the video capability of streaming interpreters of 39 different languages, and can interpret over 200 other languages via audio," said Ikuta.

### **The Wheels on the Bus**

Lane Hadlock is the director of transportation for Washington County School District. He says working with IRONMAN has been a very unique experience, noting how their expertise and organization is unsurpassed. Their preparation on behalf of the school district provided an efficient, on-time arrival for participants and spectators.



Forty-eight drivers, transportation department staff members, and school district staff members all worked together. At Town Square, every 10 minutes, eight buses were loaded and departed for Sand Hollow to unload and then return for another group, he said.

"Many athletes and spectators commented on how well organized the event was. A common comment was how kind everyone treated them," he said. "All of the athletes and spectators had left when a senior female swimmer, who had timed out, asked me if all of the buses had left. I told her they had, but I would give her a ride back to Town Square."

"She was crying and disappointed and thanked me many times on the way back. She was originally from England and had participated for many years in events all around the world. She said the kindness of people here and the beauty of the area made this one of her favorite experiences even though she had timed out."

### **Bikes in the Air and Everywhere**

During the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship, the airport had an incredible number of passengers fly into St. George from all over the world. "If they were athletes, they had a bicycle with them," said Richard Stehmeier, airport manager at St. George Regional Airport.

In most cases, the bikes were expensive (somewhere between \$5,000 to \$15,000 or more), he explained. As a result, there were lots of bikes in expensive cases coming into St. George. The flights were full and the aircraft baggage holds were not big enough to hold the athletes' bags and bikes together, he said.

"We had lots of people get off the airplane expecting their bike to be in the baggage claim area and then it didn't arrive. For the most part, they were very understanding and were told that their bike would be delivered to their hotel the next day or later that evening."

Skywest Airlines, together with their partners, American, United and Delta, stepped up and sent trucks down to Las Vegas to pick up rerouted bikes the first day of the rush. Then they really stepped up and sent aircraft from Salt Lake City with no passengers, just bikes onboard, to make sure the athletes got their bikes when they needed them, he said.

"They did the same thing after the race was over. There were literally bikes, in their cases, lined up on the baggage ramp in rows of 50 feet or longer. They were loaded on the plane (with no passengers) and sent on their way to one of the hubs that we fly to. Really was amazing to see that many bikes sitting on the parking ramp waiting for a ride."

"By the way, the rental car vendors at the airport rented over 600 cars in three days before the event kicked off. Can't wait for the next one."

As the May IRONMAN World Championship approaches, Greater Zion acknowledges and appreciates all the work of the local public safety, medical, and all industry professionals who invest



both paid and volunteer time into these events ... events that drive our economy. It wouldn't be possible without you!

The 2021 Intermountain Healthcare IRONMAN World Championship presented by Utah Sports Commission, postponed from last year, comes to Greater Zion on May 7, marking the first time this iconic endurance race leaves its home in Hawaii. For more information, visit [GreaterZion.com](http://GreaterZion.com).

### **About Greater Zion**

Located in the southwest corner of Utah, Greater Zion is a destination that offers more than 2,400 square miles of adventure and inspiration. Zion National Park, the fourth most visited National Park in the United States, is the premier attraction, but Zion is only the beginning. Four state parks and a multitude of year-round recreational lands set the stage for a burgeoning mountain biking scene, some of the best off-highway vehicle riding in the country, scenic and challenging play at 13 top-rated golf courses, world-class cultural performances at Tuacahn Center for the Arts and so much more. The vibrant communities of St. George, Springdale, Hurricane, Ivins and towns in between offer a wide range of lodging options, dining experiences and access to outdoor pursuits through local outfitters and tour companies. Home to the 2021 and 2022 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship, and the 2021 IRONMAN World Championship, Greater Zion also is a world-class destination for sporting events, conferences and meetings. The Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office is a transient-room-tax-funded entity of Washington County, Utah. For more information, please visit [GreaterZion.com](http://GreaterZion.com).