



Media Contact:

Sara Otto, Marketing Manager
435-986-3375
sara@greaterzion.com

Iconic Events Shine Spotlight on St. George

Three IRONMAN World Championships in 13 months – how did that happen?

By Kevin Lewis, Director, Greater Zion Convention & Tourism

On Wednesday evening, just a few days before the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship in September, I was at a reception for VIPs on the lawn at Entrada at Snow Canyon. The sky was a distinct desert blue and a golden moon was slowly rising over Paradise Ridge. Just one more layer to the kind of emotion that typically fills springtime evenings in the Land of Endurance.

Guests from across the globe paused their conversation to snap photos and soak up the emotion. It was stunning.

One of my favorite rewards as director at the Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office is watching people experience the magic of our desert world for the first time. I nodded my head in gratitude and turned back to the conversation at hand.

I was chatting with Diana Bertsch, senior vice president of IRONMAN World Championships. Diana is the force behind some of the most iconic endurance events in the world. She's traveled the globe to put on world championship events and she's seen some pretty spectacular places. But recently, she's become enamored with the attributes of our community ... the people, the passion, the commitment to excellence and the attitude of optimism.

In the last few years, Diana's had a chance to savor the juicy fruit of a community that comes together to make good things happen, and it's refreshing.

Looking back, what happened on that Wednesday night wasn't necessarily surprising; in a way, you might have expected it. But on that beautiful evening, when my heart and energy were soaking up the emotion of the World Championship activities we were orchestrating, what happened next took my breath away.



"Kevin, we need to find a minute to sit down with Andrew," Diana said. Andrew is Andrew Messick, the CEO of IRONMAN.

"Okay...."

Then, pulling me aside, "and Kevin, I need you to trust me."

Hmmm.

"Do you trust me, Kevin?"

"Yeah, I trust you, Di. I'm a little scared of you, but I trust you."

We found a table and sat down with Andrew, and Jeff Robbins, CEO of the Utah Sports Commission. Bottom line, because of complications with the pandemic, the IRONMAN World Championship – a race that has been held in Hawaii for 44 years – was not going to happen in Kona in 2021. In 2020, the race had been cancelled, and for Diana, cancelling the IRONMAN World Championship two years in a row was simply not acceptable. So as any savvy business leader would do, she started to navigate a contingency plan. Based on her experience here, she knew the perfect location to host the event and she pitched the idea to Andrew.

Nothing like this had ever been done before. IRONMAN leaving Kona? Seriously?!? But in many ways, making dramatic adjustments seems to be a pretty common theme these days.

After taking some time with the concept, and spending a few days in the area, Andrew felt the same inspiration Diana had. So there, under the glow of the desert moon, we started to process the possibilities.

Could we pull it off?

Less than a month earlier, when pandemic circumstances made it clear that New Zealand wouldn't be hosting the 2022 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship, Diana approached us about adding that race to our calendar. Why? Because as so many have come to know, we are an amazing destination for endurance sports, and this community knows how to host them.

At that time, without exception, every community leader pledged their support. But would they do it again?



The IRONMAN World Championship is the longest running, most iconic endurance event in the world. To even be considered is an honor. But seriously, three World Championships in 13 months? Would our community support it? Could we handle the pressure? Could we figure out the logistics and the financial commitments?

Diana and I were exchanging sideways glances. Jeff Robbins and I were doing the same. Andrew remained focused.

No other community has ever done anything like this. But this isn't any "other community." This place was formed by pressure and exertion. It was built by people who figured out how to bring life to a barren and ragged terrain. It is the home to individuals and communities who thrive with optimism and purpose.

"We've built a strong and trusted relationship with our friends in Greater Zion," Diana said. "The communities here have proven time and time again that this is a world class venue where champions have, and will continue to rise to the challenge."

So once again, on the eve of what was to be the biggest, most globally recognized event to ever happen here, we went to work to do it one better.

The next morning, before we'd spoken to anyone, or even started on the details, Triathlete magazine published an article with the headline: "How St. George Became the New Kona." (link to: <https://www.triathlete.com/culture/news/how-st-george-became-the-new-kona/>)

The article had nothing to do with the previous night's conversations, but it served as confirmation that we were on to something. The reputation of this area was growing, and in the triathlon community, it had taken on a whole new dimension. They were already putting us on par with this iconic, IRONMAN destination.

In just a few short days, with the blessing of community leaders, IRONMAN, the Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office, and the Utah Sports Commission put the pieces together and the deal was done. A process that can often take months or years, came together during the week of the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship.

2022 will be a transformational year for our community as we continue to solidify our position on the world stage.



Jeff Robbins said this “may be the biggest event in Utah since the 2002 Winter Olympics, as far as a world-wide, marquee brand.” To be selected to host it, plays a significant part in paving the path for another Winter Olympics in the future.

The spirit of the IRONMAN World Championship is rushing across the Pacific in the golden glow of a new sunrise. With a spirit of renewal and endurance, it breaks across a new horizon and beckons those who choose to rise.

In May 2022, shine your light in the Land of Endurance.

To learn more about the IRONMAN World Championship and what it means for our community, visit IRONMAN.GreaterZion.com.

About the Author

Kevin Lewis is the Director of the Greater Zion Convention & Tourism Office. His career started in broadcasting and his portfolio includes national advertising awards for television, print, multi-media and web campaigns. Kevin played the lead role in bringing several key events to Greater Zion including anything related to IRONMAN. This year the area played host to the IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship. That event brought in 3,500 athletes from 87 different countries and nearly \$18 million in economic impact.

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 and Tourism Office is a transient-room-tax-funded entity of Washington County, Utah. For more information, please visit GreaterZion.com.