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Connecticut Convention Center celebrates 20-year anniversary

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Hartford, CT The Connecticut Convention Center marked its 20th anniversary with a commemorative event celebrating two decades of economic impact, community revitalization, and public-private partnership. The event brought together state and local officials, business leaders, and longtime collaborators to reflect on the center's legacy and look ahead to a vibrant future for downtown.

Guest speakers included governor Ned Lamont; Hartford mayor Arunan Arulampalam; Michael Freimuth, executive director of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA); and Len Wolman, chairman and CEO of Waterford Group, which served as master developer of the Adriaen's Landing project. Developed as part of the State of Connecticut's revitalization initiative, the Connecticut Convention Center is a state-owned facility and a lasting example of successful

public-private partnership. It is operated by Waterford Venue Services under the stewardship of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA), which continues to oversee investment and development in the surrounding district.

Since opening on June 2, 2005, the 540,000 s/f Connecticut Convention Center — the largest full-service convention venue between New York and Boston — has hosted more than 3,000 events and welcomed over six million visitors.

It stands as a cornerstone of Hartford's Front Street District, which also includes the Hartford Marriott Downtown, the Connecticut Science Center, and a growing mix of entertainment, housing, and educational developments.

"The venue's location between two major metro areas was once seen as a challenge — but it's become one of its greatest strengths. Accessibility and affordability have made this Center a go-to destination for everything from industry expos and sporting events to black-tie galas," said Michael Freimuth. "The skilled staff keeps events coming back to the Convention Center, and the welcome they receive from downtown restaurants and businesses keeps them coming back to Hartford."

Len Wolman emphasized that the district's success is the result of deep, sustained collaboration among public and private partners. He recognized the vital support of the State of Connecticut, the City of Hartford, and key stakeholders like Travelers, UConn, and CRDA. Special thanks were extended to the Convention Center's dedicated team, including General Manager Mike Costelli and staff, whose combined service totals over 800 years. Notably, 55% of full-time associates have been with the Center for over a decade — a testament to the strength, stability, and culture of the team.

For Kristie Gonsalves, president of North East Expos, the Connecticut Convention Center has been a game-changer. "When we moved the Connecticut Flower & Garden Show here in 2007, it gave us the space and flexibility we needed to grow," she said. "Now we bring over 40,000 attendees every year to Downtown Hartford — and it takes a highly professional team to pull it off. This place is built for scale."

Behind the scenes, the numbers tell their own story. Over the past 20 years, the culinary department has served more than 168,000 six-ounce chicken breasts, logged 257 cumulative years of service, and used over 373,000 pounds of fryolator oil. Meanwhile, the environmental services team has vacuumed the Center's 150,000 square feet of carpet approximately 4,000 times and dispensed more than 21 million feet of paper towels and 60 million feet of toilet paper — underscoring the scale of operations that keep the Center running seamlessly.

The celebration concluded with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, which will be permanently displayed in the Convention Center as a tribute to the enduring partnerships and vision that have shaped its success. The plaque also honors the Capital Region Development Authority's Board Members and staff, whose tireless work continues to drive progress and prosperity in the City of Hartford.