

Applause

State sports foundation names HITS best event of year

Monday, June 8, 2015 at 2:18 by Susan Smiley-Height

The Florida Sports Foundation has named the HITS Ocala Winter Show Circuit, held at HITS Post Time Farm in Ocala, the Best Event of the Year in the Small Market category.

The foundation recently presented five awards to recognize Florida communities and sports commissions for outstanding efforts in sports tourism in the state. The awards were presented at the organization's annual sports summit, held in Fort Lauderdale.

The awards included:

- * Best Event of the Year – Small Market: HITS Ocala Winter Horse Show Jumping Circuit – Ocala/Marion County Sports Commission
- * Venue of the Year: Nathan Benderson Park – Sarasota County Sports Commission
- * Best Awarded Event of the Year – Large Market: 2017 Major League Baseball All Star Game Week – Miami-Dade Sports Commission
- * Best Event of the Year – Mid Market: United States Fastpitch Association World Series – Visit Panama City Beach
- * Best Event of the Year – Large Market: 2014 Amateur Athletic Union Girls Junior National Volleyball Championship – Central Florida Sports Commission, Orlando

The 10-week HITS Ocala Winter Circuit was held between Jan. 13 and March 23 and attracted more than 54,800 competitors and 20,000 spectators to Ocala/Marion County. More than \$3 Million in prize money was awarded to the nation's most accomplished riders and horses.

During the HITS Ocala Winter Festival, Feb. 10-15, HITS hosted the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup CSIO-4*, which gave international equestrian stars the opportunity to compete for more than \$400,000 in prize money and the chance to represent their country in Spain at the FEI Nations Cup Finals in September.

According to HITS data, exhibitors accounted for more than 84,000 room nights and generated more than \$94 million in economic impact. More than \$84 million of the economic impact came from out of state.

“Each of these awards were earned through the hard work of the sports commissions staffs who work tirelessly to enhance their local communities through sports,” stated Florida Sports Foundation President John Webb in a news release. “The 27 Florida Sports Commissions bring over 2,500 sporting events to the state annually and provide a significant impact to the Florida tourism industry and economy.”

“Florida has been the home of our winter show circuit for over 30 years and with the continued support of local businesses, the community and Marion County's equine enthusiasts, HITS has made a significant impact on show jumping throughout the state, and

the nation,” said HITS President and CEO Tom Struzzieri in the release.

“It is an honor to be recognized by the Florida Sports Foundation for the 2015 HITS Ocala show circuit, which presented over \$3 Million in prize money, the FEI Nations Cup, and the second-annual Great American \$1 Million Grand Prix. We look forward to continuing these legacies for years to come,” Struzzieri added.

The 2016 HITS Ocala Winter Circuit begins Jan. 19 and will include 10 weeks of show jumping competition, in addition to the third annual Great American \$1 Million Grand Prix on Monday, March 28. More information is available at www.HitsShows.com.

For information about the Florida Sports Foundation and the 27 Sports Commissions of Florida, visit www.flasports.com.

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