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Cal Expo CEO Announces Retirement, Board Appoints Deputy as Interim CEO

SACRAMENTO – After decades in the fair industry and ten years as the CEO of the California Exposition & State Fair, today Rick Pickering announced his retirement from the State, scheduled for year end. Pickering will be retiring at year end to redirect his expertise and energies toward international faith-based organizations. The Cal Expo Board of Directors also announced that Chief Deputy General Manager Tom Martinez would be appointed the Interim CEO.

“No one accomplishes much on their own, but on the combined efforts of the team, friendships and partnerships that come into their lives,” said Pickering. “I will greatly miss working with dedicated leaders in the Capitol region, but my trust in Tom as the Interim CEO is deep and his work over the past seven years has been transformational.”

During his ten years at the helm of Cal Expo, more than \$270,000,000 has been generated and reinvested into operating and programming the facilities, plus another \$44,000,000 in upgrades to Cal Expo’s infrastructure. Pickering and his team maneuvered through the pandemic while serving numerous emergency roles for the State and the Sacramento region, including vaccinating and testing millions of Californians. Most recently, he orchestrated the successful and record setting comeback of the 2022 California State Fair, which helped bring Californians back together post-pandemic.

Pickering has continually invested in building stronger communities during his more than 30 years of public service at the state, county, municipal, and special district levels in California, in addition to his work with numerous nonprofit organizations. He has served in key leadership roles throughout North America in the fair and festival industry, while at the same time working globally on issues like human trafficking, feeding children, providing potable water, and education.

“We cannot thank Rick enough for the legacy he has left behind for Cal Expo through all his hard work and dedication as Cal Expo’s fearless leader and CEO,” commented Jess Durfee, Cal Expo’s Chair of Board of Directors. “The board is confident that Tom will seamlessly continue to enhance and deliver impactful results for our state and region.”

Under Pickering’s guidance, the State Fair embarked on cutting-edge programs including the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Sacramento NAACP; celebration of Farm Workers with the Chavez Foundation and the UFW; inaugural Out at The State Fair programming; the first California Bear Cup E-Sports Gaming competition; creation of a State-wide Youth Mariachi competition in partnership with Univision; inaugural United States National Drone Racing Championship; and the first state-recognized cannabis competition. During his tenure, Cal Expo became the home field for the indomitable Sacramento Republic FC and opened the new Rock N Brews family restaurant. He is also credited with expanding horse racing activities at Cal Expo to a level that generated more than \$100,000,000 in annual wagers.

Many of these endeavors, especially Cal Expo’s extensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic, were also under the leadership of Martinez.

“I want to thank the Board for their confidence in my leadership and Rick for his continued mentorship, support, and partnership,” said Martinez. “I look forward to building on everything we have accomplished under Rick’s leadership, and I am incredibly energized by the opportunities ahead. By continuing to improve our execution, we will deliver tremendous value for the state and our region.”

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