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## **SANTA MARIA VALLEY SOARING AS SPORTING EVENTS DESTINATION**

### **Tournaments Embrace Valley's Versatile Venues, Affordable Lodging, Mild Weather and Coastal Attractions; Visitor Bureau Offers Groups Complimentary Support**

*Santa Maria, CA*—The Santa Maria Valley on California's Central Coast may be best known for its picturesque beaches, fine wines and world-famous barbecue, but it is also gaining recognition as a premier destination for sporting events. The Santa Maria Valley resides in northern Santa Barbara County just 160 miles north of Los Angeles.

"The Santa Maria Valley was sort of a forgotten gem of the Central Coast, but that is changing," said Wendy Hudson, marketing coordinator for the City of Santa Maria's Hagerman Sports Complex. "For example, about 95 percent of our weekends at the complex are now booked, compared to around 70 percent just a few years ago."

The Hagerman Sports Complex—considered the crown jewel of the local sporting experience—features four multipurpose fields for softball, baseball, youth soccer and other sports, as well as a restaurant, meeting room and expansive parking facilities. The Paul Nelson Aquatic Center, Central Coast Sports Arena, Atkinson Community Center and the new Orcutt Community Park are among the numerous other local facilities that host sporting events.

Hudson said that recent renovations to the Hagerman Sports Complex, combined with an aggressive marketing push, have helped sporting event organizers rediscover the Santa Maria Valley. "They are usually surprised by the quality of our facilities, which are comparable to what you find in bigger cities," she said.

Recent tournaments at the Hagerman Sports Complex have included the ASA Metro softball tournament, which was attended by 50 teams from 11 counties. Upcoming tournaments include the Junior High Grass Volleyball tournament on October 16, the Special Olympics Regional Games on October 9-10, the Toys for Tots charity softball tournament on December 4-5 and December 11-12, and the Triple Crown girl's softball tournament in February.

Golf, tennis, swimming, basketball, baseball, bowling, cycling, lawn bowling, archery and roller hockey are among the other sports that can be accommodated by local facilities. Recent sporting events in the valley have included the Cool Summer Soccer Cup, Columbus Day Swim Meet, Windmill Century bike race, and Santa Maria Comcast Open Tennis Tournament.

"The word is definitely getting out that we are a family-friendly destination with versatile sporting venues and mild year-round weather," said Gina Keough, manager of the Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau. "People who come here for tournaments often turn it into an affordable family vacation."

Keough also noted that the valley's convenient location along Highway 101 between Los Angeles and San Francisco is another selling point for the region. "We are easy to reach from the big cities to the north and south, and from the Central Valley as well. This makes it easy for teams and participants to enjoy a neutral location as well as a change of scenery without traveling too far from home."

To help sporting event coordinators plan their tournaments and events, the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau offers complimentary support services, as well as select monetary grant support. The bureau offers complimentary welcome bags to groups, as well as up to 1,000 blank name badges, registration assistance, and presentation materials to assist with event promotion.

Interested parties may also download the bureau's complimentary Santa Maria Valley Event, Meeting & Sport Facilities booklet, which presents details on local venues, lodging and vendors. To download a copy, visit the Planning Services section at [www.SantaMariaVisitor.com](http://www.SantaMariaVisitor.com).

For more information on planning events in the Santa Maria Valley, call Group Sales Coordinator Jennifer Mejia at the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779 ext. 815.

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