

## Atlanta Makes Bids For NASCAR Hall of Fame

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ATLANTA — Atlanta hopes to park a NASCAR hall of fame on real estate owned by hometown mogul Ted Turner, just across the street from the shrieks and spray of Centennial Olympic Park's famous fountains.

Atlanta's NASCAR shrine will cost about \$92 million, money the city's bid team would raise from Georgia's major corporate NASCAR sponsors, bank loans and as much as \$30 million in support from the state and city governments. Atlanta's hall would open by 2008.

The attraction's potential site, now a parking lot at Luckie Street and Centennial Olympic Park Drive, would be a short walk from the city's coming-soon tourist destinations: the Georgia Aquarium and the new World of Coca-Cola.

These are the first details of an otherwise secret bid that local officials plan to submit to NASCAR to win racing's hall of fame. The information was obtained through Georgia's open records law.

Atlanta is one of five cities — Richmond, Daytona Beach, Fla., Charlotte and Kansas City, Kan., are the others — that have been vying for a national NASCAR hall of fame since January. Bids are due Tuesday to NASCAR officials in Charlotte, and NASCAR is expected to choose a host city by the end of the year.

The hall of fame could be a windfall for the community that gets it, creating jobs, exposure and tourism dollars.

Each city claims to have an edge. Charlotte and Daytona Beach each believe they're racing's hometown. Richmond says it's next door to the nation's capital. Kansas City has a well-visited potential site near its track.

NASCAR is owned and operated by the France family, and a small group of decision-makers will select the site. Key in that decision are NASCAR's 43-year-old CEO, Brian France, and his sister, Lesa France Kennedy, head of public company that owns several racing tracks.

State documents suggest that Atlanta officials intend to present NASCAR with a well-financed, centrally located and reasonably profitable attraction.

Internal memos included in the documents, as well as conversations with two people familiar with the bid, say the Turner property is Atlanta's first choice. It was unclear whether Turner had donated his property for the hall, and officials close to Turner did not return phone calls seeking comment.

The hall of fame would have shops and restaurants, and "an innovative, interesting design that has the excitement and motion of the sport," said Mark Lazarus, president of Turner Entertainment Group and a leader of the local bid team.

Organizers hope to draw 1 million visitors a year to the attraction.

State officials may pledge as much as \$25 million for the project, while the city could provide \$5 million through special tax breaks for building downtown, documents show.

The bid team's corporate backers, all of them NASCAR sponsors, have promised \$30 million, either by sponsoring the hall of fame or its exhibits, or by recruiting more sponsors from out of state, documents show.

"We're not in this to build a hall of fame and not have it be a long-term asset," said Scott Wilfong, president of SunTrust Bank, Atlanta, and one of the leaders of the city's bid effort.

The bid team is also presenting NASCAR with a way, similar to the Centennial Olympic Park brick program, for racing fans to buy into the project, according to state documents.

The bid effort would borrow the balance of the money, about \$30 million, according to state documents.

The state predicts a NASCAR hall of fame would eventually have annual sales of about \$36 million, with operating costs of about \$27 million.

The attraction would hire 116 people and bring \$3.4 million in state revenues during its first year. Over 10 years, it would put some \$36 million in state coffers, state officials contend.

The bid team is made up of city and state officials, downtown business group Central Atlanta Progress and executives from SunTrust, Home Depot, BellSouth, Coca-Cola and other companies.