



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan.4, 2012

Contact: Mike Draper, R&R Partners
(775) 336-4547
mike.draper@rrpartners.com

National Championship Air Races introduces Blue Ribbon Review Panel; announce dates for 2012 event

Reno, Nev. –In a press conference to discuss the future of the National Championship Air Races, the Reno Air Racing Association (RARA) announced on Wednesday the formation of a Blue Ribbon Review Panel to study the event. The panel will examine any possible changes or modifications that could be made to enhance the already high level of safety established by the FAA and existing RARA procedures. RARA also announced that, despite many challenges in the near and long-term future, they are planning to hold the 49th Annual National Championship Air Races at the Reno-Stead Airfield, Sept. 12 – 16, 2012.

“Buoyed by the overwhelming support of the victims and families of last year’s terrible tragedy, our sponsors, air race participants and fans and aviation enthusiasts all over the world, we are absolutely committed to doing everything we can to hold this historic event in 2012,” said Mike Houghton, president and CEO of RARA. “The safety of our fans and pilots has always been our foremost and primary concern, which is why we feel so strongly about a blue ribbon review. This effort is not designed to interfere or duplicate the efforts of the National Transportation Safety Board and we will continue to cooperate with them to the fullest extent.”

The panel conducted its first meeting shortly after the press conference and will release its preliminary results and recommendations to RARA within the next 90 days, allowing race officials to study them before the event’s annual Pylon Racing Seminar (PRS) in June.

Headed by former Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Jim Hall, and former Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Nick Sabatini, the four members of the panel bring a wide breadth and depth of experience. The panel is rounded out with two aviation legends, Steve Hinton, a highly-acclaimed movie stunt pilot, aviation choreographer, two-time national Unlimited Air Race champion and current pace plane pilot in the Unlimited Class, and John Sharp, an aeronautical engineer and the winningest pilot in the history of air racing.

“In addition to the blue ribbon panel, as is an annual matter of course, we will work with the race classes and emergency responders to conduct an internal review, in the very near future, of all of the event’s operations and procedures,” said Houghton. “Until we get further down the road, we will not speculate on possible changes to the event or the results of either of these reviews or the NTSB investigation. As has been the case, the NTSB has asked that they remain the point for all communications related to the accident.”

The not-for-profit event is a year-round effort that regularly attracts more than 200,000 spectators and generates an estimated \$85 million annually to northern Nevada’s economy. It was also announced that, RARA had a loss of up to \$1.5 million for 2011. Race officials wanted to make it very clear that, while this financial loss presents a significant hurdle, thanks to the continued generosity, sympathy and support of the event’s fans and sponsors, the loss could be overcome.

- more -

- Air Races Blue Ribbon Audit Panel, cont'd (p. 2) -

“We know there are many people in our organization, our community and all over the world who have been significantly impacted by last year’s tragedy and our thoughts and prayers remain with them,” said Houghton. “However, we have heard from a vast majority of these people that this event must continue on and many of our fans and sponsors have volunteered to do whatever they can in order to help ensure the successful continuation of the National Championship Air Races. It’s in this spirit that we’re working towards holding a poignant and successful event in 2012.”

In order for the 2012 event to occur, RARA must receive permits from the City of Reno, Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority and the FAA. RARA has already begun to initiate conversations with each of these entities regarding permitting for 2012 and these conversations are ongoing.

“For planning purposes, we have to receive our waiver from the FAA for PRS by the end of February or March, at the latest,” said Houghton. “This will provide a pretty good indication of our ability to get permits and waivers for September’s event. Regardless, many people, including victims of the accident, have told us they are coming to Reno in September, one way or another. We’ll do whatever we have to do in order to memorialize and celebrate courage, passion and indomitable spirit that is so often associated with aviation but, more importantly, was so vividly exhibited during the accident and the weeks and months since, even if that means just holding a memorial air show.”

For more information on the National Championship Air Races, visit www.airrace.org.

###