

A CHAMPION'S IDEA COULD SEE CALGARY HOST ITS BIGGEST EVER CONVENTION

Craig Stokke's mission to host the largest convention in Calgary began by a chance meeting in Italy.

A member of the Rotary Club of Calgary South, Stokke was in Rome in 2015 when a man there told him he'd attended the Calgary Rotary International Convention in 1996. The event attracted nearly 25,000 people from 126 countries and remains the largest convention ever held in the city.

The man said he enjoyed Calgary so much that more than 25 years later he gave his daughter and son-in-law a trip to the city and the Rocky Mountains as a wedding present.

Afterwards, as Stokke was going for a run around the Colosseum, he thought: Why not bring the Rotary International Convention back to Calgary? With up to 30,000 people now attending the event each year, it would be an opportunity for Calgary to set a new record in convention attendance.

"I didn't know where to begin," Stokke says. "But I was quickly channeled to Meetings + Conventions Calgary (MCC). And I realized it was a one-stop shop to connect to all the right people and groups."

A partnership created between the Calgary Hotel Association and the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre, MCC works with North American and International meeting and association planners to attract meetings, conventions and incentive business to Calgary. Supported by the BMO Centre and the TELUS Convention Centre, MCC works with people such as Stokke, through its Calgary Champions program, to educate them about how they can leverage efforts to bring major meetings and conventions to the city.

"Calgary Champions have led the efforts to bring 13 conventions and 17,000 delegates to the city, since 2013" says MCC executive director Dave Sclanders. "As well, Champions have played a role in seven confirmed future conferences with nearly 6,000 delegates.

"It's a total partnership between Champions, Calgary meeting venues and hotels and us all working to position the strongest bid for our city."

Together MCC, Stokke and the the Southern Alberta Rotary District want to bid to host the 2023, 2024 or 2025 Rotary International Convention. They've submitted a letter of intention and are one of 12 cities selected to bid for the conventions.

"MCC has helped us show Rotary International that Calgary has everything they need to host such a prestigious international event," Stokke says.

If successful, Stokke hopes the city's second Rotary convention also inspires attendees to send their children to Calgary two decades later.

For more information on becoming a Calgary Champion contact Meetings + Conventions Calgary at 403.261.8500 or info@meetingscalgary.com.