

Conference Center Completes First Decade of Service

By Ryan Kunz
Church Magazines

April conference opened the Conference Center's second decade of service. In its first 10 years, many millions experienced the unique qualities of the one-of-a-kind building during more than 100 sessions of general conference and 4,500 events, as well as their associated broadcasts.

The Conference Center held its first session of general conference on April 1, 2000. There, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said: “[The Conference Center] will prove to be a great addition to this city. Not only will our general conferences be held here, and some other religious meetings, but it will serve as a cultural center for the very best artistic presentations. We hope that those

not of our faith will come here, experience the ambience of this beautiful place, and feel grateful for its presence” (“To All the World in Testimony,” *Liabona*, July 2000, 4; *Ensign*, May 2000, 4).

Six months later, on October 8, President Hinckley dedicated the building.

Since then, almost seven million visitors have come to the Conference Center to attend 4,577 events. Some 4.8 million visitors have toured the building, and the center has been host to more than 5,500 dignitaries. The events held in the auditorium and adjacent Conference Center Theater have included general conference, 10 Young Women general meetings, 10 Relief Society general meetings,

three memorial events (including President Hinckley's funeral), and 125 musical performances, not including the Tabernacle Choir's *Music and the Spoken Word*, which has been held in the Conference Center 186 times.

Those numbers begin to suggest a fulfillment of President Hinckley's words.

Brent Roberts, director of headquarters facilities, has met many people in the building who have shown their gratitude for what they felt there. “They've walked in with tears in their eyes and the Spirit in their hearts,” he said. “It's not just the building, though—it's the Lord, His work, and His Spirit.”

The center was announced on Easter morning by President Hinckley during the April 1996 general conference.

An overview of the construction challenges that were met in building the Conference Center helps attest to the building's unique status. The 21,000-seat auditorium was to be carved from a downhill slope between Salt Lake City's Main Street and West Temple Street. Three large construction companies joined in the work. There were to be no support columns in the auditorium, to ensure that everyone had an unobstructed view, so the builders had to employ the use of 290-foot-long (88 m) steel trusses that would be capable of supporting loads between 250 and 525 pounds per square inch (17–37 kg per square cm). This design also would accommodate the landscaping plans for the roof. On any given day during the process, some 1,000 workers were on site.

During the construction, the building survived the highly unusual 1999 Salt Lake City tornado, and though a boom on a huge crane was snapped, the work continued.

The structure was completed on time, and visitors to the center enjoy state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.





For television, the Conference Center provides a digital, high-definition signal. The first live high-definition broadcast in Utah originated from the Conference Center during President Hinckley's 90th birthday celebration in June 2000.

Engineers created the sound system in the auditorium to provide excellent acoustics whether visitors were listening to a speaker or attending a musical event, making careful calculations to take into account the materials on the walls and ceiling, the number of people who fit inside, and the carpeting and cushioning.

President Hinckley said that the building also conveys a sense of elegance. Such elegance can be seen as visitors stroll the foyers, where a sculpture of the Savior and busts of Church Presidents can be seen; walk in the gardens on the roof, among trees, flowers, bushes, and waterfalls; look up through the nine skylights on top of the building, which can be covered for performances; and enjoy the paintings throughout the building, many of which are familiar to members of the Church and almost all of which are original.

The massive building exhibits many impressive statistics. It covers 10 acres (4 ha), or one city block. There is enough electrical wiring within the center to circle the earth twice. More than 5,900 gallons (22,330 liters) of water are recycled through fountains and water courses every minute.

However, the greatest feature of the center is neither the miles of wiring nor the amount of weight the roof can bear, nor any other mere statistic.

"It is not a museum piece, though the architecture is superb," said President Hinckley. "It is a place to be used in honor to the Almighty and for the accomplishment of His eternal purposes" ("This Great Millennial Year," *Liabona*, Jan. 2001, 80; *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 67). ■