

# Credit One is new title sponsor for Charleston's historic WTA Tour event

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A rendering of the new Credit One Stadium at LTP Daniel Island. Provided

It was the Family Circle Cup when Rosie Casals won the first one in 1973, when Chris Evert won five in a row from 1974-78, and when it moved in 2001 from Hilton Head to Charleston in 2001. Here, tennis legends Venus and Serena Williams collected their trophies.

It's been the Volvo Car Open for the last six years, as Charleston's WTA Tour stop out-lived other tournaments to become the largest women's-only event in North

America, and new stars such as Sloane Stephens and Madison Keys added their names to the champions' list.

Now, as the tournament prepares for its 50th edition in 2022, a new title sponsor has come on board.

Charleston Tennis LLC, which owns the WTA 500 level tournament, announced on July 21 that it has reached a multi-year agreement with Credit One Bank to be the title sponsor of the tournament and the newly renovated stadium at LTP Daniel Island.

The stadium will be known as Credit One Stadium, and officials are still working

Charleston businessman Ben Navarro owns Charleston Tennis LLC and is founder and CEO of Sherman Financial, which owns Credit One Bank, a financial services company that is based in Las Vegas. Credit One has sponsorship deals with NASCAR, the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders and the Vegas Golden Knights of the NHL, among others.

The deal with Credit One is for a minimum of five years, tournament director and Charleston LLC president Bob Moran said Tuesday.

"This is what I would call a new era in tennis and in entertainment for the city of Charleston," Moran said.

The ongoing renovation of the stadium, slated to finish next March just before the tournament begins on April 2, will expand capacity from 7,500 to 11,000 and will allow the venue to attract concerts and other events.

The stadium will include 16 permanent suites, new concessions, more bathrooms and a 75,000-square foot Stage House with a partial roof. The Stage House will

include locker rooms, a gym and training facilities, production and media space, catering amenities and an outdoor rooftop restaurant and bar.

WTA star Madison Keys, the 2019 Volvo Car Open champ, took a virtual tour of the new stadium on Tuesday.

“It’s so cool,” Keys said as she wore VR glasses to navigate the stadium. “It looks great.”

The deal with Credit One also secures the near-term future of the tournament, after the difficulties of the coronavirus pandemic, which wiped out the 2020 event and forced a no-spectators policy at the 2021 tournament last April.

“It’s incredibly important,” WTA Tour CEO Steve Simon said of keeping the Charleston tournament viable. “And the good news here is that there is a true foundation for this event to flourish and to be strong in place. We have too many events that don’t have this level of support from ownership to sponsors to cities to an infrastructure.

“The formula is there for this event to flourish.”

Volvo Cars will remain involved as the official vehicle of the tournament, Moran said.

The commitment from Credit One will be popular with WTA players as Charleston is an attractive stop on tour with a reputation for treating players well.

“This tournament is loved not only by the community, but it also is a player favorite,” said Keys. “I think you see that based on the people who come to the tournament every year. So to have this tournament continue to be successful every single year is incredibly important.

“If there’s anything players can do to help be a part of that, we will absolutely do it because it truly is one of our favorite stops every year.”

When the Volvo Car Open was canceled in 2020, Credit One partnered with Charleston Tennis LLC to put on the Credit One Bank Invitational, a TV-only event that was the first large-scale tennis event after COVID-19 wiped out much of the schedule.

“This has been a tough couple of years for everyone,” Moran said. “And in the sports and entertainment business, it’s been really hard with cancelations and postponements. You name it, we’ve had to deal with it. So this is some good news for us.”



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Jeff Hartsell is a two-time S.C. sportswriter of the year who has covered Clemson, South Carolina, The Citadel, College of Charleston and high school beats, as well as professional golf and tennis events in Charleston.