

Gov. Walker: Honors five for excellence in tourism industry

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Annual tourism conference concludes with awards celebration

Madison – Governor Scott Walker presented five recipients with Governor’s Tourism Awards this evening for their outstanding contributions to the state’s hospitality and travel industry. The awards ceremony took place during the closing dinner of the 30th Annual Wisconsin Governor’s Conference on Tourism, which was held at the Potawatomi Hotel & Casino in Milwaukee.

“Wisconsin’s natural beauty and iconic attractions bring travelers to our state from near and far, but it’s the passion of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry that keeps them coming back year after year,” Governor Walker said. “The five honorees recognized tonight are dedicated to great customer service and create projects that help grow the state’s tourism economy.”

Sponsored by the Governor’s Council on Tourism, the Governor’s Tourism Awards recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses for their excellence, dedication, and impact on Wisconsin’s travel and hospitality industry.

“This year, we recognized 33 nominees who embody our mission of making Wisconsin the premier destination for fun in the Midwest and continue to raise the bar for our whole tourism industry,” said Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett. “Every year, we see such an outstanding pool of talent, and this year is no different. Our five honorees should be proud!”

The recipients of the 2017 Governor’s Tourism Awards are:

- **Legacy Award - Gary Knowles, President, Knowles Communication:**
For more than 40 years, Gary Knowles has helped put Wisconsin on the “better get there” list for travelers and journalists. As the former Director of the Wisconsin Division of Tourism Bureau of Communications, Knowles dedicated his career to promoting tourism in Wisconsin. He continued his advocacy of the state as a communications consultant, developing effective promotions for nearly 20 tourism organizations and businesses throughout the state. Today, he fuels public interest in Wisconsin’s outstanding attractions, events, and byways with his articles in publications such as Midwest Living and Chicago Sun Times, and serves as a monthly travel advisor on Wisconsin Public Radio’s The Joy Cardin Show.
- **Rising Star Award - Scott Liegl, Project Event Development Manager, Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention & Visitors Bureau:**
As Project Event Development Manager for the Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention & Visitors Bureau, Liegl has played an important role in the rapid growth of sporting events in the area, increasing events from 53 in 2013 to 81 planned for 2017. Under his leadership, Liegl also helped the CVB achieve a 501(c)(3) status for the Central Wisconsin Sports Authority. He first joined the Bureau in 2014 as a Sales Manager, where his ability to organize commissioners, game scheduling, and event bracketing quickly became an advantage in the development of sporting events in the Wausau area.
- **Stewardship Award - Cave of the Mounds, Blue Mounds:**
As a founding member of Travel Green Wisconsin, Cave of the Mounds remains on the forefront of environmental stewardship efforts in Wisconsin’s tourism industry. From creating eco-friendly parking lots to preserving surrounding grounds by planting native prairie and savannah plants, Cave of the Mounds has continually worked to preserve a fragile natural treasure while maintaining a viable business for over 75 years. With its geological wonder below ground and an Environmental Education Center above ground, Cave of the Mounds weaves conservation and education into every aspect of its operation.
- **Service Excellence Award - Marcus Hotels & Resorts, Milwaukee:**
Pioneered over 80 years ago by the founder of The Marcus Corporation, “Doing Well by Doing Good” remains at the center of the company’s philosophy to this day. Last year, Marcus Hotels & Resorts associates volunteered more than 28,000 hours in their local communities, and the company donated over half a million dollars to Wisconsin charities like the Boys & Girls Clubs and American Cancer Society. The Corporation is a continued supporter of tourism-driven amenities, such as the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, The Milwaukee

Symphony Orchestra, and more.

- **Arts, Culture, and Heritage - American Players Theatre, Spring Green:** Called the “finest classical-repertory company in the U.S.” by Wall Street Journal theater critic Terry Teachout, American Players Theatre (APT) hosts over 200 productions that attract nearly 110,000 patrons each year. Heading into its 38th season with a new \$7.7 million update to its flagship stage, the Theatre continues to play a major role in making Spring Green a cultural destination for tourists from all over the country. Beyond producing top-quality theater, APT offers visitors a holistic experience that brings together nature, community, and art on its 110-acre property.

To learn more about the Governor’s Tourism Awards, visit www.wigcot.org.