

wigcOT 2022

**GOVERNOR'S
TOURISM
AWARDS**



2022 AWARDS PRESENTATION



Each year, Wisconsin's tourism industry honors the Governor's Tourism Awards recipients at the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism (WIGCOT). While recipients in each category will be honored at the Governor's Dinner, we wish to recognize all the nominees for their dedication, creativity and excellence within the Wisconsin tourism industry.

Sponsored by the Wisconsin Council on Tourism, the Governor's Awards acknowledge leadership, commitment and innovation among the people and organizations that propel our industry forward. There are five categories of awards.

The Governor's Tourism Rising Star Award – This award will be presented to an individual who is new to the tourism industry, within the last 5 years, and has shown leadership, commitment and a passion for Wisconsin's tourism industry.

The Governor's Tourism Innovation Award – This award recognizes a business or community that has implemented a new strategy that has positively impacted their organization or destination through an innovative approach in technology, sustainability, adaptivity and/or the implementation of best practices. (Formerly the Stewardship Award)

The Governor's Tourism Award for Arts, Culture & Heritage – This award will be presented to a business or destination that showcases the arts, culture or heritage for the enhancement of the tourism experience and economic well-being of a community.

The Governor's Tourism Service Excellence Award – This award will be presented to a business that has achieved significant success and growth by providing exceptional service to their customers and a strong, charitable involvement in their community.

The Governor's Tourism Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion Award – This award will be presented to a business or destination that has demonstrated leadership in raising awareness or facilitating change to build a more inclusive and welcoming environment for visitors to Wisconsin.

The Governor's Tourism Legacy Award – This award will be presented to an individual who has shown a long-lasting and permanent contribution to the industry over the years. A nominee for this award should have 25 years or more of distinguished service to the tourism industry, 15 years or more of which has been in Wisconsin.

The following nominees guide our collective efforts, enhance our reputation and inspire our greatness. Please join us in saluting the 2022 Governor's Tourism Awards nominees.

RISING STAR NOMINEES

Amy Albright, Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau

Amy Albright started with the Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau (OCVB) more than four years ago and continuously displays her passion for Oshkosh while leading the OCVB to ensure economic development through tourism. Amy's marketing background has prompted her to make the Oshkosh area much more visible by jumpstarting its presence on social media, radio and other media outlets, promoting the Oshkosh area on a whole new level. She has made it a goal to create relationships with many knowledgeable leaders in the industry, and immediately became a mentor to others. Amy is one of Oshkosh's biggest cheerleaders and has made so many great connections, partnerships and relationships within the industry. She has made subtle changes that will continue to make great impacts within the community. She leads by example not only for her staff, but also for other community leaders.

Hannah Klein, Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

Hannah Klein was hired at the Stevens Point Area CVB into a brand-new position to create a liaison between its partners and stakeholders in the community and the CVB. With a blank canvas, Hannah grew this position into so much more than her job description entailed. Her main priority in this position is creating lasting and valuable relationships with our partners in tourism. She takes pride in knowing that she has created longstanding relationships with partners and continues to work on keeping those relationships strong. Hannah has a thirst for knowledge and is constantly looking for ways to continue to grow and excel in her career. She has a positive attitude and attacks each task with enthusiasm, which makes working with her energizing. She is always looking for continuing education opportunities, whether it's attending conferences, conventions and training seminars or watching webinars.

Jason Kauflin, Wisconsin Golf Trips

Jason Kauflin turned his passion for golf, travel and tourism into a business when he started Wisconsin Golf Trips in 2016, helping to create memorable golf trips to Wisconsin for guests from all over the world. Jason is a longtime member of the Wisconsin State Golf Association and has served as a volunteer for First Tee as well as several major golf events, including the 2017 U.S. Open at Erin Hills and 2021 Ryder Cup. He added a one-stop shop to make coming to Wisconsin for a golf trip at multiple facilities as easy as one phone call, something that didn't exist before he started Wisconsin Golf Trips. His business has tripled over the past three years, proving the demand for his services and his success enhancing the tourism experience for many.

Katie Carey, Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce

Katie Carey has been the tourism manager for the Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce for more than two years, as well as a valuable member of the volunteer-based Jefferson County Area Tourism Council (JCATC) since late 2019. She has been the point person for Instagram and has really elevated the brand and position with her fantastic work and photos. She is also a key member of the new weddings subcommittee, which looks to brand Jefferson County as a premier Wisconsin wedding destination by offering luxurious yet affordable weddings with unique venues and prime locations. Katie has always been a contributor to conversations that involve ideas to grow, ideas to connect and ideas to build something new. And Katie is one of those rarities who can take a project and run with it, which is fantastic for volunteer organizations.

Lauren Sackett, Rhinelander Area Chamber of Commerce

Born and raised in Rhinelander, Lauren Sackett has shown a confidence as Executive Director that has benefited not just the Chamber, but all the tourism organizations in the region. Since becoming the Executive Director of the Chamber in June of 2018, Sackett has served as the Treasurer of the Oneida County Tourism Commission and has advocated for increased commitment in tourism investment. Her leadership during the pandemic was unparalleled and many tourism businesses were able to survive because of her work. She partnered with Oneida County Public Health to share information with area businesses, put on listening sessions and informational meetings, and contacted area representatives to keep tourism included in future planning. Lauren is the perfect blend of local pride, fearless advocate and compassionate peer. She is the missing piece the Rhinelander Area Chamber of Commerce has been waiting for to bring tourism in the Northwoods to the next level.

INNOVATION NOMINEES

Care for Door County, Destination Door County

Destination Door County created Care for Door County, a campaign focused on educating and informing both visitors and residents, with a call to action to be good stewards. They created a pledge to respect the water's vast and unpredictable beauty and practice water safety at all times; honor the local culture and traditions by exploring with an open heart and mind; follow the trails and paths by letting only your mind wander; discover a sense of wonder while finding new and undiscovered places; embrace nature's wild spirit while leaving it perfectly unchanged; and do your part to preserve, protect and care for Door County always. The intention was to start a movement in Door County that will continue every year, maintaining harmony between tourism and stewardship, ultimately creating a truly sustainable destination.

Carol Sapienza, Jefferson County Tourism

Representing both the Village of Cambridge and Town of Oakland while serving as the Secretary of the Jefferson County Area Tourism Council (JCATC), Carol Sapienza has single handedly helped JCATC, a volunteer tourism organization, thrive this past year through exquisite and expert organization. With the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Carol took on extra work and went above and beyond on a limited budget. She utilized many free online tools and expanded the reach of JCATC. From her nomination, “Carol is a dynamo and can be an inspiration for all those out there that think money can limit innovation and change. All you need are the right tools and the right people.”

Snowmobile Friendly Community, Hayward Lakes Visitors and Convention Bureau (HLVCB)

In 2019, the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs (AWSC) created the Snowmobile Friendly Community program. Cities and counties in Wisconsin were invited to complete an application showing what they are doing to make their community “Snowmobile Friendly” for anyone who snowmobiles, with a focus on tourists. Sawyer County was one of the first eight communities to receive the award. This is the second year in which the HLVCB created a way to link those who were snowmobiling in the county with the AWSC “Snowmobile Friendly” community via Instagram and Facebook. Snowmobilers were asked to take their picture along with one of the 30 “Snowmobile Friendly” signs scattered throughout the county and upload them to Instagram and/or Facebook.

Paul Isakson, Mayor of Amery

Mayor Paul Isakson champions efforts to raise the visibility and awareness of agricultural tourism as an important community asset and emerging economic engine for the city and surrounding area. He sees collaborative efforts as a major strategy for destination marketing. For example, in 2021 he worked with city staff, Polk County Tourism leaders, local businesses and area farmers to develop an easy-to-use agricultural tourism page on the City’s official website. This effort used online surveys to gather pertinent information about local farms and agriculturally anchored businesses. This effort not only produced an easy way for visitors to find farm-based tourism opportunities, but also provided local farms with a link that might increase their revenues. This project, and Isakson’s championing energy, uplift agricultural tourism as an economic engine that benefits the entire community.

Theresa Nemetz, Milwaukee Food & City Tours

For the first time in the company’s 15-year history, Milwaukee Food and City Tours was unable to host its renowned walking and bus tours due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a stopgap measure, the company started

selling gift boxes containing 12 items from local businesses. Themed for various holidays, what was originally considered a stopgap solution that would allow Theresa Nemetz's business to weather the storm of the pandemic, quickly turned into a business all its own. Theresa's ability to nimbly pivot Milwaukee Food & City Tours not only facilitated the company's survival, but also helped it grow while supporting the local Milwaukee economy. The company has sold more than 39,000 boxes, infusing more than \$2 million into businesses throughout the Milwaukee area. Now available to ship, the financial benefit of these gift boxes will continue to impact the local economy for years to come. This is a case study in innovation, versatility and resourcefulness.

Milwaukee Hotel Month, VISIT Milwaukee

In March 2021, VISIT Milwaukee worked in partnership with local hotels to create the Milwaukee Hotel Month campaign. Milwaukee Hotel Month featured 43 hotels throughout the area offering incredible packages and discounted rates starting at \$75. Vacationers and staycationers alike took advantage of these deals, curbing the impact of COVID-19 on local business. The campaign focused on visitors within the two-to-three-hour drive market, encouraging locals and visitors to enjoy a weekend in a home away-from-home, with taglines like, "escape your four walls." Milwaukee Hotel Month proved to be a boon to the hotel industry at a desperately needed juncture. VISIT Milwaukee came up with a timely and creative solution to the dire needs created by the pandemic. The team understood that a rising tide lifts all boats and that increasing traffic to area hotels would affect the hospitality industry, retail industry, the local economy and eventually, the greater Wisconsin economy.

Wisconsin River Trail Organization

Wisconsin River Trail Organization (WRTO) is a group of common community members doing an uncommon thing. Formed in 2014, the WRTO Board had an idea to create a 20-mile hiking/biking trail in the Boscobel/Woodman/Wauzeka area. When the concept of this trail was discussed with the City of Boscobel, full support was given, and they have secured funding time and time again. When this trail is complete, there are plans to continue to reinvent the community by taking old feed buildings and build a hub for tourists and locals together. There are plans to create a hostel, brew pub, gift shop to rent recreational supplies, theatre, indoor farmer's market and meeting area for all to socialize and grow. The WRTO is made up of nurses, insurance reps, teachers and secretaries that alone, would be unlikely to leave a significant inheritance to their families; but together, as mentors to the kids in the community, they will leave a legacy trail, that will only be built upon.

Steve DeBaker, Trout Springs Winery

Steve DeBaker owns Trout Springs Winery with his wife Andrea in Greenleaf, Wisconsin. Steve spent countless hours over seven years to establish the Wisconsin Ledge as an American Viticulture Area (AVA) on behalf of the Northeast Wisconsin Grapergrowers and Northeast Wisconsin Wineries. An AVA is a prestigious designation, and with just under 2.5 million acres, the Wisconsin Ledge is now the 12th largest AVA in the United States with 24 bonded wineries and just over 500 acres of planted grapevines. The vision was that if northeast Wisconsin could be recognized as a specific AVA, it would stimulate the viticulture industry in Wisconsin and create a destination for millions of tourists to visit and spend money. This project exemplifies the true nature of this award by showing what an individual can accomplish by dedicating passion, commitment and an unwavering awareness of the vision to create something special for countless generations to come in the state of Wisconsin.

ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE NOMINEES

The Mining & Rollo Jamison Museums

The Mining & Rollo Jamison Museums are the eastern bookend of the Main Street business district in Platteville. The Museum campus includes scenic greenspace, pollinator gardens, a real underground mine from the pre-Civil War Lead Rush, a railroad amusement ride pulled by a 1931 mine locomotive, and picturesque interpretive structures. The Museum serves as a regional cultural center, offering year-round intergenerational activities that connect the two aspects of the Museum's identity: the humanities aspects of heritage and culture and the STEAM aspects of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. A guiding interpretive theme is "pioneering" — which is the expression of human ingenuity, inquiry, enterprise and development — in the context of the region over a long timeline. Pioneering connects Platteville's past and future and inspires community optimism.

Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower, Door County Maritime Museum & Lighthouse Preservation Society

The Door County Maritime Museum is expanding their Sturgeon Bay location by 7,000 square feet with the landmark Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower. The Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower offers 10 floors of interactive educational exhibits that highlight maritime history, people and industries; accessibility to a lighthouse experience that can accommodate everyone regardless of physical abilities; a must-see maritime experience that will draw visitors to the area from across the country; as well as an intriguing destination that will create a significant economic boost to the region. The Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower shares the important maritime culture and heritage of the community with a wider audience, making this unique part of American history come alive for a growing number of visitors.

Forts Folle Avoine, Burnett County Historical Society

Forts Folle Avoine, (pronounced fall of wan), is an 80-acre historical park located on the Yellow River that sits on the site of two early fur trade posts from 1802-1805. The fort structures were burned down and then left undisturbed until they were discovered in 1969. Forts Folle Avoine is on the National Registry for being the only known location in the United States to have two competing fur trade companies on the same property at the same time and within 100 feet of one another. Forts Folle Avoine offers a unique family-focused atmosphere encompassing beauty, nature, history, education and entertainment. The site seeks to engage visitors in the history of Forts Folle Avoine, teach about the habitat of the park and offer the experience of stepping back in history to better understand the impact it had on lifestyles of today.

CAFE Event Committee, City of Oak Creek

Oak Creek's CAFE Event Committee, led by Mayor Dan Bukiewicz, is a group of people inspired to create statewide awareness for the importance of cultural inclusion and celebration within our communities. CAFE is an annual event that stands for Culture, Art, Food, Entertainment. The purpose of CAFE is to create a showcase of the wide range of cultures and ethnic diversity present in our Wisconsin communities. The 2021 CAFE event included representation from the following groups: Albanian, Cuban, German, Hmong, Irish, Italian, Mexican, Native American, Pakistani, Palestinian, Polish, South American and the Sikh Faith. Tragedies, like what happened at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, can make communities feel powerless and fearful. CAFE seeks to facilitate human connection and cultural education, in the hopes of diminishing hate culture and ensuring experiences where all people, residents and visitors, feel safe, accepted and celebrated.

Plymouth Advancement Association

Since 1994, the nonprofit Plymouth Advancement Association has been instrumental in recognizing the heritage of the area and has spearheaded numerous projects. The PAA lead a two-year effort culminating in 2021 with the completion of two major heritage and artistic projects for the historic downtown. The first project, the Cheese Capital of the World Arch and Trestle, is a tribute to Plymouth's ties to the cheese and dairy industry. The second major project, "Return of the Walldogs," is a combination of both art and local heritage. The PAA organized a three-day outdoor festival in August 2021 for visitors to enjoy watching world renowned Walldog artists (and a few local muralists) paint seven new murals for the downtown. Both of these projects bring recreation, history, art and heritage to the forefront as an integral part of defining Plymouth's downtown.

Octagon House Museum, St. Croix County Historical Society

The St. Croix County Historical Society offers tours to the public of the Victorian era Octagon House as it was in 1855, with a different theme each year in order to display the many artifacts in their collection. In addition, they offer programs for area students at local schools such as classroom visits and a hands-on teaching wagon. They also partner with local businesses to bring services to the community such as painting classes, yoga in the garden, walking tours of the historic district and a farmer's market.

WideSpot Performing Arts

WideSpot is a performing arts venue located on the second floor of the tallest building in Stockholm. The venue presents musical acts from the region and beyond (including Sweden several years ago!), as well as theatrical presentations, improv classes, a gumbo cookoff and other community events. They've had guest lecturers talk about everything from the history of the Durand courthouse to experts talking about water quality issues, including sedimentation fill in of the lake. WideSpot is in their 13th year serving the region around Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River.

Create Waunakee Committee, Village of Waunakee

“Create Waunakee” has a mission to celebrate the innovators, creators and artists that live and work within the Village of Waunakee, making it the unique and vibrant place that it has become. Since officially forming in February 2020, this committee of nine dedicated community volunteers and four village staff members has gone above and beyond to bring amazing programs, ideas and opportunities to Waunakee. “Waunakee is Home” is a series of monthly interviews with local community members that has become a unique way to learn more about one another. The Waunakee Artisan Market celebrated its first year in the fall of 2021. It's a unique market that blends the charm of fall on the farm with a wide variety of unique artisan wares emphasizing the talents of local artists. Also in 2021, “Make Music Day” showcased musicians and performers from Waunakee and surrounding areas, giving them the opportunity to perform in several locations (both public and private) throughout the day on June 21st, all free of charge. “Create Waunakee” also engaged with the community with smaller projects, including Online music and food events.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION NOMINEES

Dr. Bert Davis, America's Black Holocaust Museum

Dr. Bert Davis worked tirelessly to solicit funding to open the doors at America's Black Holocaust Museum, and through his work has had the opportunity to obtain a \$10 million dollar gift that sparked the expansion and reopening of this important Museum on February 25, 2022. With the opening, the Museum will be able to continue its mission of showcasing and exploring what racism and bigotry does to humanity through programming and storytelling as only a museum of this kind can do, while carrying on the legacy of Dr. James Cameron.

Krystal Westfahl, Let's Minocqua

Under Krystal Westfahl's leadership, the Minocqua Chamber of Commerce received \$39,550 Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) grant for an Oneida County Research Project: Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Inclusion. Krystal is committed to bringing diversity to tourism in the northern parts of the state.

Eli Wedel and Jillian Macson, Pyramid Event Venue

Pyramid Event Venue is a boutique performance and event venue in Lake Mills serving award-winning pizza, specialty cocktails and local brews, with events five days a week. The owners, Eli Wedel and Jillian Macson, wanted to own a business where everyone can go and be themselves, and it has brought the community together in the best way possible. There are nights when the dance floor is full of people of all different age groups, ethnicities, sexual orientations and walks of life, laughing and having fun with one another. The Pride Nights have brought an awareness to the LGBTQ+ community in a way that Lake Mills has never seen.

Unique Unites, VISIT Milwaukee

Unique Unites is an ongoing campaign designed to highlight Milwaukee's eclectic and diverse community with a focus on inclusivity and representation for all who live, work and visit the city. The campaign, spurred by a video created for the Democratic National Convention, presents the wonderfully random contrasts of Milwaukee not as an intersection, but as a richness that provides endless possibilities. Built around the Unique Unites landing page on the website, this campaign encourages visitors and locals alike to branch out, explore the city, learn about its diverse community and find their Milwaukee. With this initiative, visitors from all walks of life can feel like they belong in a city where they are represented and included.

LEGACY NOMINEES

Janet Werner, Jefferson County Tourism

Janet Werner has been a chamber and tourism mainstay in Jefferson County for more than 25 years. Her financial and event planning experience has benefited several Jefferson County organizations. She exemplifies what it means to be a true professional and volunteer for the tourism industry. Whether directing the Jefferson Chamber towards growth and more events, organizing finances of multiple tourism organizations or being on hand to bartend events, Janet's big picture perspective and willingness to jump into whatever is needed is what makes her an asset to any organization. Janet knows the value of making connections on the grassroots level. She has accomplished so much in her career because of her emphasis on relationship building and knowing the importance of making people feel heard and acknowledged. For these reasons, Janet is a widely known and trusted tourism professional throughout Jefferson County.

Dave Blank, Real Racine

Dave Blank has been able to adapt to the changing landscape of tourism marketing over the past 40 years by continually learning. During his tenure, Real Racine hosted dozens of events which capitalized on the county's location on the shore of Lake Michigan and attracted hundreds of thousands of participants and spectators from throughout the country. These events included—Ironman 70.3 Racine, Hot Rod Power Tour, EVP Pro Beach Volleyball, the Australian Rules Football National Championship, Pro Watercross, one of the very first Color Run's in the country, Wisconsin State Snowsculpting Championship and Open House Racine County. He started the Real Racine Sports and Events Commission, which enabled individuals and corporations to make tax-deductible donations. Dave has been a mentor, a great resource and a cheerleader for Racine, the state of Wisconsin and the travel industry.

Denise Deaton-Tolzman, QueenB Radio

Denise Deaton-Tolzman has long been a strong promoter of agriculture in Southwest Wisconsin. Her strong background in agriculture has benefited many throughout the region. As her radio sales territory reached other destinations, she dug right in to assist more communities in promoting their events. Denise's creativity is boundless and she is credited for many promotions and events that have evolved over the years. She was instrumental in establishing the Grant County Tourism Council in 1996 and served in leadership roles, including President, through the years. She is always volunteering her personal time and talents to events, and is known for taking on tasks when many others do not have the expertise or time. The very successful Day on the Farm

and Fall Harvest Table Dinner in Platteville are just two of the long-standing events that continue to draw attention to ag tourism. Her selfless passion and hands-on willingness to make things happen is significant and will have lasting effects on the tourism industry.

The Kids From Wisconsin

Kids From Wisconsin (KFW) performs for audiences totaling more than 120,000 each summer. Since 1969, KFW has showcased Wisconsin's talented youth to over six million spectators. They travel thousands of miles each year to perform more than 60 shows, are often contracted for fundraisers, and have raised thousands for charitable organizations. They were named 2021 "Best of Milwaukee" winners for Arts and Entertainment and Best Musical Education Program.

Sherry Quamme, MI River Parkway Commission/WI Great River Road

Sherry Quamme has a life-long commitment to community. Upon moving to the Driftless Area, she immediately became a force for Tourism in Southwest Wisconsin. She put her administrative skills to work as the Ferryville Clerk/Treasurer. Subsequently, she has worked with more than eight local Tourism/Economic Development Organizations to promote Southwest Wisconsin and The Great River Road. If one is looking for tourism information, Sherry is one of the most engaged, active and informed people on Wisconsin's West Coast. It is a unique volunteer who can put the time and effort into such a big endeavor and do such a good job. From efficiently chairing quarterly meetings to encouraging members' involvement to consistently demonstrating a forward-looking approach toward program needs to overseeing marketing and promotion to raising funds to communicating with media and the public, she is simply outstanding.

Kari Zambon, Holiday Acres Resort

We fondly recognize Kari Zambon, who passed away in spring 2020.

A steadfast champion for tourism in the Northwoods, Kari was fearless in her commitment to the region's top industry. Kari's love for the area was shared with generations of visitors to Holiday Acres Resort. Through her leadership, the Oneida County Tourism Commission was created. She fostered partnerships between the many area destination marketing organizations including The Northwoods of Wisconsin Marketing Consortium. Her tenacity was unmatched as she fought for tourism funding and helped facilitate a room tax partnership between the City of Rhinelander and the Town of Pelican. She was passionate about the Northwoods, her community and the industry she served. She paved the way and showed the importance of tourism's economic impact. She was a mentor, a fighter and a friend to many.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE NOMINEES

The Racine Zoo

The Racine Zoo is a 28-acre, accredited zoo along the shores of Lake Michigan. Every year, the Racine Zoo works to create a safe, fun, enriching and educational place for all ages. The Zoo incorporates animals and wildlife conservation education into every part of their work. From guided scout hikes and preschool classes to summer camps and special events, they strive to connect the community with nature. One of the biggest focuses in recent years has been removing barriers to access and giving people a reason to visit the Racine Zoo. It was the first certified sensory inclusive zoo in Wisconsin. Staff at the Zoo have attended racial sensitivity workshops to engage and reach previously under-served audiences more proactively. The Zoo draws tourists from all over the country for fun, engaging interactions.

Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association

The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association (WATA) advocates for tourism on Wisconsin farms throughout the state. The WATA Board connects with farmers on an ongoing basis to discuss issues, challenges and opportunities to expand agritourism in Wisconsin. The organization has a powerful and user-friendly website that makes it easy for people to find agritourism destinations statewide. Visitors can search by location or desired farm experience. The 2021 website design also makes it easier for farmers to put their farms on the map. Shelia Everhart, WATA's Executive Director, works with state leaders to increase the visibility of agritourism statewide. Evidence of this was Governor Evers proclaiming Wisconsin's first Agritourism Week in Wisconsin.

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