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Tourism Agencies Announce Annual Awards

Cedar Falls, Iowa – Tourism is an \$8 billion industry in the State of Iowa, generating \$351 million in Black Hawk County and employing 2,800 residents. Black Hawk County ranks among Iowa's top five counties for tourism impact.

May is National Tourism Month, and the first week of May is National Tourism Week. The Cedar Falls Tourism and Visitors Bureau and the Waterloo Convention and Visitors Bureau celebrated by honoring local attractions and tourism-related businesses at an Annual Cedar Valley Tourism Awards held Wednesday, May 4, at the Island Park Beach House in Cedar Falls.

“This is the twelfth year we've held this event and it gives us a chance to honor the many businesses and organizations that work hard to provide a memorable experiences to our visitors,” said Kim Manning, manager of the Cedar Falls Tourism & Visitors Bureau.

Honorees were selected through a nomination and voting process made open to the public. Nominations were solicited by both Bureaus and the nominees were placed on an online ballot. “We really like giving the public a chance to determine the honorees through this kind of process,” said Aaron Buzza, director of the Waterloo Convention & Visitors Bureau. “This process gives us the opportunity to recognize outstanding events, attractions and businesses and it also helps us better distinguish and identify the opinions of customers, visitors and attendees,” he added.

Whiskey Road was named the Cedar Valley Restaurant of the Year. Nominators noted the restaurant's atmosphere, service and multiple choices of whiskey to enjoy.

The Lodging Establishment of the Year award went to the Fairfield Inn & Suites of Waterloo/Cedar Falls due to its décor, service, and state-of-the-art A/V system.

The UNI Men's Basketball Team was recognized as the Organization of the year. The nomination and voter comments noted the team's historic and memorable post season run, seasonal highlights including home wins over the #1 team in the country, North Carolina, and MCV rival Wichita State, and the highest ticket sales since the McLeod Center opened in 2006.

Hick's Place was honored as Attraction of the Year. The award recognizes an attraction that substantially contributes to the local tourism industry by bringing in a significant number of visitors and enhancing quality of life in the community. Voters agreed that Hick's Place fit the criteria noting the variety of family-friendly offerings, the beauty of the place and the outstanding Military Appreciation event that takes place there each year.

The Cedar Falls RAGBRAI visit was recognized as Event of the Year. The award recognizes a hallmark event that creates significant economic impact, attracts substantial out-of-town visitation, and positively promotes the area as a visitor destination. RAGBRAI welcomed over 20,000 riders in addition to thousands of support crews and media. 438 official volunteers provided hospitality and logistics, while 5,000 community members and 12,500 guests enjoyed the bands.

Other special honors were given to Jon Crews as the Cedar Falls Friend of Tourism and to Lanehaven Farms as the Waterloo Friend of Tourism. Crews was honored for his thirty years of service to the city and his unwavering support of the tourism division. Lanehaven Farms was honored for the outstanding experience they offer to visitors who tour their operation.

A new Outstanding Customer Service Experience award, was added this year in observance of the Bureau's upcoming Customer Service training to take place at the Elks Club at 10:30am on Thursday, May 5. The inaugural honor went to the volunteer veterans who helped plan and host the 365 & Counting; lowans in the Vietnam War exhibit at the Grout Museum of History & Science. The nominator noted the powerful interaction between the veterans and Grout Museum visitors as they processed the pain and anxiety of revisiting such a dark time.

The Visitors Bureaus would like to thank those who voted for award nominees and those who attended the event to honor these outstanding events, attractions, businesses, organizations and individuals. We encourage you to offer them your congratulations as well.

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