

April 12, 2018

Embargoed until 10:00 p.m. on April 12:

RECIPIENTS OF SASKATCHEWAN TOURISM AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE ANNOUNCED AT GALA CELEBRATION

REGINA – The annual Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala is the province’s largest gathering of tourism operators, representatives and stakeholders. More than 300 gathered in Regina on April 12 to pay tribute to the award finalists and recipients for their exceptional work and leadership in 2017.

“Tonight’s gala shines a spotlight on Saskatchewan’s vibrant tourism sector and the remarkable hospitality and experiences that delight visitors to our province,” Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan Gene Makowsky said. “The Government of Saskatchewan is pleased to acknowledge the leadership and accomplishments of award recipients and finalists, and congratulate them on earning recognition by their peers.”

“Hosting the annual Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala is a privilege and honour,” Tourism Saskatchewan CEO Mary Taylor-Ash said. “This occasion provides a rare opportunity to assemble tourism operators and representatives from across the province, and celebrate those who raise the bar on the delivery of great hospitality, customer service and guest experiences. Tonight’s honourees are exceptional ambassadors for Saskatchewan. Tourism Saskatchewan is proud to showcase their achievements.”

The winners of the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence for 2017 are:

- **Rookie of the Year Award**
Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Roughrider Football Club

FIBA 3x3 World Tour, Saskatoon

In July 2017, Saskatoon became the first Canadian city to host a FIBA 3x3 World Tour event. Twelve teams from cities across the world, such as Ljubljana, Rio de Janeiro, New York and Montreal, along with Saskatchewan's own Team Saskatoon gathered to compete in the three-day tournament. Construction of a special half-sized basketball court was required, since 3x3, also known as streetball, is played with two teams of three players and a single hoop. A temporary stadium was created at an intersection in downtown Saskatoon, where the excitement attracted over 12,000 fans and curious spectators. Tourism Saskatoon, a dedicated host committee and enthusiastic volunteers drove the success of this first of three tournaments to be hosted by the city. The competition garnered international attention via the FIBA 3x3 YouTube channel and broadcasts by RedBull Media House and TSN.

- **Service Excellence Award**
Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Ghostown Blues Bed & Breakfast, Maple Creek

Operating since 2011, Ghostown Blues Bed & Breakfast has earned accolades for its eclectic accommodations – a collection of historic structures that includes restored pioneer cabins, sheep wagons, vintage camper trucks and an array of buildings from the past. Each meticulously decorated unit provides a comfortable, unique “home away from home” for visitors. Cabin expansion was undertaken in 2017 to better accommodate family visits. A website update, with an added online reservation system, enables travellers to determine the availability of their favourite cabin and reserve their choice. Property enhancements included the construction of a fully functioning outdoor kitchen for guest use and catering to large groups, weddings and corporate retreats. Taking customer feedback seriously, the property responds to every review and comment. Testimonials from satisfied guests speak to the efforts of owners and staff to provide exceptional hospitality and memorable guest experiences.

- **Tourism Employee of the Year Award**
Sponsored by Harvard Broadcasting Regina

Chris Standing, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon

Chris Standing, Senior Interpreter at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, has deep ties to the land. His grandfather, Elder Cy Standing, was a member of the original team that brought the dream of Wanuskewin to fruition. A knowledgeable and passionate ambassador for the park, Standing is the first person to greet guests, and his personal stories enhance the visitor experience. He goes the extra mile to maintain connections through social media, extend personal invitations to events and celebrations, and develop repeat visitors to the park. His responsibilities include designing and facilitating the majority of cultural programs, while developing festival and event concepts. His goal is to inspire people, which he pursues through innovative approaches that deliver meaningful experiences. Standing’s work helps to advance Saskatchewan’s alignment with the nationwide commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, and champion understanding and mutually respectful relationships.

- **Tourism Employer of the Year Award**
Sponsored by Regina Airport Authority

Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, Saskatoon

The Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA) operates six First Nations casinos in Saskatchewan. During its 22-year history, SIGA has maintained a standard of exceptional customer service and first-rate amenities. The entertainment company invests in its people and is committed to cultivating the talent of employees. Through robust learning and professional development programs, health and wellness initiatives and opportunities for career advancement, SIGA builds an engaged workforce and an enviable workplace culture. These qualities are highlighted in achievements such as earning Great Place to Work® Canada certification. SIGA ranks in the Top 30 Saskatchewan companies recognized by *SaskBusiness Magazine*. The company is proud to be one of the largest and most progressive employers in the province, with over 60 per cent of its nearly 1,800 employees identifying as First Nation. SIGA’s vision is to deliver sustainable net income and employment opportunities to the 74 First Nation communities in Saskatchewan.

- **Gil Carduner Marketing Award**

Sponsored by Phoenix Group

Saskatchewan Roughrider Football Club, Regina

The Saskatchewan Roughrider Football Club embraced the once in a lifetime opportunity to build momentum for the highly anticipated opening of the new Mosaic Stadium. A dynamic campaign, *The Inaugural Season*, focused on several goals that included increasing ticket and merchandise sales, driving attendance to the team's new home and re-energizing Rider fans after bidding a sombre farewell to historic Mosaic Stadium. The campaign harnessed the curious energy of Rider Nation by asking the question, "How green can it get?" Energy and excitement were highlighted in campaign statements – "It's showtime!" and "I can't wait!" A combination of traditional and non-traditional advertising, involving television, radio, digital and social channels, along with paid and unpaid marketing tactics proved effective. Ten Saskatchewan Roughrider home games in 2017 sold over 96 per cent of seats, with more than 320,000 fans celebrating the stadium's first season.

- **Fred Heal Tourism Ambassador Award**

Sponsored by Wanuskewin Heritage Park

Saskatchewan Craft Brewers Association, Saskatoon

By motivating and organizing competitive businesses, the Saskatchewan Craft Brewers Association (SCBA) has fostered a collaborative craft brewing industry that manufactures superior products. The organization represents the interests of Saskatchewan craft brewers and endeavours to create a fair regulatory environment. Its work has inspired a boom in the industry, with the opening of new breweries and a shifting perspective of Saskatchewan as a high-quality manufacturer of craft beer. An ever-increasing beer selection delights food and drink enthusiasts. Stories shared by tourists, travel bloggers and national and international media amplify the momentum and achievements of the industry. The SCBA is a proponent of saskdrinks.com, a detailed interactive map for locating craft breweries, distilleries and wineries across the province. In 2017, the SCBA toasted unity among its 13 members with the first collaborative creation, the Saskatchewan Multigrain Pale Ale.

- **Travel Media Award**

Sponsored by Vendasta

Jim Byers, Toronto, ON

Jim Byers ranks among Canada's most prolific travel writers. His work has appeared in major publications, such as *The Globe and Mail*, *National Geographic*, *Zoomer Magazine*, *The Dallas News*, and many others. An impressive career involved serving five years as travel editor of the *Toronto Star*. He is popular as a speaker and panelist at tourism events. Byers visited Saskatchewan in 2017, through Tourism Saskatchewan and Tourism Saskatoon's travel media programs. The trip inspired a number of stories that received widespread exposure and reached nearly 12.5 million readers. The articles "10 Canadian National Parks You Should Visit This Summer" and "Exploring Saskatoon Like a Local" each appeared in more than 30 Postmedia outlets; "The Wacky Fans of this Canadian Football Team Love Watermelon Hats and All Things Green" was featured in *The Dallas News*; and "Stellar Things to do in Surprising Saskatchewan" appeared on Skyscanner.ca.

- **Community Event of the Year Award**
Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Arts Board

YXEats, Saskatoon

YXEats showcases the prowess of local food producers and culinary artists in Riversdale, Saskatoon's oldest neighbourhood. Known as the *Festival for Foodies*, it includes culinary tours, long table brunches, cooking schools and other ticketed events, which have sold out each year. With the goal of making YXEats the neighbourhood's most iconic event, the Riversdale Business District Association has brought vendors and restaurants together as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The festival demonstrates the same hard work and ingenuity of the small businesses it represents by refreshing its event program annually and reaching out to local food producers to enhance its offerings. This effort has resulted in greater participation and additional sponsorships, assuring long-term growth and giving foodies from Saskatoon and beyond a culinary adventure that leaves them coming back for more.

- **Marquee Event of the Year Award**
Sponsored by CTV

Ness Creek Music Festival, Big River

Since 1991, the Ness Creek Festival has been an annual showcase of great music in a beautiful northern setting. Today, it is one of Saskatchewan's signature summer events and attracts more than 3,500 attendees from across the province, Canada and beyond. The four-day schedule features over 100 artistic and cultural performances and hands-on activities in 10 festival venues. Attendees appreciate the community-focused atmosphere and opportunities to enjoy talent, as well as gain deeper ecological awareness and understanding of the boreal forest. Programming represents both the cutting-edge of new music and the bedrock of the festival's traditional roots. Local, national and international acts range from bluegrass and folk to funk and almost everything in between. Ness Creek Festival audiences have come to "expect the unexpected." In 2017, the entertainment extended to a floating stage – the Stage of Aquarius – on nearby Nesslin Lake.

- **Business of the Year Award
(Under 20 Full-time Employees)**
Sponsored by Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Historic Reesor Ranch, Maple Creek

Historic Reesor Ranch, located high in the Cypress Hills, has established a proud legacy during its 113-year history. It has been home to six generations of the Reesor family and has operated as a guest ranch and bed and breakfast since 1991. In 2017, the Reesors took their dedication to preserving history to a new level, meeting the guidelines to become Saskatchewan's first working ranch to be designated a Provincial Heritage Property. The business strikes a successful balance between managing growth and maintaining the integrity of the land, and consistently delivers on the promise of an authentic, memorable visitor experience. The popular Ranch Hall Grill, guided ATV tours, enticing winter getaway packages and upcoming Wine in the West tours are examples of new services and offerings that enhance appeal. Recent technical upgrades and the availability of online booking further demonstrate the commitment to guest satisfaction.

- **Business of the Year Award
(Over 20 Full-time Employees)**
Sponsored by The Western Producer

Grassroots Restaurant Group, Saskatoon

Since the opening of Ayden Kitchen & Bar in 2013, Grassroots Restaurant Group has been committed to making Saskatoon known for quality cuisine. The early success of its first restaurant paved the way for two additional ventures: Little Grouse on the Prairie and Sticks and Stones. The trio of restaurants employs over 100 people. A focus on developing service skills and nurturing the culinary talents of staff delivers meaningful benefits. Grassroots Restaurant Group has made further efforts to raise the profile of Saskatoon's culinary scene by maintaining strong connections to local suppliers and charities, and by hosting Prairie Feast Street Fair, an event that brought chefs from across the country to Saskatchewan. Opening its fourth restaurant and first Regina location in 2018, Grassroots Restaurant Group continues to herald the province as a destination for exceptional dining.

- **Tourism Builder Award**
Sponsored by Tourism Saskatchewan

Ian McGilp, Saskatoon

Ian McGilp began his career in tourism in 1984, as an employee in the Ministry of Tourism and Small Business. His experience in commercial banking, working with small businesses, local exhibitions and fairs, tour operators and visitor and convention bureaus, laid the groundwork for years of involvement in tourism development. When Tourism Saskatchewan was created, he moved into his role in industry development. McGilp was pivotal to the creation of a number of tourist attractions, tourism master plans and destination area projects throughout Saskatchewan. Manitou Springs Resort Hotel & Mineral Spa is one example of a successful enterprise that benefitted from his guidance. Devising creative solutions to funding challenges, he brought together corporate partners, businesses and the community to support the project. He was informally proclaimed "King of Redefinition" for establishing an innovative funding precedent that others would follow. The Lake Diefenbaker Tourism Destination Area plan was another ambitious initiative bearing his imprint. By the time of his retirement in 2012, McGilp was commonly known as the "Father of Industry Development" in Saskatchewan. He continues to assist tourism associations and operators, and share his special talent "to bring together the human and financial resources to make tourism development happen."

Bernadette McIntyre, Regina

For more than two decades, Bernadette McIntyre has been a familiar face among sports tourism circles, both provincially and nationally. She is admired for taking the role of volunteer to extreme heights and dedicating countless hours to bringing national and international events, along with visitors, to Saskatchewan. Her commitment to various committees and events includes serving as president of the 1998 Scott Tournament of Hearts and 2006 Tim Hortons Brier; executive vice-president of the 2008 Scott Tournament of Hearts host committee; and chair of the 2013 Canadian Football League alumni committee and 2016 Canadian Wheelchair Curling Championship. She is active on bid committees and her efforts helped bring the 2017 Pinty's Grand Slam of Curling and 2018 Tim Hortons Brier to Regina. McIntyre was CEO of Wascana Centre Authority from 2008-2017 and worked tirelessly with Tourism Regina, the Regina Hotel Association, Regina Rowing Club and other partners to complete the Finishing Line

Facility that enabled Regina to host national and international rowing, canoeing and kayaking competitions. Her leadership has instilled confidence in Saskatchewan's ability to host major events, as well as awareness of the province's impressive venues, accommodations, experiences and volunteers.

Detailed information regarding each category winner is available at **Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com**.

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Tourism in Saskatchewan is a \$2.19-billion industry, employing 67,200 Saskatchewan residents.