



News Release

April 11, 2019

Embargoed until 10 p.m. on April 11:

30th ANNUAL SASKATCHEWAN TOURISM AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE CELEBRATED

SASKATOON – Saskatchewan’s tourism sector honoured businesses and individuals at the 30th annual Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala, which was celebrated in Saskatoon on April 11 at TCU Place.

“Tonight is a special occasion celebrating the 30th annual Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence,” Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan Gene Makowsky said. “The Government of Saskatchewan extends congratulations to the award recipients and finalists, and to the Tourism Builders honoured this evening. Their hard work contributes to authentic, remarkable visitor experiences that make Saskatchewan a great place to visit.”

“Tourism Saskatchewan is exceedingly proud of the effort that has made the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence a 30-year success story,” Tourism Saskatchewan CEO Mary Taylor-Ash said. “We take even greater pride in the work of our industry. These awards showcase tourism operators and businesses that epitomize hospitality and leadership. They inspire others to dream big and pursue their goals with unwavering determination. Tourism Saskatchewan is delighted to celebrate their achievements.”

The winners of the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence for 2018 are:

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

Wheatland Express, Cudworth/Wakaw

Wheatland Express is central Saskatchewan’s exclusive excursion and event passenger train that connects the communities of Cudworth and Wakaw. The not-for-profit company is aimed at generating tourism, economic and employment opportunities for local communities, and providing first-rate attractions and events to visitors from Saskatchewan and beyond. Wheatland Express provides a made-in-Saskatchewan experience and collaborates with local partners to showcase the province’s culture, services and talents. Eight tours for approximately 800 guests were initially planned for the inaugural season, which was scheduled to end in September. Overwhelming ticket demand required additional scheduling and, by the end of 2018, 25 tours hosted nearly 4,000 guests. The expanded season included The Magical Winter

Express, a new winter experience that brought more than 1,000 visitors to Wakaw over four days in December.

- **Service Excellence Award**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Harvest Eatery, Shaunavon

With its impressive reputation and award-winning chef, Harvest Eatery in Shaunavon has put rural Saskatchewan on the culinary map. Located in the heart of the southwest, this 45-seat, farm-to-table operation is the brainchild and creative collaboration of husband and wife duo, Chef Garrett “Rusty” and Kristy Thienes. The eatery served its first meal on July 1, 2013. Since then, its tables have been full. With inspired and experiential dining in mind, the Thienes have developed a warm, welcoming atmosphere paired with a seasonal menu featuring gourmet comfort food to create a culture hotspot that brings the community and tourists together. The Thienes and the entire Harvest Eatery staff aim to create a memorable experience for customers by maintaining a high level of service during every interaction.

- **Tourism Employee of the Year Award**

Sponsored by Harvard Broadcasting

Brenda Peterson, Parks Canada, Grasslands National Park

Brenda Peterson is the Visitor Experience Lead for the East Block of Grasslands National Park, but wears many other “hats” for the greater good of the park and the community. She plays an invaluable role as Interpretation Coordinator, Quality Visitor Experience trainer, Park Duty Officer and Fire Patrol in the East Block. Peterson leads by example, is highly motivated and always goes the extra mile. She works tirelessly to improve services in the park, evident through the positive feedback received, as well as the steady increase in visitor numbers and revenue year after year. She has been instrumental in nurturing partnerships with the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Royal Astronomical Society, Wood Mountain Wagon Train, Wood Mountain Historical Society, local rural municipalities and operators.

- **Tourism Employer of the Year Award**

Sponsored by Regina Airport Authority

Gold Eagle Casino, Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, North Battleford

Since 1996, Gold Eagle Casino has been a premier entertainment source for the Battlefords and tourist destination that regularly draws over 28,000 visitors a month from surrounding provinces and the local area. It is part of the family of First Nations-themed casinos, owned and operated by the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA). The casino is one of the largest employers in the Battlefords, employing over 300 people. With a mandate to employ an 80 per cent First Nations workforce, SIGA has taken pride in being an industry leader in engaging and growing First Nations people by providing employment and development opportunities. 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.

- **Gil Carduner Marketing Award**

Sponsored by Phoenix Group

Kinder Surprises Antiques, Davidson

Kinder Surprises Antiques has transformed a 100-year-old hip-roofed barn, near Davidson, into an antiques wonderland. By harnessing the power of social media, owner Erin Kinder connects with customers, shares heartwarming stories and encourages people to embark on a road trip. The business welcomes visitors on Sunday afternoons from spring until fall. The company's marketing conveys the charm and feeling of living in rural Saskatchewan through compelling content, videos and photographs. In addition to highlighting the calm, stress-free pace of country life, messages promote "girl power." Advertising and posts are created with an 88 per cent female demographic in mind. Activities on Facebook and Instagram have successfully reached the desired audience. Sales have increased by 25 per cent annually since the business started in 2014.

- **Fred Heal Tourism Ambassador Award**

Sponsored by Wanuskewin Heritage Park

Watrous Manitou Marketing Group, Watrous

The Watrous Manitou Marketing Group, a partnership between the Town of Watrous and Resort Village of Manitou Beach, promotes tourism, economic and community development. With one full-time and one part-time employee and a seven-member volunteer Board of Directors, the group has worked tirelessly to revitalize the area into a major tourism destination in rural Saskatchewan. Initiatives undertaken by the group include developing a long-term community tourism plan, branding initiatives, support of education and training opportunities for local businesses, aggressive marketing plans, new product development initiatives and implementation of a destination marketing program for sustainable growth. This program has also helped to increase the area's marketing reach, secure a strong position within the Saskatchewan travel market, and create long-term financial stability for the destination area. As a result of the efforts of the Watrous Manitou Marketing Group, the region continues to experience an increase in visitation, with many businesses reporting record numbers of visitors year over year.

- **Travel Media Award**

Sponsored by Vendasta

Robin and Arlene Karpan, Saskatoon

Robin and Arlene Karpan are travel writers, photographers, book publishers and bloggers specializing in Saskatchewan travel. They are authors of 15 books, including *Saskatchewan's Best Scenic Drives*, *Photographer's Guide to Saskatchewan*, *The Great Saskatchewan Bucket List* and *Northern Saskatchewan Canoe Country*, among others. Some have won awards and become Canadian bestsellers. Book sales to date are well over 100,000 copies. In 2018, the Karpans released *Saskatchewan's Best Scenic Drives*, a 208-page guidebook with 185 colour images and 42 maps showcasing the most spectacular road trips in the province. The release of the book sparked extensive media coverage and quickly landed on Saskatchewan bestseller lists. In addition, the Karpans highlighted Saskatchewan's natural beauty in *The Canadian Nature Photographer*, *CAA Saskatchewan Magazine*, *The Western Producer*, as well as on

Photojourneys.ca, their popular travel blog. Their photography graced the cover of *Canadian Geographic* twice and was featured on a stamp by Canada Post.

- **Indigenous Tourism Experience Award**

Sponsored by Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies

Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon

Wanuskewin Heritage Park is a national historic site on the northern edge of Saskatoon. For over 26 years, it has been a centre for sharing Indigenous culture, traditions and history. Hundreds of thousands of guests have enjoyed participating in immersive and meaningful visitor experiences. Wanuskewin Heritage Park is the location of the longest, continuously operating archaeological dig site in Canada and has yielded evidence of human occupation as long ago as 6,400 years. Traces of every cultural group that existed on the Northern Plains have been discovered. The park is on Canada's tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage designation. An ambitious renewal plan includes the addition of 15,000 sq. ft. to the main facility and preparing the property for the return of bison.

- **Community Event of the Year Award**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Arts Board

Taste of Maple Creek Festival, Maple Creek

Taste of Maple Creek Festival is a day-long community-wide festival held annually on the third Saturday in August. The event brings together a variety of community organizations to offer a "taste" of what the Old Cowtown of Maple Creek has to offer. During the event, Jasper Street in the Maple Creek Heritage District is overtaken by food tents. Local restaurants treat festival attendees to samples of their culinary best. Programming includes a classic car show and shine, artist showcase, photo exhibition, family activities, all-ages street concert and outdoor movie night. The event attracts travellers from across southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, and is popular with visitors to Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park. Taste of Maple Creek Festival dishes out a hearty helping of rural Saskatchewan hospitality.

- **Marquee Event of the Year Award**

Sponsored by CTV

2018 WBSC Junior Men's World Softball Championship, Prince Albert

The 2018 WBSC Junior Men's World Softball Championship attracted athletes from 13 countries and thousands of spectators from around the world, with a total estimated economic impact of over \$11 million. Ticket sales were 170 per cent in excess of the organizers' expectations. On July 10, attendance was more than 5,000, making the championship one of the largest sporting events in Prince Albert's history. In order to meet the requirements to host an event of this calibre, \$1.6 million was raised to expand Kinsmen Field and construct new world-class softball facilities. The existence of these facilities has already attracted the FSIN Youth Softball Championships for 2019, which will bring a projected 70 teams from across North America to Prince Albert.

- **Business of the Year Award
(Under 20 Full-time Employees)**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Over the Hill Orchards and Winery, Lumsden

During an orchard tour, wine tasting or supper series event, hear the story of how owners Dean and Sylvia Kreutzer made their labour of love come to fruition at Over the Hill Orchards and Winery, near Lumsden. Over the past 18 years, the family business has evolved from selling raw fruit to processed fruit products to wine and now specialty dinners that combine all of its products. With each progression in its business model, yield and profitability have increased. The Kreutzers have realized that what is of greatest value in their business is their “story” and their knowledge as cold climate fruit experts. Their customers want (and will pay for) a personal connection to their food and drink. Dean’s “dry as Riesling” sense of humour and the involvement of their children in the business are also major assets and contributors to their success.

- **Business of the Year Award
(Over 20 Full-time Employees)**

Sponsored by Insightrix Research

Regina Exhibition Association Limited, Regina

The Regina Exhibition Association Limited is a not-for-profit corporation that operates Evraz Place – a 100-acre event complex in Regina. The organization has served the community since 1884 and has successfully grown Evraz Place into the province’s hub for sport, recreation, entertainment and business events. Each year, Evraz Place hosts more than 700 events and sees 3.5 million visits. These visitors account for \$425 million in GDP impact to the provincial economy and \$219 million to the local economy. In 2018, Evraz Place hosted the Tim Hortons Brier and MasterCard Memorial Cup. These two major events attracted thousands of visitors who spent money in the province on accommodations, restaurants, retail and transportation. With new events in the negotiation stage and on the horizon – including the first-ever Tim Hortons NHL Heritage Classic in 2019 – the tourism impact of Evraz Place is expected to continually grow.

- **Tourism Builder Award**

Sponsored by Tourism Saskatchewan

Randy Fernets, Saskatoon

Randy Fernets served as Director of Industry Development and Sport with Tourism Saskatoon from 2005 to 2017. During his career, he built a culture for tourism in the province and beyond. His advocacy has benefitted the food and beverage industry, local sports, recreation and festivals, and other areas of tourism. As Managing Director of Saskatoon Sports Tourism, he secured over 48 national and international sport events and conferences. He was responsible for Tourism Saskatoon’s Destination Marketing Program Incubation Fund, which evaluates and encourages new festivals and events. Fernets was a driving force behind the Trails of 1885 initiative, which brought recognition and funding to support the commemoration of key sites related to the Northwest Resistance. Through his lobbying efforts and dedication to the project, the Trails of 1885 is a viable brand that crosses three western provinces. He helped establish the Athletics Commission of Saskatchewan, which led to securing a UFC Fight Night – the first in the

province. As a result of the commission, many professional boxing events have been held throughout Saskatoon. Fernets was also instrumental in the development of a food truck strategy for Saskatoon, along with other projects to enhance the visitor experience.

Scott Ford, Saskatoon

Scott Ford began his career in tourism in 1988 at Saskatchewan Place, now SaskTel Centre, where he serves as Executive Director. His 30 years of experience in facility and event management, event booking and self-developed/-promoted events has helped Saskatoon and Saskatchewan secure hit concerts, family entertainment and national and international sporting events. In addition to his professional career, he has dedicated countless volunteer hours to attracting major events and visitors to the province. Ford's leadership has been shared among various committees, including the Bid Committee and Host Organizing Committee for the 2000 Labatt Brier, 2004 Nokia Brier, 2007 JUNO Awards, 2009 Canadian Country Music Association Awards, 2010 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championships, 2013 MasterCard Memorial Cup, 2018 4 Nations Cup and others. Ford was responsible for creating two of Saskatoon's most popular outdoor summer festivals – A Taste of Saskatchewan, which began in 1995, and Rock the River, which has been an annual sellout since it premiered in 2014. Ford is directly involved in hosting all major rodeo events in Saskatoon, which include the 2010 to 2018 PBR Canadian Finals. For over a decade, he has been active on the board of Saskatoon Sports Tourism.

Shann Gowan, Swift Current

Shann Gowan is a cultural leader and driving force in Swift Current. She has worked tirelessly to bring forth a range of cultural experiences and festival programming to the community. Gowan created Cultural Festivals, an organization with a mandate to present a variety of high-quality performing and visual art experiences that enhance the quality of life and boost community pride. As its director for nearly 20 years, she produced the SaskPower Windscape Kite Festival, Long Day's Night Music Festival and the Blenders Music series. She recruited volunteers, booked quality performers, raised funds to compensate artists fairly, and worked with key community partners to ensure the success and viability of these events as creative tourist draws to the area. The SaskPower Windscape Kite Festival has grown into a nationally recognized family event that welcomes as many as 11,000 attendees annually, half of whom are from outside of Swift Current and include visitors from across Canada, the U.S., Europe and Asia. The festival generates more than \$1.7 million in tourism spending each year. Additionally, Gowan has managed the fundraising, finances, marketing and promotion of over a dozen local partners, such as the Swift Current Art Gallery, Swift Current Museum, Lyric Theatre and others.

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Tourism in Saskatchewan is a \$2.37-billion industry, employing 63,800 Saskatchewan residents.