



News Release

April 5, 2017

Embargoed until 10 p.m. on April 5:

28th ANNUAL SASKATCHEWAN TOURISM AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE CELEBRATED

SASKATOON – Saskatchewan’s tourism sector honoured businesses and individuals at the 28th annual *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala*, which was celebrated in Saskatoon on April 5 at the Sheraton Cavalier Saskatoon Hotel.

“The Government of Saskatchewan acknowledges the businesses and individuals honoured at the 28th annual *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala*,” Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan Jeremy Harrison said. “Their accomplishments are impressive, and highlight leadership, creativity and deep pride-of-place. The award recipients and finalists inspire their peers and encourage residents, communities and businesses throughout the province to deliver great guest experiences and service.”

“Tourism Saskatchewan considers it a privilege to host this annual gala that shines a spotlight on people and businesses deeply committed to building a vibrant tourism industry and delivering on the promise of exceptional hospitality and memorable guest experiences,” Tourism Saskatchewan CEO Mary Taylor-Ash said. “Our congratulations, along with our gratitude, is extended to the award recipients and finalists, who are champions of our industry and dedicated ambassadors for the province.”

A 15-person external panel selected the 33 finalists and 11 award recipients. The recipients of the Tourism Builder Award were chosen by a panel of select industry veterans, a member of Tourism Saskatchewan’s Board of Directors and a member of its Executive Leadership Team.

The winners of the *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence* for 2016 are:

- **Rookie of the Year Award**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Roughrider Football Club

Cowtown Kids Toy & Candy, Maple Creek

Housed in a heritage building on Maple Creek’s Main Street, Cowtown Kids Toy & Candy is the largest independent toy store in Saskatchewan. With a unique focus on selling only traditional and nostalgic toys of impeccable quality, a visit to the toy store is a delight for not only children but also for parents and grandparents who are able to reminisce about their own childhoods. The low-tech product lines include the largest puzzle display and selection in Western Canada, and an entire secondary building that is dedicated to children’s books. Cowtown Kids Toy &

Candy is the brainchild of businessman and father Bob Siemens. Seeing opportunity in Saskatchewan, Siemens sold his assets in British Columbia to start a new life with his family in the Cypress Hills area. Since opening in 2015, the business has become a tourism anchor in downtown Maple Creek, and its sales have been three times greater than initially projected.

- **Service Excellence Award**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Skyxe Saskatoon Airport, Saskatoon

Skyxe Saskatoon Airport posted big numbers in 2016. It serviced over 1.45 million passengers and grew seat capacity by 5.2 per cent. It achieved the number 1 On Time Performance (OTP) ranking in Canada (for a second consecutive year) with 90.16 per cent of flights departing on time. Skyxe Saskatoon Airport was also ranked the number 1 Canadian airport by the Airport Service Quality Program (global benchmarking program), based on its customer service measurements. Following the completion of a \$53.4-million makeover in 2015, it unveiled a new look with diverse retail outlets, more food and beverage options and enhanced parking programs. Skyxe Saskatoon Airport also launched a new staffing program that provides 24/7 customer service response, an ambassador program with 53 dedicated volunteers that provide assistance, welcoming smiles and local information on Saskatoon, and it recently went through a re-brand, which included in an enhanced social media program.

- **Tourism Employee of the Year Award**

Sponsored by Harvard Broadcasting

Kristine Scheller, Cypress Hills Destination Area, Maple Creek

Kristine Scheller is the Administration and Finance Manager of Cypress Hills Destination Area (CHDA). Scheller has been employed by the CHDA since 2011, when the organization was a pilot program. She was the first staff member hired. Over the last six years, Scheller has provided the base from which the organization operates and has been an invaluable member of the team. She has consistently taken on tasks that challenge her abilities and has repeatedly gone “above and beyond” in her duties, from co-ordinating membership events and taking visitors on tours of the area to providing additional support during transitional periods of the organization. Through her energy and dedication, Scheller has been a tireless ambassador for the Cypress Hills area.

- **Tourism Employer of the Year Award**

Sponsored by Transcontinental Printing

Park Town Hotel, Saskatoon

The Park Town Hotel is a 59-year-old business located in downtown Saskatoon. With over 170 employees, the Park Town Hotel operates on an ethos of excellence in customer service. In 2016, the hotel won the Better Business Bureau of Saskatchewan’s Torch Award for Business Ethics, as well as the ABEX Priority Focus for Immigration Award. The Park Town Hotel recognizes that its success and longevity stem from the support and loyalty of its employees. As such, the hotel is committed to providing the best quality of life possible for its staff, both within and outside the workplace. The results can be seen in its high retention rate and the number of staff members who have worked there for more than 15 years. Employees are recognized and rewarded for positive customer feedback. Park Town University provides in-house opportunities

for training in every department, and many employees have received certification as tourism professionals through Saskatchewan Tourism Educational Council programs.

- **Gil Carduner Marketing Award**

Sponsored by Phoenix Group

Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Regina

The mandate of the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (RSM) is to further an understanding of Saskatchewan's natural history and indigenous cultures. As a means of promoting Saskatchewan's rich fossil history, the RSM led the selection of the Provincial Fossil, a new official emblem for Saskatchewan. The *Saskatchewan Fossil* campaign included an educational unit and video contest targeted to teachers and classrooms, an exhibit and in-person vote at the museum open to residents and visitors to Regina, as well as an online poll encouraging citizens across the province to cast their vote. The campaign successfully reached a number of RSM target markets and led to an increase in visitation, website traffic and social media engagement. The campaign has also resulted in future opportunities to enhance the visibility of Saskatchewan, the RSM in Regina and the T.rex Discovery Centre in Eastend as tourism destinations.

- **Fred Heal Tourism Ambassador Award**

Sponsored by Wanuskewin Heritage Park

Angela Schmitt, Redwillow Outfitting, Carrot River

With a background in business and board governance and experience in outfitting and organic farming, Angela Schmitt translates her knowledge and passions into a relentless drive to see tourism and economic development thrive in northeast Saskatchewan. Not only is she co-owner of Redwillow Outfitting, Schmitt is the East Central Representative for the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association, a shareholder and board member of the Carrot River Inn, and she sits on local tourism committees. In 2007, Schmitt spearheaded the establishment of the Carrot River Economic Development committee. From that group, a tourism and branding initiative emerged and in 2015, a community brand, *Saskatchewan's Outback*, was established with an official rollout in 2016. Today, the impact of the initiative is evident with the brand being embraced throughout the community. Carrot River has seen an increase in community pride, business engagement and visitors interested in *Saskatchewan's Outback*.

- **Travel Media Award**

Sponsored by Vendasta

Ashlyn George, Saskatoon

Ashlyn George is an advocate for all things Saskatchewan on her global platform and travel website, *The Lost Girl's Guide to Finding the World*. Although she documents her travels through more than 55 countries and all seven continents, she is most passionate about sharing her experiences of her home province. George is a prairie ambassador in the field of travel journalism, as she continuously reinforces positive perceptions of Saskatchewan through the sharing of her outdoor adventures and captivating landscape travel photography. As the 2015 Saskatchewaner, George grew the program's audience from fewer than 10,000 social media followers to more than 33,000 in only 11 months. Her collection of eight written pieces on travel experiences reached an audience of more than 110,000 people in over 140 countries. In

addition, George published nine pieces for *CAA Saskatchewan* and *AMA Insider* magazines, writes a monthly travel column for *Pink Magazine*, and has contributed to the *Huffington Post* and numerous travel websites.

- **Community Event of the Year Award**

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Arts Board

Country at the Creek Music Festival, Big River

Country at the Creek Music Festival is a two-day showcase of exceptional entertainment, set in the northern boreal forest at the Ness Creek site. In its six years of operation, the event has doubled attendance and earned a reputation for attracting major talent while maintaining a small-town feel. Country artists from across Canada and the U.S., who have performed at the festival, boast about the intimate atmosphere, gracious audience and great hospitality. Country at the Creek Music Festival proclaims that “festivalgoers come for the music, but stay for the experience.” The friendly atmosphere and welcoming nature of local residents and businesses contribute to the positive experience that keeps attendees coming back. The music festival was proudly built by dedicated volunteers. The organizing committee hosts a number of promotional events throughout the year that engage and benefit the local community, while sustaining volunteer involvement.

- **Marquee Event of the Year Award**

Sponsored by CTV

SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival, Saskatoon

The SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival began as a three-day event and has grown to become a 10-day showcase of more than 140 performances in over 20 venues. The festival celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2016, and saw attendance exceed 75,000, with 25 per cent of the audience travelling from outside of Saskatoon and from beyond Saskatchewan’s borders. It commands an economic impact of \$8 million and has forged meaningful partnerships with local businesses and organizations. A signature summer event, the SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival has a proud history of merging community, culture and music. The festival is recognized for its year-upon-year success, top-quality lineup and track record of giving back. The majority of programming is free for the public. A 400-strong volunteer corps dedicates more than 6,000 hours during the event, and has defined the festival’s reputation for delivering exceptional hospitality and memorable experiences.

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

Sponsored by the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame, Regina

Located in Regina, the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016. To mark the occasion, the organization developed three commemorative initiatives to engage the entire province. A travelling exhibit visited 45 communities in 58 days, traversing more than 10,000 km across the province from Meadow Lake to Estevan and Moosomin to Lloydminster. An original one-woman, one-act play, *Diamond Girls*, depicted the experience of the Saskatchewan women who played in the All-American Professional Baseball League during the Second World War. With performances throughout Saskatchewan, as well as Alberta, Manitoba

and Ontario, this often sold-out play brought history alive and perfectly combined sport and culture to celebrate Saskatchewan. A gala event, hosted in Regina, brought together and honoured many of the Saskatchewan Hall of Fame's living inductees.

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

Park Town Hotel, Saskatoon

The Park Town Hotel is an award-winning, independently owned and operated hotel, located in downtown Saskatoon along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. The 172-room, seven-storey, full-service hotel boasts three food and beverage outlets, a cold beer and wine store, comedy club and nine rooms of conference and meeting space. The accommodation property attributes its long-term success to growth and expansion, including the latest renovation of its lounge and presidential suite, and its ability to stay relevant in an ever-changing market by expanding its business and introducing new offerings to its customers, such as weekly Paint Nite. The Park Town Hotel's more than 170 employees are committed to service excellence, as well as ensuring the customer experience is a memorable one, resulting in repeat patronage. It is for this reason that the hotel's revenues increase year after year.

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

Trent Fraser, Regina

Trent Fraser has spent more than 20 years engaged in professional and volunteer pursuits that have benefitted the tourism sector. As Director of Marketing and Corporate Development for Saskatchewan's best-known sport franchise, he was instrumental in re-energizing the Saskatchewan Roughriders brand and driving it to the top of Canadian Football League merchandise sales and ratings on *The Sports Network*. He pioneered fan-based marketing and introduced signature campaigns, notably *The Melon Head* and *Heart of the Nation*. Fraser was project manager for the Saskatchewan Pavilion at the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver. He worked with multiple stakeholders and communities to ensure that diverse interests were represented, and forged partnerships with more than eight provincial organizations and government ministries to create a pavilion that was a crowd-pleaser, attracted widespread media coverage and showcased Saskatchewan hospitality to the world. Fraser has shared his expertise with numerous boards and industry organizations, and led the development of business and strategic plans to achieve short-term and long-term success for the tourism sector. "Giving back" is his mantra and he has served on a number of volunteer boards, including Tourism Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame and the Regina Airport Authority. He has played a key part in recruiting national and international events, and has served on a number of host committees. Fraser is respected for his business acumen and work ethic, but it is his fun-loving nature, creativity and enthusiasm for every project that leaves an indelible impression on those fortunate to work with him.

Irene LeGatt, Saskatoon

Irene LeGatt has dedicated her entire professional career and a tremendous amount of personal time and effort to advancing Saskatchewan's tourism sector. She began working for Parks Canada in 1983 as a historic interpreter, and advanced to positions in visitor activities,

marketing and communications, and external relations. She has served in management roles and completes her tenure as South Saskatchewan Field Unit Superintendent. Legatt's leadership over the past 35 years is impressive. Her contributions range from enhancing visitor experiences to revitalizing infrastructure to developing communications and marketing strategies that not only focus on the tourism aspect but address the protection of rare species and preservation of traditional stories and cultural assets. LeGatt's business savvy has driven the success of numerous tourism special projects and capital initiatives, and guided tourism policy development from planning through to implementation. She is recognized for fostering a rapport with industry partners and stakeholders at the local, provincial and national levels. LeGatt has cultivated a legacy of meaningful relationships with colleagues, industry peers and numerous organizations that play a role in the province's tourism sector. These include Tourism Saskatchewan, the Gabriel Dumont Institute, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, Trails of 1885, and members of the Fransaskois community, to name a few. Her volunteer efforts have benefitted the Western Development Museum, the Saskatoon Heritage Festival and other organizations. If the living skies of this great province could talk, they would join the chorus of colleagues over the past three and a half decades and shout a resounding, "Thank you, Irene!"

Steve McLellan, Regina

Steve McLellan has spent several decades at the front and centre of Saskatchewan's tourism industry. He graduated from SIAST with a diploma in hotel administration. His early business ventures included managing the Moose Head Inn at Kenosee Lake and opening Moose's Off Broadway restaurant in Yorkton, where he became active in the business community. In 1989, he became Executive Director of the Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan (TISASK) and oversaw programs and services that benefitted 1,100 members. His vision for a program to recognize industry peers for exemplary work and service led to the creation of the *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence*. He was active with the Tourism Industry Association of Canada as a board member and on committees, and was a founding director of the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC) and the Tourism Alliance for Western and Northern Canada. McLellan served on the provincial task force that led to the creation of Tourism Saskatchewan, merging TISASK, STEC and the Government of Saskatchewan's tourism department. He became Tourism Saskatchewan's Director of Member Services and Sales and was instrumental in the new organization's first Annual General Meeting and Conference. McLellan served as Executive Director of Tourism Regina from 1997-2007. Under his leadership, many successful marketing campaigns were launched, a vibrant membership base was established and a destination marketing fund was created that would generate revenue for marketing the city as a tourism destination. Currently CEO of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, McLellan continues to champion the province, promote its impressive tourism assets and advocate on behalf of the industry.

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