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MEDIA CONTACT: MARLA CICHOWSKI  
[MARLA@TIMEZONEONE.COM](mailto:MARLA@TIMEZONEONE.COM)

## ILLINOIS OFFICE OF TOURISM CELEBRATES DESTINATIONS WITH EXCELLENCE IN TOURISM AWARDS

CHICAGO - The 2019 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism kicked off Monday, February 4, in Chicago with the **Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards** ceremony at the Palmer House Hilton. The awards honor Illinois' travel and tourism marketing teams with the most compelling marketing initiatives of 2018. Before the ceremony, Governor JB Pritzker welcomed attendees and thanked them for making Illinois a top destination for visitors from around the world.

Travel and tourism professionals from around the country judged submissions in eight categories, ranging from best social media marketing to best event or festival, with one exceptional entry receiving best of show. Each category contained a Budget A for organizations with annual operating budgets of \$500,000 and above, and Budget B for organizations with budgets under \$500,000.

Here are the 2019 Illinois Excellence in Tourism Award winners:

- Best Visitors Publication Budget A – Great Rivers & Routes, *2019 Great Rivers, Great Routes, Great Memories Travel Guide*
- Best Visitors Publication Budget B – Great Rivers Country Tourism Office, *Great River Road in Illinois Visitors Guide*
- Best Social Media Marketing Budget A – Skydeck Chicago, #StreetToSkyChi
- Best Social Media Marketing Budget B – Ottawa Visitors Center, Midwest Morel Festival
- Best Website Budget A – The Art Institute of Chicago
- Best Website Budget B – Mt. Vernon Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Best Leisure Collateral Budget A – Visit Springfield, *Abe's Hat Hunt*

- Best Leisure Collateral Budget B – Quincy Area CVB, *99 Watering Holes*
- Best Cooperative Partnership Budget A – Rockford Area CVB, *“Rockford Peaches 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary”*
- Best Cooperative Partnership Budget B – [TIE] Visit McHenry County, *“McHenry County Made Passport”* and Galesburg Area CVB, *“One State Together in the Arts 2018 Conference”*
- Best Branding Initiative Budget A – Rockford Area CVB, *Bring Your Game 2 Rockford*
- Best Branding Initiative Budget B –[TIE] City of Columbia, *Pop-Up Shop* and Elgin Area CVB, *Explore Elgin*
- Best Event or Festival Budget A – The Magnificent Mile Association, *The Magnificent Mile Lights Festival*
- Best event or Festival Budget B – Streater Tourism, *Murals and Milestones*
- Best Tourism Marketing Budget A – Illinois Holocaust Museum, *Stories of Survival*
- Best Tourism Marketing Budget B – Ottawa Visitors Center, *Twice The Rivers... Twice the Fun*
- Best of Show – Great Rivers & Routes  
The Best of Show award goes to the submission that received the highest overall score from the judge’s panel, going above and beyond to execute a fully comprehensive event, initiative or campaign.
- Distinguished Tourism Leadership Award Recipient  
**Thomas S. Rivera**, trailblazer and longtime advocate for Illinois Tourism.

Travel and tourism drives significant contributions to Illinois’ economy. In 2017, Illinois welcomed 114 million visitors, which generated more than \$3 billion in state and local tax revenue. The success of state tourism each year couldn’t be accomplished without help from hospitality and tourism partners and stakeholders across the state.

This year’s Illinois Excellence in Tourism program, was presented by Illinois Office of Tourism. The Illinois Governor’s Conference on Travel & Tourism is taking place in Chicago, Feb. 4-6, at the Palmer House Hilton. The conference unites state leaders, travel experts and special guests to share the latest innovative ideas for promoting travel.

To download photos from Monday’s awards **ceremony [click here.](#)**

To review a complete conference schedule and a list of speakers at this year’s conference, visit <http://www.ilgovconference.com>

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*The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents*