



## Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

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### Illinois Office of Tourism Honors Tourism Industry Leaders with Excellence in Tourism Awards and Silver Lining Stories

**CHICAGO** -The 2021 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism kicked off Monday, Dec. 6, at Navy Pier in Chicago with an awards ceremony honoring tourism leaders' contribution to the industry including special recognition for how communities responded throughout the pandemic.

This year, the new Silver Lining Stories initiative awards tourism attractions and business owners who rallied to support their communities and innovated under extremely challenging circumstances as they navigated the pandemic. Honorees were selected by their industry peers who voted via the [Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism Facebook page](#).

"I'm committed to making the investments necessary to renew our tourism industry and the communities it supports. We've deployed over \$1 billion in relief to over ten thousand Illinois businesses in hundreds of cities and towns throughout our state," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "We've provided 7,500 hospitality grants totalling \$265 million through the Business Interruption Grants and Back to Business Grants. And we're distributing grants aimed at new and returning festivals and tourism attractions everywhere in our state."

"Congratulations to the small businesses and community groups who were nominated for the Silver Lining Stories. Their stories spotlight the ingenuity, resilience and resourcefulness we saw in the tourism industry and across Illinois as folks pivoted to help each other and be in service to their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic," **said Sylvia I. Garcia, acting director of the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**.

Silver Lining Stories categories include:

- **Best Support for Essential Workers** - Winner: [Project Front Line](#), nominated by Visit McHenry County, Organizations, individuals or businesses that stepped up for essential workers and helped make their lives better.

- **Most Engaged Community Partner** - Winner: [Vine Street Market](#), farmers market at O'Fallon Station, nominated by ILLINOISouth Tourism, Individual, business or organization that supported their community in multiple ways over a period of time.
- **Most Innovative Pandemic Startup** - Winner: [Takeout 25](#), nominated by Visit Oak Park, Travel/tourism business that successfully launched during COVID and created a sustainable business
- **Best Pivot** - Winner: [Shawnee Hills Wine Trail](#), nominated by Southernmost Illinois Tourism, Business or individual that changed their business model during one of the largest economic, human & health pandemics, and innovated as a result.

The **Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards** were also presented to celebrate the most innovative tourism marketing initiatives from convention and tourism bureaus (CVB) throughout the state, prior to the pandemic. The award ceremony was hosted by Val Warner, the Emmy Award-winning co-host of Windy City Weekend on ABC 7.

"It is an incredible honor to be able to recognize our tourism partners across the state who work tirelessly to promote Illinois as a premier tourist destination," said Karla Flannery, deputy director of the Illinois Office of Tourism.

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.

#### Illinois Excellence in Tourism Award winners:

Best Niche Targeting Budget A – Heritage Corridor CVB, *2019 Heritage Corridor Ale Trail*  
 Best Niche Targeting Budget B – Ottawa Visitors Center, *Local Food Restaurant Week*  
 Best Niche Targeting Budget B – Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, *History in Your Backyard*

Best Social Media Marketing Budget A – Galena CVB, *Facebook milestone Galena*  
 Best Social Media Marketing Budget B – Quincy Area CVB, *Best Postcard Pic FB Contest + Inside Guide*

Best Branding Initiative Budget A – Rockford Area CVB, *2019 International Table Tennis Federation North American Olympic Table Tennis Trials*  
 Best Branding Initiative Budget B – Elgin Area CVB, *Ring Around Elgin*  
 Best Branding Initiative Budget B – Galesburg CVB, *Experience Galesburg Rebrand*

Best Cooperative Partnership Budget A – Visit Lake County CVB, *Visit Lake County - Best Cooperative Partnership (Six Flags Great America and Lincolnshire Marriott Resort)*  
 Best Cooperative Partnership Budget B – Sports Illinois, *Sports Huddle 2019*

Best Event or Festival Budget A – Illinois Restaurant Association, *Chicago Gourmet*  
 Best Event or Festival Budget B – The Joliet Area Historical Museum, *A Night Behind Bars*

Best Website Budget A – Choose Chicago, *Choose Chicago Website*

Best Website Budget B – Elgin Area CVB, *Explore Elgin Website*

Best Tourism Marketing Budget A – The Art Institute of Chicago, *Andy Warhol—From A to B and Back Again*

Best Tourism Marketing Budget B – Lakeview Chamber of Commerce, *Wrigleyville Wonderland*

Best Printed Collateral Budget A – ILLINOISouth, *ILLINOISouth Kids Activity Book Series*

Best Printed Collateral Budget B – Great Rivers Country, *Antiques in Illinois*

Best International Marketing – Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, *Route 66*

Best PR Campaign – Navy Pier, *The Beach Chicago*

Best of Show - Illinois Restaurant Association

This year's Illinois Excellence in Tourism program and Silver Lining Stories are presented by the Illinois Office of Tourism. The Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism is taking place in Chicago, Dec. 6-8, at the Sable Hotel at Navy Pier. 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 view the conference press release [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.*