

## 2011 Nebraska travel industry award winners announced

### Gov. Heineman announces winners at travel conference

OMAHA, NEB. (Oct. 20, 2011)—More than 150 tourism professionals were on hand to honor their peers at the annual travel awards banquet Thursday evening at the Ramada Plaza Omaha Hotel and Convention Center – CoCo Key Water Resort. The event capped the 36th Annual Nebraska Travel and Tourism Conference organized by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development's Travel and Tourism Division and hosted by the Omaha Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Gov. Dave Heineman announced the following 2011 Nebraska Travel Industry award winners.

**The 2011 Henry Fonda Award** – the state's highest tourism award representing leadership, vision and dedication to the tourism industry – went to **Jane and Randel Smith** of Brownville. Between 1960 and 1980, this couple started the Brownville Village Theatre, served as presidents of the Brownville Historical Society, organized the town to promote tourism with the preservation of the historic buildings on Main Street, and started Outfitters Row, which brought many tourism businesses and shops to the community. The Smiths started offering riverboat tours in 1970 aboard the Belle of Brownville. They built a campground and facilities to accommodate travelers, and later brought another excursion boat to town, the Spirit of Brownville.

With their "build it and they will come" attitude, this couple pushed forward and opened the Lyceum, a bookstore/restaurant which has become Brownville's primary meeting space and the heart of the community. In 2009, they opened the River Inn Resort on the banks of the Missouri River. This unique, full service meeting place and B&B is noted for being the only floating lodging facility in the state.

**The Friend of Tourism Award** went to the **Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation**. Over the years, this Omaha-based foundation has developed or supported a variety of tourism-related projects across the state, including complimentary roadside assistance to stranded motorists, funds for the construction of green cabins in Ponca State Park, and money for wheelchair-accessible fishing piers and walkways at Lake Cunningham and Ponca State Park.



**Governor Heineman presents the award to Rose White, Executive Director of the Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation.**

**The Outstanding Event Award for communities with populations up to 10,000** went to **Swedish Days** in Holdrege. What began 36 years ago as a small event honoring the town's Swedish heritage, has turned into a fun-filled, two-day festival that attracts thousands of visitors to this town of 5,200 people. Hundreds of volunteers, organizations and residents dedicate countless hours to this festival, which includes a fun run, car show, downtown street festival, parade and vendors from across the state.

**The Outstanding Event Award for communities with populations greater than 10,000** was given to North Platte's **NEBRASKAland Days**. For more than 45 years, this western festival has drawn visitors from around the world to celebrate Nebraska's frontier history and its connection to that most famous western entertainer, Buffalo Bill Cody. During this year's festival, nearly \$7 million dollars were pumped into the local economy by more than 120,000 visitors from 230 Nebraska cities and 34 U.S. states.

**The Outstanding Tourism Association Award** was won by **Golf the North**. This alliance of residents, businesses, golf courses, lodging properties, restaurants and local tourism attractions put together an outstanding golf tour of five nine-hole courses. The package gives visitors a relaxing golf outing and offers a fun and cost effective way to travel throughout northeast Nebraska.

**The Outstanding Tourism Campaign Award** went to the **Lincoln Convention & Visitors Bureau** for its "Be a Tourist in Your Own Home Town" summer passport program. The program has encouraged thousands of area residents to explore 25 of the Capital City's tourism attractions, festivals and businesses. This year, a mascot, Trip, was introduced to promote the program. He even traveled across the state and visited the Interstate 80 welcome centers to spread the news about all the tourism opportunities in Lincoln.

**The Outstanding Tourism Publication Award** was won by **Cherry County Tourism**. More than 20 years ago, the Valentine/Cherry County tourism guide was a black and white newsprint magazine. Today, it's a full-color, glossy, magazine-size publication. The publication is full of interesting articles, photographs and advertisements all designed to entice visitors to the scenic region of north central Nebraska along the Niobrara River.

**The Outstanding Website Award** went to the **Bone Creek Museum of Agrarian Art** in David City. Since the website's upgrade in April 2010, attendance at the museum has increased by 20 percent. The exceptional site ([www.bonecreek.org/](http://www.bonecreek.org/)) has helped this one-of-a-kind museum become one of the top tourist destinations in Butler County.

**The Outstanding Tourism Attraction Award** was given to **The Great Platte River Road Archway** near Kearney. The nation's only tourist attraction built over a federal interstate, the archway is an exceptional attraction visited by nearly 100,000 people last year. In the past two years, it has seen a marked upswing in attendance and has helped to increase the average tourist's visit in Kearney from one hour to more than two hours, sometimes for the entire day. Seventy-five percent of the Archway's annual visitors hail from other states or countries.

**The Outstanding Nature-Tourism Entity Award** celebrates the state's many outdoor recreational pastimes and activities. This year's winner was **Arbor Day Farm**. This Nebraska City attraction is a 260-acre living laboratory of environmental stewardship and conservation. Nearly 250,000 people visit Arbor Day Farm each year to explore its many nature-based tourism activities. Its greenhouse tours allow visitors to see firsthand where tens of thousands of tree seedlings get started.

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