

Local legends and best of the best highlighted at Tourism Summit

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Alton Regional CVB features 2016 events

ALTON - Aeries Resort in Grafton and Argosy Casino Alton were among the local businesses honored at the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau's 13th annual Tourism Summit held Thursday, Jan. 19 at the Atrium Hotel & Conference Center, 3559 College Ave., Alton.

Aeries was highlighted as the region's Best Attraction thanks to owners Jeff and Sandy Lorton's efforts to build up the resort destination. With the Grafton Zip Line, Aerie's Winery, Aerie's Terrace and cabins lodging and more, the Lorton's have been a strong promoter of tourism, according to Brett Stawar, President and CEO of the Alton Regional CVB.

"Each year, we like to recognize the attractions, businesses and people that make the Meeting of the Great Rivers a winner," Stawar said.

Also honored by the CVB were Argosy Casino Alton as Partner of the Year, the North Alton Godfrey Business Council's Benjamin Godfrey Legacy Trail, Alton Little Theater for Best Group Tour Experience, Rock the Hops as Best Festival and Grafton residents Ed Amburg, Rod Jackson, Bonna Downey and Mary Lillesve for their volunteer efforts with the American Queen river boat bus tours. Alton resident Larry Kulp was honored as Volunteer of the Year for his work with the CVB's shuttle tours.

Headlining the annual summit was Catherine Neville, publisher of Feast Magazine. Neville helped kick off the Sixth Annual Alton Restaurant Week which begins Friday, Jan. 20 and runs through Jan. 29.

"We are pleased to welcome Catherine Neville to our region and our summit event," CVB President and CEO Brett Stawar said. "Food tourism has provided a strong economic base for our region and having Ms. Neville here just as we kick off our Sixth Annual Restaurant Week is an added bonus."

The summit also highlighted the economic impact of tourism in northern Madison, Jersey and Calhoun counties for 2016. Overall, the region saw a 3 percent increase in tourism growth in 2016 with more than \$456 million pouring into the area the result of visitors. Visitors also contributed \$12.18 million in sales tax receipts in Madison, Jersey and Calhoun counties in 2016.

The CVB also unveiled its newest campaign, Local Legends, which highlights the efforts of area residents to create a destination for visitors. Among the inaugural honorees were Ben and Trudi Allen of The Loading Dock, Ann Badasch of My Just Desserts, Matt and Sara McGibany and Chad Nelson and Felicia Breen of Mississippi Mud Pottery.