

Annual Tourism Summit highlights economic impact of visitors

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer
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ALTON - The Alton Regional Convention and Visitor Bureau celebrated the accomplishments and partnerships of 2017 at the annual Tourism Summit Thursday morning at Best Western Premier.

Brett Stawar, President of the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, started the summit off by speaking on the economic impact that tourism has had on the area in last year.

"If you build a place where people want to visit then you have built a place where people want to live. If build a place where people want to live then you have built a place where people want to work, and if you build a place where people want to work then you have built a place where business has to be. It all starts with a visit and that visit doesn't happen without all of us in this room and your CVB," Stawar said.

The CVB's theme of "It All Starts With a Visit" which brings together tourism and enhancing economic development has had an impressive impact on the area. During 2017 the tourism industry had an overall impact of more than \$500,000,000 on the region.

"We recorded the counties of Madison, Macoupin, Jersey and Calhoun," Stawar said. "All together we generated 503 million dollars in visitor expenditures. That supported

35 hundred full-time jobs in the industry. We raised nearly 15 million dollars collectively for our communities going back into that local tax space."

Numbers like these don't just happen, it takes a large combination of things Stawar said. A combination of thing motor coach delegates, education delegates, sports delegates and meeting delegates, all of which and had an economic impact of \$800,000 in group sales.

Stawar said pulling together some really great attractions is what helps to contribute to such large numbers.

"Each year we like to award the best of the best for group travel," Stawar said. "This year it's a combination of partners that helped us book six new motor coach tours in 2017 on the Gardens, Grapes and Galleries tour."

The Nan Elliott Rose Garden, The Grafton Winery, The Beall Mansion, Mississippi Mud Pottery and Lewis and Clark Community College's Signature Gardens were all awarded for the tour which highlighted the local gardens, antique galleries, live art and wine.

The Partner of the Year Award was presented to the Old Bakery Beer Company for work with the CVB on creating a Craft Beer Passport Program, Craft Beer Week and their tremendous support with Restaurant Week.

Stawar also recognized the Jazz and Wine Festival Committee for creating the event which celebrated the legacy of Miles Davis as the committee was presented the award for Best Festival.

The Best Innovation Award was presented to Wow Event Center and Germania Brew Haus.

The Jerseyville Downtown Country Christmas received the Best Community Involvement Award.

Stawar said there are a lot of exciting collaborations and events on the horizon where the Mother Road Meets the Great River Road as he introduced special guest speaker Bill Geist.

Geist spoke on the importance of getting people to want to visit the community and creating a desire within them to invest in the community.

"Destination marketing encourages somebody who has no reason to come to your community, to come," Geist said. "If they come they may just want to stay and if they stay they're going to want to invest."

As Geist closed the summit he noted how exciting it is to see the mutually beneficial relationships grow between the neighboring communities as the CVB becomes more regional and inclusive of the The Great River Road and Mother Road Route 66 as he revealed the new "Great Rivers and Routes of Southwest Illinois" umbrella site and slogan. Stawar added that other sites such as www.visitaltont.com will remain with the addition of "Great Rivers and Routes of Southwest Illinois."

