

Tourism Bureau Receives Awards At Annual Governor's Conference

by Stephanie Tate
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ALTON - The GreatRivers & Routes Tourism Bureau received two Excellence in Tourism awards at the annual Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism during an awards ceremony at the Peoria Civic Center.



The bureau received awards for Best Social Media Marketing, and Best Printed Collateral. The Social Media Marketing Campaign recognized the bureau's Heartbeats video series and the Printed Collateral award was presented for the new Route 66 Passport created by the Bureau for the Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in Illinois.

"We are extremely honored and thrilled to be presented with these awards from our industry peers," Great Rivers & Routes President & CEO Cory Jobe noted. "Our small but mighty Bureau team works each and every day to make sure our region shines for our community stakeholders and the traveling public. It's nice to have this recognition for those efforts."

The Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards were presented to honor the most successful tourism marketing and advertising initiatives, from convention and visitor bureaus (DMOs) and tourism destinations to attractions and innovators throughout the state who make Illinois shine.

Travel and tourism professionals from across the industry judged submissions in nine categories, ranging from best public relations and social media marketing campaigns 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 \$750,000 and above, and Budget B for organizations with budgets under \$750,000. The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau competed in the Budget A category.

The Bureau's Heartbeats video campaign focused on using social media to highlight the passion and commitment of people throughout the region who have made an extraordinary impact on southwest Illinois. Using the power of video in a partnership with Shift Agency of Alton, the bureau created eight different videos representing the six county, 39-community tourism bureau region. The Heartbeats' stories ranged from musicians and artists to ferry boat owners; orchard and organic farmers to entrepreneurs and football coaches. The main goal of the campaign was to introduce area residents and travelers to the people and experiences that make southwest Illinois an amazing destination and place to call home.

When it comes to road trips, one highway has become legendary – Route 66. And the best way to commemorate this Mother Road adventure is with an interactive printed passport complete with removeable stickers highlighting each stop. The Bureau created a printed passport that detailed 14 different stops along The Last 100 Miles of Route 66 in southwest Illinois. This passport guided road trippers along the highway and provided an entertaining road map for this one-of-a-kind adventure. The passports were free and stocked up at stops along highway.

“It is an incredible privilege to recognize and celebrate our statewide tourism partners at this year's Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards,” said Daniel Thomas, Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism. “These awards are a reflection of our partners' unwavering commitment to Illinois' tourism industry, whose hard work and dedication promote Illinois as a premier travel destination.”

This year's Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards program was presented by the Illinois Office of Tourism. The 2024 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism is underway in Peoria, March 19-21, at the Peoria Civic Center. The annual conference brings hundreds of Illinois industry leaders, travel experts and visionaries together to explore the latest industry trends and insights that contribute to Illinois tourism, one of the leading economic drivers in the state.