



March 15, 2010

## News Release

Embargoed until 10 p.m. on Monday, March 15:

# 21<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL SASKATCHEWAN TOURISM AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE CELEBRATED

SASKATOON – Saskatchewan’s tourism industry honoured businesses and individuals at the 21<sup>st</sup> annual *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala*, which was celebrated on Monday, March 15 at TCU Place in Saskatoon.

“The *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala* is an opportunity for our sector to celebrate its stars,” Dr. Lynda Haverstock, President/CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan, said. “It is a privilege to honour these entrepreneurs, employees, volunteers, and businesses that soar “above and beyond” expectation to make our province a superb destination. Tourism Saskatchewan is delighted to host this annual tribute. We extend our heartiest congratulations and thanks to all of the award recipients and nominees.”

A 12-person tourism industry committee selected the 45 finalists and 16 award recipients from nearly 90 nominations. The Chairman’s Lifetime Achievement Award recipient was selected by Mr. Carey Baker, Chair of Tourism Saskatchewan’s Board of Directors, and the Outfitter Legacy Award recipient was chosen by the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association.

The winners of the *Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence* for 2009 are:

- **Business of the Year  
(Under 50 Full-time Employees)**  
*Sponsored by The Western Producer*

### **Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery, Maple Creek**

Owners and operators Marty and Marie Bohnet opened Cypress Hills Vineyard & Winery in June 2007 and have welcomed more than 60,000 guests since. Visitors repeatedly agree with the company’s motto – “the BEST afternoon of your summer!” In 2009, visitation to Saskatchewan’s first commercial winery grew by 30 per cent over the previous year. The Maple Creek-area business employs 24 full- and part-time staff and is a prominent and valuable partner in the tourism industry. Marty and Marie are strong supporters and participants in the Destination Area Plan being developed for the Cypress Hills and surrounding area.

- **Business of the Year**  
**(Over 50 Full-time Employees)**  
*Sponsored by The Western Producer*

**Prairieland Park, Saskatoon**

Since its earliest days as a centre for agricultural excellence, Prairieland Park in Saskatoon has evolved into a provincial leader in the development of trade shows, conferences, special events, industry expositions, concerts, cabarets, and more. With more than \$16 million in infrastructure enhancement in recent years, Prairieland Park has become one of Canada's premier venues. The new buildings take up 210,000 sq. ft on the 55-hectare property. Each year, Prairieland Park attracts 1.6 million people to its more than 1,200 local, national, and international events. With a commitment to quality service, the organization's almost 900 employees ensure that all events go off without a hitch, resulting in repeat business and booked facilities. Prairieland is also committed to its workers. With a culture built on respect and the philosophy that everyone is important, the organization has experienced a great deal of staff longevity and loyalty.

- **Corporate Partner of the Year**  
*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport*

**Gabriel Dumont Institute Publishing Department, Saskatoon**

In a four-year partnership with Batoche National Historic Site of Canada (BNHS), the staff of the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) has made Métis history come alive by providing the expertise, knowledge, and activities required to create exceptional visitor experiences. The partnership has allowed BNHS to provide high impact programming onsite, including storytelling circles, Métis language speakers, presentations of Métis art, dance, and food, as well as event organization and management by GDI. Ongoing programs such as the Caron Home Program Development featuring an historic farmstead, along with events such as the Métis Women's History of Resistance and Survival: Stories of Tourond's Coulee/Fish Creek and Batoche, and the Back to Batoche website, have helped to bring a true voice to Métis cultural activities and to create relevant visitor experiences at BNHS.

- **Creative Excellence Award**  
*Sponsored by Advantage Sign and Display Systems*

**Suzanne Paschall, Saskatoon**

Suzanne Paschall has been an active writer and musician in Saskatoon for more than a decade. She was born and raised in central Kansas, has lived in New York City, and in the Toronto area, but has called Saskatchewan home for the past 17 years. Most recently (December 2009), she launched her first non-fiction book titled, *Birth of a Boom: Lives & Legacies of Saskatchewan Entrepreneurs*, which highlights the personal stories of 13 of Saskatchewan's most successful entrepreneurs. Suzanne is also a pianist, songwriter, and singer of blues, swing, jazz, and funk music. She performs with two bands – Paschall & Dahl and Jump Me Martha. Suzanne and her fellow musicians have performed at hundreds of events and festivals across the province and Canada. Her music has also been used in film, television, and in live theatre, and has won international awards in the music industry, further increasing awareness of Saskatchewan music outside of our province.

- **Fred Heal Tourism Ambassador Award**

*Sponsored by Wanuskewin Heritage Park*

**Claude-Jean Harel, Great Excursions, Regina**

Claude-Jean Harel launched Great Excursions in 1998 as Saskatchewan's leading destination management company, focusing exclusively on the development, marketing, and promotion of authentic Saskatchewan tourism experiences. Since that time, Claude-Jean has worked with many individuals and organizations to promote the province, resulting in new visits from domestic and international markets through the publication of articles, films, photographs, and books. Among other activities, Claude-Jean has worked with tourism operators to create and enhance tourism products in the form of festivals and events, tours, and local bounty initiatives. He produced and chaired Regina's Ice and Fire Carnival, delivered dozens of workshops, webinars, and presentations on Saskatchewan, and was editor of the Canadian Tourism Commission's *Tourism Magazine*.

- **Gil Carduner Marketing Award  
(Budget of Under \$20,000)**

*Sponsored by Phoenix Group*

**Shearwater River Cruises, Saskatoon**

The 100-year-old wreck of a fairly large steam-driven passenger ship is (to say the least) an unusual and quirky piece of prairie history, and a diving recovery expedition on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wreck is even more noteworthy. In 2009, Shearwater River Cruises offered the "Luncheon with a Shipwreck" package and provided visitors to Saskatoon a unique glimpse into a little-known facet of local folklore, delivered through a relaxing and informative cruise on the South Saskatchewan River. The objective of the campaign was to raise the profile of the company and its river cruise products, as well as boost the image of Saskatoon by publicizing "Saskatchewan's only 'maritime' disaster."

- **Gil Carduner Marketing Award  
(Budget of Over \$20,000)**

*Sponsored by Phoenix Group*

**Western Development Museum, Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Saskatoon, Yorkton**

A cornerstone of the Saskatchewan spirit is shared experience, one that is deeply rooted in the everyday life of ordinary people. The Saskatoon Western Development Museum (WDM) exhibit, "Winning the Prairie Gamble: Farm Life in Saskatchewan," and "Winning the Prairie Gamble: The Saskatchewan Story," featured at the WDMs in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, and Yorkton, showcase the events, achievements, and people significant to the province's history and development. Each of the WDMs feature special themes that engage, entertain, and educate museum visitors in a manner which fosters pride in our resident visitors, and elevates awareness of the unique nature of Saskatchewan for those visiting from outside our borders. These exhibits stimulate pride in our heritage, while reflecting the spirit and soul of this amazing province we call home.

- **Land of Living Skies Award**

*Sponsored by Transcontinental*

**Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve**

Celebrating 10 years in 2010 as a biosphere reserve, designated by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve has long been an advocate of sustainable tourism in our province. The designation formally recognizes the region's commitment to the conservation of biological diversity, the pursuit of sustainable

economic development, and the creation of opportunities for education, research, and experimental approaches to improved land management. Recent projects of the biosphere reserve include the installation of four obelisks with information placards along the Millennium Trail, development of pamphlets and information packages to educate residents and visitors on safe hiking practices within protected areas, and creation of a display on the history of the three main cultures that make up the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve – French, Ukrainian, and Polish – which will be ongoing and updated each year.

- **Promotional/Marketing Campaign – Association, Bureau or Region**

*Sponsored by SaskTel*

**Moose Mountain Tourism Association, Carlyle**

To entice visitors to the area, the Moose Mountain Tourism Association set a goal to make planning a vacation as easy as possible. To achieve this, it forged invaluable partnerships with the area's major attractions and combined everything into one straightforward package. Tourists were invited to "Discover the beauty and tranquility of Saskatchewan's island forest." The packages featured free play at White Bear Casino, accommodations at the Kenosee Inn Resort Hotel, discounts at the Kenosee Superslides, and golf at White Bear and Kenosee golf courses.

- **Promotional/Marketing Campaign – Event or Festival  
(Budget of Under \$20,000)**

*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority*

**Yorkton Film Festival**

It is well known in the Canadian film industry that there is a world-class event with a "country attitude" right here in Saskatchewan. The Yorkton Film Festival is the longest running festival of its kind in North America – offering a venue for people to view the latest films and meet new talent in a completely relaxed atmosphere. Where else can internationally known or emerging filmmakers experience ethnic food, Ukrainian humour, outdoor banquets, films under the stars, skeet shooting, and authentic Aboriginal products? The event features small screenings, a chance to network at events and on the golf course, and the prestigious Golden Sheaf Awards.

- **Promotional/Marketing Campaign – Event or Festival  
(Budget of Over \$20,000)**

*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority*

**Auto Clearing Motor Speedway's NASCAR Canadian Tire Series (NCATS) Event, Saskatoon**

Dream it. Build it. And they will come. That is the philosophy of the Saskatoon Stock Car Racing Association (SSCRA). And on July 29, 2009, they came. A sold out crowd of 5,000 welcomed NASCAR to the Auto Clearing Motor Speedway for the first-ever NASCAR Canadian Tire Series (NCATS) Event. With the tagline, "Velocity Prairie Thunder," the event's comprehensive marketing program included print media, radio, television, brochures, highway billboard signs, a website, notices attached to 2009 race schedules, and two media announcements – one televised on TSN, raising the profile of the city and the province. The racing event was such a success that NASCAR will be back to Auto Clearing Motor Speedway on August 4.

- **Rookie of the Year**

*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce*

### **Chief Whitecap Trail**

Following almost a decade of planning and development, the official opening of Saskatchewan's newest branded tourism corridor occurred in July 2009 at Whitecap Dakota First Nation. Highway 219, from Saskatoon to Lake Diefenbaker, is now known as Chief Whitecap Trail. The designation of the trail is part of the Lake Diefenbaker Tourism Destination Area Plan, which was developed by Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Lake Diefenbaker Tourism Association, Mid Sask Enterprise Region, local rural and urban municipalities, Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority, and Tourism Saskatchewan. The concept behind Chief Whitecap Trail is to develop partnerships and links between the attractions and communities found on or within proximity to the trail in order to grow a strong packaged tourism product that will ultimately attract more tourists to the region.

- **Service Excellence (Business)**

*Sponsored by Casinos Regina & Moose Jaw*

### **Tourism Moose Jaw**

Since 1979, Tourism Moose Jaw has been the first point of contact for people planning a trip to the city. The increased number of first-time visitors in recent years created a demand for a customer service-based, knowledgeable organization to properly service them. As the numbers grew, so did the levels of commitment to providing exceptional guest service, which is the standard at Tourism Moose Jaw. Guest service training is based on the book, *Give 'em the Pickle*, and it is not unusual to hear one or more staff during the summer months proudly announce, "I gave that family a pickle today," having exceeded the visitor's expectations. The Ambassador Program and Little Chicago Information Bus are both operated enthusiastically by Tourism Moose Jaw staff. Travellers are also welcomed to the city by Mac the Moose at the Visitor Centre, and now a Snowbird Tudor Jet makes its home on the site.

- **Service Excellence (Individual)**

*Sponsored by Arcas Group*

### **Debbie Aldous-Ibbitson, Tourism Saskatoon**

Debbie Aldous-Ibbitson's love of travelling in- and out-of-province has enhanced her ability to help tourists to our province in her role as Visitor Services Coordinator for Tourism Saskatoon. She started with the tourism organization in November 1996, and has gone the extra mile to help hundreds, maybe thousands, of visitors to enjoy their stay in the city. Debbie handles the reception area and visitor requests in a professional, courteous, and expert manner. She hires and trains Summer Visitor Information Counsellors, and she puts her organizational skills to work in her responsibility for ordering merchandise and maintaining inventory control, and in the coordination of member events. All requests are handled efficiently and promptly but with that extra level of service that brings visitors back for more. For Debbie, it all starts with a smile.

- **Spirit of Saskatchewan Award**

*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Arts Board*

### **CanoeSki Discovery Company, Saskatoon**

CanoeSki Discovery Company is one of Saskatchewan's foremost eco-adventure travel companies specializing in wilderness canoeing and tours. One of these expeditions, the David Thompson Voyageur Trek, has been conducted successfully for the last three years and is slated to run again in July 2010. It began as a collaborative event, involving the Saskatchewan Archaeological Society

(SAS), St. Louis Historical Society, and CanoeSki. The program offers a three-day fur trade-themed river adventure on historically significant portions of the South Saskatchewan River in the vicinity of Batoche. On the trek, guests can paddle a locally built replica of a voyageur canoe, enjoy an authentic camping menu, and visit places associated with important historical figures. The Voyageur Trek helps visitors gain an appreciation of our Saskatchewan heritage, and to authentically connect with it through an adventure travel experience.

- **Tourism Media Award for Travel Journalism**

*Sponsored by Delta Regina Hotel*

**D. Grant Black, Wakaw**

D. Grant Black's first book, *Saskatchewan Book of Musts: The 101 Places Every Saskatchewanian Must See*, highlights 101 Saskatchewan destinations. Published by MacIntyre Purcell Publishing Inc., the book was released in October 2009 – perfect timing for what become a popular Christmas gift for both current and former residents of our province. Grant playfully calls his book a "Saskatchewan Bucket List". The publication covers each region of the province and includes "Must See" listings and a "Take 5" list – five recommendations on different themes from 14 well-known Saskatchewanians. The *Saskatchewan Book of Musts* has received regional and national attention and is currently the #1 Saskatchewan title on *Amazon.ca*.

- **Outfitter Legacy Award**

*Sponsored by Saskatchewan Outfitters Association*

**James Yuel, Adventure Destinations International**

- **Chairman's Lifetime Achievement Award**

*Sponsored by Tourism Saskatchewan*

**Janet Olsen**

Detailed information regarding each category winner is available at [www.industrymatters.com](http://www.industrymatters.com).

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