



NEWS RELEASE

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EMBARGO UNTIL:
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VISIT MANKATO'S 2017 TRAVEL AND TOURISM WEEK AMBASSADORS

MANKATO, Minn.—As part of the 34th annual National Travel and Tourism Week, which is May 7 through 13, Visit Mankato will recognize outstanding ambassadors of Mankato in four categories for making visitors feel welcome.

- Curt Van Asten, taproom and events manager at Mankato Brewery, will be awarded the Attraction Travel and Tourism Award for his planning, professionalism and personality, which have led to the brewery's national recognition as Best Beer Bar in Minnesota by the Brewers Association.
- Emilee Mailhot, breakfast bar attendant at Holiday Inn Express & Suites, will be awarded the Hotel Travel and Tourism Award for exceeding her customers' expectations every day. As one of the first people the guests see in the morning, Emilee and her friendly attitude and creative messages written on bananas delight visitors and keep them coming back for more.
- Christopher & Patrick Person and Natasha O'Hara, owners of Mankato Independent Originals, will be awarded the Restaurant Travel and Tourism Award. Their four locally-owned restaurants cater to all kinds of visitors' appetites and they personally work to improve the community and the visitor experience.
- Lori Benike, assistant store leader/event coordinator at Scheels in Mankato, will be awarded the Retail Travel and Tourism Award for being the face and voice of Scheels. She has a variety of important roles to make Scheels a better place for the customers, employees and our community.

"Our hospitality ambassadors are one aspect of a visitor's first impression of the community," said Anna Thill, president of Visit Mankato. "This year's theme for National Travel and Tourism Week is Faces of Travel, and we are recognizing Mankato's faces of tourism who help make visitors' time in Mankato memorable."

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Each of Visit Mankato's ambassadors will be recognized with a highlight video on social media and on Visit Mankato's website throughout National Travel and Tourism Week. Videos will be posted at visitmankatomn.com/partners/travel-tourism-awards.

In 1983, U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution establishing National Travel and Tourism Week. In support, President Ronald Reagan signed a Presidential Proclamation urging citizens to observe the week with "appropriate ceremonies and activities." The tradition is celebrated the first full week of May and paves the way for people to gather nationwide to spread the word of travel.

More than thirty years later, travel is more relevant than ever as a driver of the U.S. economy; the industry creates jobs at a faster pace than the rest of the economy.

Thill says one in every nine American jobs depends on travel. In Minnesota, the leisure and hospitality industry accounts for 11 percent of the state's total private sector jobs. In Blue Earth and Nicollet counties, travel and tourism supports more than 12,000 employees in hotel, restaurant, attraction, transportation and retail jobs.

Travelers drive revenue into a broad spectrum of businesses and local establishments, including food services, public transportation, lodging and retail. Minnesota travelers spend almost \$40 million a day, which accounts for 17 percent of the state's sales tax revenue.

For more information about Mankato as a travel destination, go to visitmankatomn.com.

Visit Mankato, the local convention and visitor's bureau, is an affiliate of Greater Mankato Growth, Inc., which also includes the regional chamber of commerce and economic development organization, Greater Mankato Growth, and downtown development organization, City Center Partnership. Visit Mankato leads the development of the visitor economy in Greater Mankato by actively promoting Greater Mankato as a premier destination for conventions, tournaments and tourism. These activities bring a steady flow of visitors and business activity to Greater Mankato that benefits local residents and future visitors. The work of Visit Mankato helps strengthen the hospitality industry which provides jobs, a diverse tax base and amenities for everyone to enjoy.