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**2013 ILLINOIS GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE SHOWCASED INDUSTRY'S INNOVATORS, HONORED AWARD WINNERS**

*Annual conference also showcased creative ways Illinois is promoting travel*

**ROSEMONT** – More than 450 of Illinois' travel industry professionals gathered this week at the 2013 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism (DCEO/IOT) and the Illinois Council of Convention and Visitors Bureaus co-hosted the event, which was held at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont from February 27 through March 1. This year's conference highlighted the people and the innovative initiatives that continue to drive forward the economic development of the state.

The conference included the annual "State of the State of Tourism" address presented by DCEO Assistant Director Dan Seals and IOT Deputy Director Jen Hoelzle. Both Seals and Hoelzle discussed the landscape of tourism throughout Illinois and highlighted new attractions and domestic and international marketing initiatives that contribute to the industry's vital role in statewide economic development.

In the address, Hoelzle highlighted creative ways Illinois is promoting travel, including focusing on the people behind Illinois' destinations, emphasizing the state's Lincoln heritage thanks to the blockbuster film, *Lincoln*, and the new partnership with Brand USA. The address also featured the roll out of the completely re-imagined website for the Illinois Office of Tourism, EnjoyIllinois.com. The new site is complete with enhanced visuals, year-round travel ideas for every season and offers an easier way to find content and travel deals. In addition, a mobile version of the site will debut in the next few weeks.

A full transcript of the 2013 State of the State of Tourism Address will be available at [llgovconference.com](http://llgovconference.com).

**Illinois Excellence in Tourism Award Winners**

The 2013 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism kicked off by honoring the groundbreaking work of industry innovators with the "Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards." Professional speaker and television commentator Laura Schwartz emceed the awards dinner. Designed locally by Dolphin Creative Promotions of Skokie, awards were presented in 12 categories. The entries were judged by a panel of marketing and tourism professionals on clarity of message, creativity, originality and the project's overall success. Award winners included:

**Best of Show:** Hiltons of Chicago

**Best Leisure Collateral:** Williamson County Fishing Guide, submitted by the Williamson County Tourism Bureau

**Best Sales Collateral:** The Park at Rosemont Direct Mail, submitted by Davis Harrison Dion

**Best Electronic Marketing:** Chicago's First Lady Promotional Video, submitted by Davis Harrison Dion

**Best Social Media Marketing:** Magnificent Mile Social Media Efforts, submitted by The Greater North Michigan Avenue Association

**Best Media/Public Relations Initiative:** Chillcation, submitted by Hiltons of Chicago

**Best Cooperative Partnership:** Trail of Terror, submitted by Galena County CVB

**Best Branding Initiative:** Midwest Morel Fest, submitted by the Ottawa Visitors Center

#### **Best Website**

**Division A:** Chillcation, submitted by Hiltons of Chicago

**Division B:** VisitGalena.org, submitted by VisitGalena.org

#### **Best Visitors Publication**

**Division A:** 2012 ILLINOISouth Visitors Guide, submitted by Tourism Bureau ILLINOISouth

**Division B:** Great Rivers Country Eagle Watching Sites Brochure, submitted by Great Rivers Country

#### **Best Event or Festival**

**Division A:** East Peoria Festival of Lights, submitted by Peoria Area CVB *and* Rick's Picks: A Lifelong Affair with Guitars and Music, submitted by Rockford Area CVB

**Division B:** History Comes Alive, submitted by Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition

#### **Best Tourism Marketing Campaign**

**Division A:** The BMO Harris Bank Magnificent Mile Lights Festival, submitted by The Greater North Michigan Avenue Association

**Division B:** Champaign County as a Destination, submitted by Champaign County CVB

#### **Lincoln Award Recipients**

New this year was the "Lincoln Awards," which were inspired by Steven Spielberg's award-winning film, *Lincoln*. The awards honored the 'behind the scenes stars' who go above and beyond for the Illinois tourism industry. Award winners included:

**Best Supporting Actress:** Lumi Bekteshi, Head waitress, The Palm's Grill, Atlanta

**Best Supporting Actor:** Tazewell County Resource Centers, Travel Guide Fulfillment Center

**Best Actor:** Robert Minge, Tourist Information Center Travel Counselor, Cumberland Road

**Best Actress:** Mary Twomey, Director of Sales and Marketing for Chicago's Essex Inn

**Best Picture:** Rick Nielsen, Rick's Picks: A Lifelong Affair with Guitars & Music

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** Roger Carmack, Executive Director of Great Rivers Country

For a complete recap of the 2013 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism, including conference schedule and list of speakers, visit [ilgovconference.com](http://ilgovconference.com). To learn more about Illinois tourism, and to plan your trip, visit [EnjoyIllinois.com](http://EnjoyIllinois.com).

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*The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.*