

Gov. Pritzker Addresses Tourism Professionals At Illinois Governor's Conference On Travel & Tourism

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PEORIA — Today, Governor JB Pritzker joined tourism professionals from across Illinois at the [Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism](#), the state's premier educational and networking conference for tourism industry professionals. The three-day conference began March 19 at the Peoria Civic Center with the 2024 Illinois Excellence in Tourism Awards ceremony, honoring Illinois tourism leaders' contributions to the industry. The annual conference, held in Peoria for the first time, unites more than 360 tourism and hospitality leaders, travel experts, and visionaries to explore the latest industry trends and insights that contribute to Illinois tourism.

“As Governor, I’m always proud to boast Illinois’ impressive tourism industry, which thrives as a cultural and economic benefit to our state,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Thank you to all the travel and tourism professionals across Illinois, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to welcome visitors and make this industry stronger than ever before.”

“Illinois’ tourism industry continues to be a significant economic driver, with 111 million visitors from around the globe spending \$44 billion across our great state in 2022,” said DCEO Director Kristin Richards. “The Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism provides an opportunity for industry professionals and leaders to share our commitment to bolstering economic development in the travel and tourism industry throughout Illinois.”

“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.”

Travel and tourism professionals from across the industry judged submissions in nine categories, ranging from best social media marketing campaign to best event or festival, with one exceptional entry receiving best of show. The Illinois Office of Tourism also announced two Illinois Tourism Legacy Awards to longtime Peoria businessman, George Manias with George’s Shoeshine & Hatters and Roger Carmack, President & CEO of Great Rivers Country.

Each Excellence in Tourism Award 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.

Illinois Excellence in Tourism Award winners:

- **Outstanding Niche Targeting Budget A (TIE)** – Choose Chicago - Chicago Brew Pass | Chicago Northwest - Chicago Northwest is Your Home for Golf
- **Outstanding Niche Targeting Budget B** – Ottawa Visitors Center - Smoketober Fest
- **Best Social Media Marketing Budget A** – Great Rivers and Routes - Heartbeats of Southwest Illinois
- **Best Social Media Marketing Budget B** – Skydeck Chicago - Skydeck Becomes Chicago’s Biggest Cheerleader

- **Best Branding Initiative Budget A** – Heritage Corridor Destinations - New Year, New Brand
- **Best Branding Initiative Budget B** – Jacksonville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau - Jacksonville Illinois Rebrand
- **Best Cooperative Partnership Budget A** – Go Rockford - 2023 Midwestern and Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships—As A Partnership Between Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, BMO Center, Skating Council of IL, City of Rockford
- **Best Cooperative Partnership Budget B** – Art Institute of Chicago - Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde: The Modern Landscape Cooperative Partnership Activation
- **Best Event or Festival Budget A** – Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau - Stroll on State
- **Best Event or Festival Budget B** – SeeQuincy - Summer Flavor Tours
- **Best Website Budget A** – Chicago Southland CVB - [VisitChicagoSouthland.com](https://www.visitchicago.org/southland)
- **Best Website Budget B** – Jacksonville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau - [Jacksonville Illinois Rebrand](https://www.visitjacksonville.org)
- **Best Tourism Marketing Budget A** – Visit Springfield - Kansas City Carvertise Marketing Campaign
- **Best Tourism Marketing Budget B** – Greater Freeport Partnership - Be A Trailblazer
- **Best Printed Collateral Budget A (TIE)** – Aurora Area CVB - 2023 Aurora Area Go Guide | Great Rivers and Routes - Discover the Mother Road Passport
- **Best Printed Collateral Budget B** – Rendleman Orchards - Orchard & Times - A Special Edition Newspaper Celebrating 150 Years
- **Best PR Campaign Budget A** – Heritage Corridor Destinations - The Great American Road Trip
- **Best PR Campaign Budget B (TIE)** – Ravenswood Chicago - Public Relations campaign for Malt Row in the Ravenswood Corridor by the Greater Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce | Ottawa Visitors Center - Your Hometown
- **Best of Show (highest score across all categories)** – Meet Chicago Northwest - Chicago Northwest is Your Home for Golf

New this year, the Illinois Governor's Conference is proud to host 10 students from Roosevelt University's Heller College of Business as part of the Enjoy Illinois Emerging Tourism Leaders Program. Majoring in Hospitality & Tourism Management, these exceptional students represent the future of the travel industry. Through industry sponsorships, they will have the opportunity to travel to Peoria, take full advantage of the conference's educational offerings and learn from and interact with some of the top leaders in their field.

“We are immensely proud of our Hospitality & Tourism Management students that were selected to attend the Illinois Governor’s Conference thanks to this exciting new partnership with Enjoy Illinois,” **said Stephanie Emrich, Assistant Teaching Professor of Hospitality Management at Roosevelt University.** “This will be a significant opportunity for our students to absorb the latest industry trends and gain essential skills for their future careers in travel and tourism.”

For a complete conference schedule and full list of speakers at the 2024 Illinois Governor’s Conference on Travel & Tourism, click [here](#).