

## NEWS RELEASE



*Where the Sun Rises  
on the Smokies*

### HAYWOOD COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

**CONTACT:** Darren Miller  
Media & Public Relations  
(828) 452-0152  
[darren@smokeymountains.net](mailto:darren@smokeymountains.net)

#### **HAYWOOD COUNTY TDA AWARDS KEY LEADERS IN TOURISM INDUSTRY**

*First Annual Luncheon Highlights Importance of Local Tourism and Travel Businesses and Organizations*

**HAYWOOD COUNTY, N.C. (MAY 11, 2009)**—The Haywood County Tourism Development Authority honored four key players in the tourism industry Thursday at its inaugural Tourism Awareness & Awards Luncheon at the Laurel Ridge Country Club.

The Front Line Ambassador Award—created “to recognize front line employees in the tourism and hospitality industry who exceed normal expectations and requirements to provide excellent service to Haywood County visitors and residents”—went to Dale Page of The Waynesville Inn Golf Resort & Spa. In his nomination, Page, a leader in the resort’s golf department, was described as a “perfect example of customized and dedicated service” who has “built relationships with our guests and locals to the point where guests are asking for him personally.”

The Event & Festival Award, which “recognizes an Event Coordinator, Planner or Organization and acknowledges as outstanding event which generates substantial tourism for Haywood County,” was presented to Folkmoot USA. Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Folkmoot is perennially named a Top 25 event by the Southeast Tourism Society. An economic impact study conducted in 2007 showed Folkmoot to have an annual impact of \$4 million on the local economy. “One of the unique aspects of this event,” wrote its nominator, “is that its reach is all over Haywood County with performances in venues across the county.” Folkmoot Executive Director Karen Babcock and Board President Scott McLeod, publisher of the Smoky Mountain News, accepted the award.

The Best of Class Business Award, which “recognizes an accommodation, attraction, restaurant, museum or retail business for leadership in the local tourism industry,” went to Cataloochee Ski Area as it approaches its 50<sup>th</sup> year of operation. One of the first ski resorts to open and the last to close in the Southeast each season, Cataloochee Ski Area boosts local tourism efforts in making the area a year-round destination. “Over the past few years, more than a half-million sports enthusiasts have visited this resort,” its nominator wrote. “In the last three years this resort has contributed \$2.8 million in payroll to the local economy.” Tammy Brown, marketing director, accepted the award on behalf of Cataloochee Ski Area.

The Tourism Leadership Award was presented to Canton Town Manager Al Matthews, who played a major role in getting an occupancy tax bill passed in Raleigh in the 1980s and has continued to help the tourism

industry in numerous ways ever since. “The vision, political skills and direct action of this savvy leader,” his nomination read, “opened the door for dollars, and he is a most important contributor to the significant status of our county-wide tourism industry today.”

The winners in each category were chosen by a panel of three judges, each ex-officio members of the HCTDA Board of Directors: Haywood County Commissioner Skeeter Curtis, Haywood County Finance Director Julie Davis, and Haywood County Economic Development Commission Executive Director Mark Clasby. The judges reviewed each nomination and chose winners based on established criteria.

Along with a delicious buffet lunch, attendees enjoyed an informative presentation by Berkeley Young of Young Strategies, a Charlotte-based company that specializes in research, planning and marketing strategy within the travel industry. From addressing how to thrive in a down economy to tips for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century travel industry, Young touched on a wide range of relevant topics and useful information during his presentation. The HCTDA will post a downloadable version of Young’s PowerPoint on its Web site in the coming days.

“The luncheon was an overwhelming success,” said Lynn Collins, executive director of the HCTDA.

“It’s a great way to bring together our industry partners in person while also recognizing those who have done outstanding work in the tourism industry and for our community,” she said. “The educational component and the networking opportunities will also help this event grow in future years.”

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