



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DESTINATION CLEVELAND RECOGNIZES RESIDENTS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

**POSITIVE INTERACTIONS WITH LOCALS REINFORCE DESIRABILITY OF CLEVELAND AS A DESTINATION
FOR BUSINESS AND LEISURE VISITORS**

CLEVELAND (March 23, 2017) – [Destination Cleveland](http://DestinationCleveland.com), the only organization in Cuyahoga County responsible for growing the travel and tourism industry, announced the recipients of its Hospitality Star and Cleveland Champions awards today at its 2017 annual meeting. The accolades are presented annually to Northeast Ohio residents who go above and beyond to positively change the perception of Cleveland as a desired destination for meetings/conventions and leisure travel.

“Research shows that residents of a destination are critical resources for those planning a trip and play an even greater role in creating a truly authentic experience throughout the visitor’s journey,” said David Gilbert, president and CEO, Destination Cleveland. “The interactions our residents have with travelers significantly help to change the perception of Cleveland and create unforgettable experiences that contribute to visitors’ decisions to come back.”

HOSPITALITY STAR AWARD

To recognize the vital role Northeast Ohio’s hospitality workers play in creating an authentic visitor experience, Destination Cleveland awards its [Hospitality Star Award](#) to a frontline staff member nominated for providing excellent customer service and hospitality to Cleveland visitors. The 2016 honor was awarded to Jay Casey, a bartender and Cleveland connoisseur at [Music Box Supper Club](#).

Nominated by his manager, Casey is known for serving Cleveland visitors their drink of choice with a side of Cleveland history. Regaling guests with stories of Cleveland’s past as well as the city’s more recent renaissance, Casey was noted as one who “shines a unique love and light on not just the Music Box or the Flats, but the entire city of Cleveland.”

Casey received this year’s Hospitality Star Award for providing a personalized tour of some of the city’s greatest gems ranging from its oldest bar to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame for a recent Music Box patron and newcomer to Cleveland. The guest shared his sincere gratitude with Casey’s manager, stating that Casey’s genuine hospitality helped him “fall in love with Cleveland.”

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Those eligible for the Hospitality Star nomination include anyone that interacts with a visitor during their stay, such as volunteers and staff at hotels, restaurants, attractions, transportation authorities, the airport, taxi cab companies, Uber and more. Past winners and the description of their superior service can be viewed [here](#).

CLEVELAND CHAMPIONS AWARD

Also recognized at the annual meeting was Ginenne Clark, events and publications coordinator for the Society for Photographic Education (SPE), as Destination Cleveland's 2016 Cleveland Champion. The annual [Cleveland Champions](#) award is given to a Northeast Ohio resident for their effort to help bring meetings and conventions to Cleveland.

In response to her employer's search for a host city for its 2019 National Conference, Clark channeled her passion for Cleveland by working with the Destination Cleveland sales team to design a convention/hotel package well-suited for SPE's meeting planners to host the meeting Downtown, a first for the Cleveland-based company. Thanks to Clark's efforts, the 2019 SPE National Conference will be held at [Hilton Cleveland Downtown](#) on March 3, 2019, and will bring approximately 1,500 attendees (2,043 total room nights; 500 on peak). The conference will generate an estimated \$1.8 million in economic impact.

Destination Cleveland's current list of Cleveland Champions ranges from local CEOs to young professionals who have been able to keep their company's meetings and events in Cleveland. For more information about the program and the critical role local influencers play in Cleveland's meetings and conventions industry, click [here](#).

For more information about Destination Cleveland or visitor-related developments, attractions and activities, please visit thisiscleveland.com, follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and subscribe to our channels on [YouTube](#) and [Pinterest](#).

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: *Destination Cleveland is Cleveland's convention and visitors bureau. This private, non-profit organization's mission is to drive economic impact and stimulate community vitality for Greater Cleveland through leisure and business travel. Cleveland welcomes more than 17 million visitors annually. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com.*