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DESTINATION CLEVELAND HONORS RESIDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

HOSPITALITY STAR, CLEVELAND CHAMPIONS AND LEGACY AWARDS PRESENTED AT ANNUAL MEETING

CLEVELAND (May 17, 2018) – [Destination Cleveland](#), Cuyahoga County's convention and visitors bureau, announced the recipients of its Hospitality Star, Cleveland Champions and Legacy awards today at its 2018 annual meeting. The awards are presented annually to Northeast Ohio residents who go above and beyond to positively change the perception of Cleveland as a destination for meetings and conventions as well as leisure travel.

"Whether someone is in Cleveland for leisure or business travel, our residents are key contributors in creating that positive first impression for visitors," said David Gilbert, president and CEO, Destination Cleveland. "Their enthusiasm and involvement in Northeast Ohio's travel and tourism industry directly affect Destination Cleveland's efforts to change the narrative about Cleveland."

HOSPITALITY STAR AWARD

The [Hospitality Star Award](#), which is given to a frontline staff member who is recognized by his or her peers as going above and beyond to provide excellent customer service and true hospitality to Cleveland visitors, was awarded to Veronica Sarmiento, administrative assistant at the Tudor Arms Hotel.

Nominated by her co-worker, Sarmiento is known for going the extra mile when it comes to assisting visitors at the Tudor Arms Hotel. One example of Sarmiento's exceptional work was helping a guest from Puerto Rico who was going to appointments at The Cleveland Clinic. The guest was shy and nervous about being in a new city, so every morning for two months, Sarmiento went to the guest's room with a wheelchair and escorted her to the hotel shuttle to meet with her Spanish-speaking contact at The Cleveland Clinic. Sarmiento's compassionate encounters are not limited to the hotel's international guests. During a wedding when parents found themselves without a sitter at the last minute, Sarmiento stopped what she was doing and watched their toddler son during the ceremony so that they could participate as members of the bridal party. Sarmiento's co-worker said, "her passion for guests has become a learning tool and is used in training modules for new employees."

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](#).

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CLEVELAND CHAMPIONS AWARD

The [Cleveland Champions Award](#), which recognizes an individual for his or her effort to bring meetings and conventions to Cleveland, was awarded to Rob Byrne, senior district sales manager for North American Breweries.

Byrne played a pivotal role in influencing North American Breweries' decision to bring its national sales meeting to Cleveland in November 2017. He suggested Cleveland as a potential host city and piqued North American Breweries' interest with his passion and enthusiasm for the region. Rob sought to infuse Cleveland into every aspect of the meeting with touches like Cleveland branded neon signs in local bars to an "epic" final event at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The North American Breweries National Sales Meeting brought in 700 attendees, 90 percent of whom were from out-of-town, with 1,500 total room nights. The meeting generated an estimated economic impact of more than \$800,000.

Destination Cleveland's current list of Cleveland Champions ranges from local CEOs to young professionals that 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](#).

DESTINATION CLEVELAND LEGACY AWARD

The Legacy Award, which recognizes an individual, group, corporation or organization's long-standing commitment and contributions to the growth of travel & tourism in Cleveland, was awarded to Bruce Akers, a long-time member of Destination Cleveland's Board of Directors.

Recognized throughout the community as a distinguished civil servant and civic leader, Akers has served on Destination Cleveland's board for 40 years – one of the longest tenures on a volunteer board in the Cleveland community. He has contributed to many committees including the Destination City Action Plan Steering Committee, Events Taskforce Committee, Governance and Nominating Committee, Public Affairs Outreach Committee and the Strategic Planning Task Force Committee. As part of his Board and committee work for the organization, Akers provides sound counsel, challenges the status quo and encourages the pursuit of strategic initiatives that will help change perceptions of Cleveland to grow the travel and tourism industry's impact on the region's economy. The community and institutional knowledge that Akers brings to his civic service has made him a change agent and has provided immeasurable value to Destination Cleveland's leadership team as the organization evolves its role within the community. In addition to his contributions to many community organizations, Akers dedicated his career to marketing and communications for area banks, retiring as senior vice president for civic affairs for KeyBank in 2001. Throughout his banking career, he also served as a councilman for 16 years and as the mayor of Pepper Pike for 20 years.

To learn more about Destination Cleveland or to keep up-to-date on new developments and activities in Northeast Ohio, please visit www.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 18 million visitors annually.*