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Rural Nevada's Top Tourism Volunteers Lauded at State Tourism Conference

EDITORS: For images of winners, see bit.ly/1iKLxU8



Courtesy of Nevada Commission on Tourism and from left to right: Brian Krolicki, Lt. Governor, State of Nevada Ben Rupert, Award Recipient, Nevada Indian Territory, 2014 Excellence in Tourism Award Sherry L. Rupert, Chair Nevada's Indian Territory

ELY, Nev. — Champions of Nevada's rural tourism industry were recognized Thursday at the VolunTourism Awards ceremony during the Rural Roundup conference offered annually by the Nevada Commission on Tourism (NCOT). A Nevada high school senior also was granted the \$1,000 June Stannard Rural Tourism Memorial Scholarship at the event.

"Rural tourism is such an important part of Nevada's tourism profile," Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, NCOT chairman, said. "The dedicated men and women in this industry have played an essential role in the success of rural tourism and I am so happy to be able to recognize their outstanding efforts and commend them on a job well done. We honor these volunteers who go above and beyond their regular job duties to



help market the extraordinary offerings found across our great state. They are certainly vital to Nevada tourism, which is a \$58 billion industry.”

NCOT presented six VolunTourism awards, one in each of Nevada’s six tourism territories — areas of similar culture and geography — along with two statewide excellence in tourism awards and the Nevada International Award. The honors were bestowed at the Bristlecone Convention Center.

“Some of Nevada’s most treasured attractions, from Hoover Dam to the Loneliest Road to Lake Tahoe, are found in the state’s rural areas,” Nevada Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs Director Claudia Vecchio said. “We are able to provide visitors with wonderful experiences and lifetime memories because of the dedication of those who work in rural tourism.”

Award recipients are as follows:

Cowboy Country Territory

Sheree Tibbals has more than 20 years of tourism-related experience with the Winnemucca Convention & Visitors Authority. She serves as treasurer for Cowboy Country Territory, overseeing Cowboy Country’s finances and writing all of the organization’s grants. She works consumer shows, participates in familiarization tours and participates on the marketing committee.

Indian Territory

Ben Rupert of Carson City works extensively to share his knowledge of the Paiute and Washoe people with the larger community, facilitating interest in and tourism to Nevada’s Indian cultural sites. Among other efforts to support Indian Territory, Rupert has helped promote the Stewart Indian School in Carson City. Skilled in the traditional arts of arrow making, drum making, bow making and fancy dancing, Rupert makes the effort to pass along that knowledge to younger generations.

Las Vegas Territory

Earl Jobson volunteers with the Las Vegas Territory monthly meetings and helps with the selection of educational speakers and venues. Jobson was reelected to the Las Vegas Territory board last June. He worked for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau for many years and has great knowledge of and relationships within the tourism industry, which benefits all Las Vegas Territory members.

Nevada Silver Trails Territory

Don Shanks of Pioche has promoted rural Nevada tourism since 1990. Currently volunteering as treasurer for Nevada Silver Trails Territory, Shanks has served in numerous positions within the organization and is its primary grant writer. He has worked on a variety of tourism endeavors, from marketing to infrastructure development, often seeing those projects through from start to completion.

Pony Express Territory

Lorraine Clark is a tireless promoter of rural Nevada tourism, supporting not only Pony Express Territory, but many of the area’s tourism organizations, including the Ely Chamber of Commerce. She worked with the Renaissance Society in Ely on the group’s mural projects, its Renaissance Village and its Art Bank. She is a member of the White Pine County Tourism and Recreation Board and she publishes the local arts and tourism magazine, Reflections.

Reno-Tahoe Territory



Dwight Borges is an active member of the Reno-Tahoe Territory, currently serving as chairman of the group's website committee. The owner of Borges Sleigh and Carriage Rides in Lake Tahoe also hosts numerous travel professionals and media visiting the Reno-Tahoe area on familiarization tours. Both activities help raise Reno Tahoe-Territory's profile in the travel industry.

Statewide Excellence in Grants Award

A.J. Frels, executive director of the Carson Valley Visitors Authority, writes all the applications for NCOT-administered grants for his agency. This past year, the Carson Valley Visitors Authority received more than \$53,000 in funding from NCOT's Marketing Grant Program and recently was awarded \$10,000 from NCOT's Projects Relating to Tourism Grant Program for a project to replace gateway signage into the Carson Valley to reflect the area's new brand.

Statewide Excellence in Tourism Award

Todd Simon of THS-Visuals works with destinations throughout the state to develop creative, professional tourism videos that bring rural Nevada to life. A member of the Reno Tahoe Territory, Simon has traveled far and wide — from West Wendover to Pahrump — to get the top-quality footage that is crucial to attracting today's tourist.

Nevada International Award

German tour operator America Unlimited and its CEO, Timo Kohlenberg, have demonstrated a willingness to sell and promote all of Nevada to the German-speaking markets of Europe. The company has embraced new itinerary ideas featuring lesser-known parts of rural Nevada while utilizing attention-getting marketing ideas to promote the state.

June Stannard Rural Tourism Memorial Scholarship

Elizabeth Ortiz, a senior at Valley High School in Las Vegas, is this year's winner of the \$1,000 June Stannard Memorial Scholarship. Ortiz participated in Valley High School's Academy of Hospitality and

Tourism program, and plans to earn a degree in hospitality management at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Ortiz says she was inspired last year after meeting Christopher Baldizan, vice president of entertainment at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino.

"I know I want to do the same thing, and fully invest myself in planning events and experiences for people that come to visit the city..." Ortiz wrote in her scholarship application essay.

Ortiz says she will be the first person in her family to attend college.

The June Stannard Rural Tourism Memorial Scholarship is given to a Nevada High School senior planning to pursue a hospitality-, travel- or tourism-related degree at an accredited college or university.

The Nevada Commission on Tourism (NCOT) is part of the Nevada Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs. NCOT is responsible for promoting and marketing Nevada as a travel destination to domestic and international travelers. Operating within a performance-based budget structure, NCOT is funded solely by a percentage of lodging tax paid by overnight guests throughout the state. For more, visit TravelNevada.com.