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INDUSTRY LEADERS TO CONVENE FOR THE 2004 ILLINOIS GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE ON TOURISM

CHICAGO, Ill. (March 8, 2004) – The 17th Annual Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism, the state's premier educational forum for the travel industry, will be held **March 29-31, 2004**, at the Chicago Hilton.

Hosted by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism and Visit Illinois, the conference will bring together hundreds of representatives from the state's tourism industry including hotels, attractions, convention and visitors bureaus, restaurants and destinations.

This year's conference will feature several nationally recognized travel industry leaders. Futurist **Ed Barlow** of *Creating the Future, Inc.* will explore influences affecting the tourism industry, renowned travel industry marketing expert **Peter Yesawich** of *Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell* will uncover the latest trends in consumer travel habits, attitudes and demands, and motivational speaker **Scott Friedman** will offer ideas on managing change and negotiating stress.

In addition, Illinois tourism leaders will share the latest statewide happenings during Illinois' State of the State of Tourism address on Tuesday, March 30. **Jack Lavin**, director of the **Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity**, and **Jan Kostner**, deputy director of the **Illinois Bureau of Tourism**, will discuss issues facing the Illinois tourism industry, as well as provide visitor and economic impact information from the past year and their vision for the future of the industry.

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“This is an important time for us to unite as an industry and to learn, work and partner together,” said Director Lavin. “The Governor’s Conference will provide an ideal setting for us to unify and build upon a strong industry, and I look forward to exploring best practices from respected industry professionals.”

A series of educational sessions will also take place during the three-day conference, as seasoned travel professionals share their insights on the latest travel research and trends, consumer behavior, the expanding role of the Internet, customer service – and most importantly, what it all means to Illinois.

The conference will conclude with the annual Governor's Awards Luncheon on March 31, which will honor outstanding tourism promotional efforts from throughout the state.

Delegates will again be able to receive continuing education credits from organizations such as the American Bus Association and the International Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus by attending conference sessions. Many organizations require these units as a measure of professional development.

For a complete conference schedule and list of speakers or to register for the 2004 Illinois Governor’s Conference on Tourism, visit the Illinois tourism Web site, **www.illinoistourism.org**, or call **866/GOV-2004**.

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The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.

Visit Illinois is a not-for-profit membership organization that serves as the primary umbrella for the Illinois travel and tourism industry. The group’s 29-member board of directors oversees efforts to promote and facilitate increased travel to and within Illinois with core services focusing on legislative support, education and professional development.