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INDUSTRY LEADERS “SET THE STAGE” FOR SUCCESS AT 2005 ILLINOIS GOVERNOR’S CONFERENCE ON TOURISM

State’s premier tourism education forum to be held in Chicago, March 29-31, 2005

CHICAGO – The 18th annual Illinois Governor’s Conference on Tourism, themed “Setting the Stage,” will be held **March 29-31, 2005**, at the Hilton Chicago. Hosted by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism (DCEO/IBOT) and Visit Illinois, the conference will put the spotlight on Illinois’ burgeoning tourism industry through an innovative educational program, numerous networking opportunities, and the annual Governor’s Awards program.

“The travel industry’s impact on Illinois’ economy is significant - contributing nearly \$23 billion in 2003. And, as a result of our many innovative efforts, its impact continues to grow,” said Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich. “This annual conference offers delegates an unparalleled opportunity to acquire valuable information and make contacts to help their businesses succeed in this competitive marketplace.”

Illinois tourism officials will share the latest statewide news during the 2005 State of the State of Tourism address. DCEO Director Jack Lavin and Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, will discuss the changing landscape of Illinois tourism and its role in statewide economic development. They’ll also discuss opportunities and challenges facing the industry over the next year and beyond.

In addition to addresses from Lavin and Kostner, the conference’s educational program will focus on industry trends, marketing best practices, research and evaluation, and what it all means to Illinois.

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Governor Rod Blagojevich
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism

Conference speaker highlights include:

- Newly appointed Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) President **Roger J. Dow** speaking to the common interests and concerns for the U.S. travel trade;
- Planning and entertaining entrepreneur **Debi Lilly**, who regularly works with Oprah Winfrey, addressing the latest trends in special events;
- **Donna DeBerry**, consultant and former Wyndham vice president of Diversity Affairs, discussing the benefits of making diversity a key component of any organization;
- **Robert Canton**, director of the Hospitality and Leisure Practice of Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, presenting the latest research findings and providing an outlook on the recent progressions of the travel industry; and
- **Susan Sweeney**, author of *Internet Marketing for Your Tourism Business*, discussing her proven step-by-step plan for building Web site traffic while sharing how attendees can take advantage of business opportunities online.

The conference will also feature several networking events, including an icebreaker at Chicago's House of Blues and an evening reception, "Illinois on Stage," where attendees will celebrate Chicago's dynamic theater scene.

The conference will conclude with the annual Governor's Awards Luncheon on March 31, which recognizes marketing excellence in Illinois' tourism industry.

For a complete conference schedule and list of speakers or to register for the 2005 Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism, visit **www.illinoistourism.org** or **www.visitillinois.net**, or call **888-658-0749**.

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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.