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Statewide Tourism Awards Presented at Governor's Conference

(HELENA) – Four statewide tourism award winners were honored for their achievements by the Montana Tourism and Recreation Industry at the 2010 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation held in Kalispell, April 8-9. Tourism award winners are selected for their outstanding contributions to Montana's tourism industry.

"The recipients of these awards are representative of an industry comprised of committed, creative individuals who are eager to share with others what makes our home so special," said Governor Brian Schweitzer. "I am proud of the work that tourism is able to accomplish collectively in making Montana a better place to work and play and raise our families."

"Tourism has a vital role in Montana's economic health," said Commerce Director Anthony Preite. "Annually ten million people visit Montana, spending \$3 billion dollars during their stay. It is the people and communities behind the industry that have solidified tourism's paramount role in Montana's economic and social well-being."

2010 Tourism Award Winners

Lee Holmes—Tourism Person of the Year
71st National Folk Festival—Tourism Event of the Year
The Helena Institute—Tourism Partnership of the Year
Butte—Tourism Community of the Year

Lee Holmes, owner and operator of Helena's Last Chance Tour Train, received the **Tourism Person of the Year** Award. The Tour Train is one of Montana's most recognizable and longest running businesses of its kind in Montana. Through his business and other endeavors, Holmes has been working to enhance visitor opportunities in Helena for nearly 40 years. He has been a team player who has looked for ways to strengthen his community through communication and collaboration.

In addition to his tourism business, he is an educator who brings his passion into the classroom by educating his students on the importance of tourism as a vital component to maintaining our historical and cultural heritage.

Holmes has served on the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce, serving two terms on the Board of Directors as well as Vice Chair of Tourism. In addition he has been involved with the Helena Hospitality Group and the Helena Convention and Visitors Bureau. Under his leadership, the Helena High School DECCA Club created interpretive displays at the Gates of the Mountains for the Mann Gulch Fire.

In presenting this award, it was noted that, “(Lee) is a very thoughtful, resourceful and proactive advocate for Montana’s tourism industry.”

In recognition of an event that supports our vital downtowns and main streets, the **Tourism Event of the Year** honored the **71st National Folk Festival**.

Butte was chosen out of a pool of over 22 cities to host this festival for a total of three years. This was the second year of the festival and it faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles given the economic climate it was compelled to operate under. Despite the financial challenges, the festival was able to raise \$1.2 million in order to hold the event.

Approximately 120,000 people came to Butte to enjoy the 3-day event which transformed its uptown historical district and generated publicity in nearly 100 newspapers and magazines across the country. Out of area visitors spent an average of \$177 per person in local businesses. In addition, much of the \$1.2 million needed to produce the event was spent directly in the local economy. Thus the direct gain from the 2009 festival was \$17.5 million spread across many small Montana businesses.

The **Tourism Partnership of the Year** award was presented to the **Helena Institute**. The Institute evolved through years of collaboration. It began with a commitment to fulfill a vision to implement a community brand in order to provide a boost to tourism. After Helena completed the brand process, they learned that their strength lay in the wide array of experiential learning opportunities Helena could offer in the arts, outdoor recreation and history.

The Helena Institute was born out of the need for the community to have an organization that could harness and take ownership of the myriad of volunteers that stepped up to offer and support these learning opportunities. In its first year the Institute offered 86 classes over a two month period. It was with the tremendous outpouring of support from the community, such as the City of Helena, the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Helena, Inc., the media, the artists and instructors as well as the businesses and lodging properties, that Helena was able to embrace and implement their new “Learn to Live” brand so thoroughly.

Butte was the recipient of the **Tourism Community of the Year** award. Butte was chosen for the exceptional way in which they have chosen to embrace a festival economy in an effort to revitalize their town and recapture a time when their community was not only centered around industry and commerce but was also a center of entertainment and an exciting place to visit for a memorable experience.

All of their major events, such as the National Folk Festival, Evel Knievel Days and An-Ri-Ra Montana Irish Festival, have shown creativity and innovation in using the steep hills and storied streets of Butte's historic district as venues that showcase the historical resources of the community, transforming them into a breathtaking backdrop for the festivities that highlight the most attractive elements of the community.

These awards are presented annually to individuals, events, partnerships and communities whose efforts to promote or develop Montana's tourism opportunities have preserved or enhanced tourism's role in Montana's economy. A list of previous award winners can be found at: <http://travelmontana.state.mt.us/conference/awards.asp>.

Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's largest industries. In 2009, 10 million people visited Montana spending almost \$3 billion during their stay. Over 42,000 jobs are directly and indirectly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$1 billion in total personal and proprietors' income for Montana residents.*

* 2008 economic figures

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