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Statewide Tourism Awards Presented at Governor's Conference

(HELENA) – Three statewide tourism award winners were honored for their achievements by the Montana Tourism and Recreation Industry at the 2011 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation held in Helena, March 28-29. Tourism award winners are selected for their outstanding contributions to Montana's tourism industry.

"I am extremely proud of the work being accomplished by our tourism industry," said Governor Brian Schweitzer. "The passion for our history, our places and the experiences to be had here elevates Montana in the eyes of our visitors."

"Economically tourism helps propel Montana forward," said Commerce Director Dore Schwinden. "When we create opportunities for our visitors to more deeply experience what Montana has to offer they are more inclined to stay longer and spend more in our downtowns and main streets."

2011 Tourism Award Winners

Dan Thyer—Tourism Person of the Year
Missoula Marathon—Tourism Event of the Year
Glacier National Park Centennial Committee—Tourism Partnership of the Year

Dan Thyer, Curator of Living History for the Montana Heritage Commission, received the **Tourism Person of the Year** Award. It is Thyer's dedication and passion for Montana's history in developing and successfully managing the Nevada City Living History Museum that earned him the honors this year.

Thyer's deep knowledge of history, keen eye for the authentic and ability to inspire a talented volunteer workforce has built Nevada City's Living History Museum into a well-respected, well-attended destination attraction for Montana's visitors.

In addition to developing the Living History program from the ground up since 2001, Thyer also organized, planned and promoted the Burnt Hole Rendezvous and Historical Reenactment in West Yellowstone from 1992 through 2005. He also resurrected the West Yellowstone Sled Dog Race which originated in 1917 and built it into one of the larger sled dog races in the lower 48.

In presenting this award, it was noted that, “(Dan) has a deep-seated love and appreciation for Montana and her history. Montana’s residents, our industry and our visitors have greatly benefited from his tireless efforts.”

In recognition of an event that supports our vital downtowns and showcases the best of Montana, the **Tourism Event of the Year** honored the **Missoula Marathon**.

In four years, the Missoula Marathon has almost quadrupled in size bringing an economic impact to the area of \$1.3 million during the 2010 event. For last year’s event, participants came from all 50 states plus as far away as Khazakstan and Singapore. 77% of the out-of-state participants said the marathon was their primary reason for traveling to Montana; and for every out of state participant, they averaged an additional two people that traveled with them to the state. With over 90% of the participants vowing to return for the event within 5 years, the economic benefits will only multiply.

In addition, the Missoula Marathon was named *Runner’s World Magazine’s* Best Overall Marathon in the United States in 2010, beating out larger, more well-known events like the Chicago Marathon, the Boston Marathon and the Big Sur Marathon.

The **Tourism Partnership of the Year** award was presented to the **Glacier National Park Centennial Committee**.

In 2011, Glacier National Park had their 100th year Centennial Commemoration. The Park experienced an 8% increase in visitation. There were 42 commemorative events, seven legacy projects, 79 educational programs formally engaging 4700 students and \$1.5 million philanthropic dollars were raised to benefit the park for years to come.

The Centennial Committee succeeded in making the commemoration a community-based, partner-driven celebration. Over 35 community partners including tourism organizations, private businesses, park concessions, non-profits, community groups, the National Park Service and tribal organizations worked together in making the Centennial Commemoration the success that it was.

It was noted during the presentation of the award that the leadership, energy and diplomacy of Kassandra Hardy, Centennial Coordinator for Glacier National Park, was the driving force behind the success and accomplishments of the Centennial Committee.

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 and primary revenue drivers. Annually over 10 million people visit Montana spending over \$2 billion during their stay. Over 25,000 jobs are directly and indirectly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$661 million in total personal and proprietors' income for Montana residents.

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