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CONTACT: Sarah Lawlor
Montana Department of Commerce
Travel Montana
406-841-2873

Marissa Kozel
Montana Department of Commerce
406-841-2772

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 2007 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation held in Helena, April 2-3. Tourism award winners are selected for their outstanding contributions to Montana's tourism industry.

"I am pleased to see these individuals and organizations recognized for the good work they do" said Governor Brian Schweitzer, "Their efforts benefit us all and I am grateful for their dedication and hard work on behalf of Montana's tourism industry."

"The role tourism plays in Montana's economic framework cannot be underestimated" said Commerce Director Anthony Preite, "It is a pleasure and an honor to be able to recognize these individuals, communities and partnerships that keep the tourism industry at the forefront in Montana."

2007 Tourism Award Winners

Mike Scholz—Tourism Person of the Year

Roundup—Tourism Community of the Year

75th Anniversary of the Montana State Fair—Tourism Event of the Year

Montana Dinosaur Trail—Tourism Partnership of the Year

Mike Scholz, owner and manager of well-known Buck's T-4 Lodge in Big Sky for the past 35 years, received the **Tourism Person of the Year** Award. Scholz has been a stalwart supporter and contributor to Montana's tourism industry for all of his professional life.

In announcing Scholz's award, fellow Governor's Tourism Advisory Council member, Carl Kochman noted that "Many of the letters of support accompanying Mike's nomination highlighted his infinite vision for the industry and his ability to make things happen." A recent

and vital example of this ability to bring partners to the table for the greater good has been his involvement in SB 284 – “The Best Place First” legislation. Scholz has been the driving force behind this legislation and it was his ability to see the collective good that kept the process moving forward. SB 284, which is awaiting the Governor’s signature, will result in significant increases in dollars to be used for tourism promotion and heritage preservation on a state and local level.

Roundup was honored as **Tourism Community of the Year** for doing exceptional work in promoting, preserving and improving their image and visitor resources for the benefit of not only their visitors, but also their residents and Montana as well.

Numerous individuals from Roundup and Musselshell County worked collectively to create a reason for people to visit Roundup that turned into an enjoyable and sustainable tourism event for the community and regional area. The result of this collaboration is the Roundup Independence Days Extravaganza (RIDE), which will celebrate its third anniversary this year. By offering a variety of entertainment over a three day period, this event encourages visitors to spend one or more nights in Roundup, thus providing the economic stimulus and tourism exposure the community desired. In addition, the success of the event has led to a revitalization of community pride, leading to long-term tourism goals such as building a new paleontology museum.

In due celebration of a major milestone this past year, the **Tourism Event of the Year** honored the **75th Anniversary of the Montana State Fair**.

In presenting this award to the Montana State Fair it was noted that it has maintained the traditions of the fair that have perpetuated its 75 year history, but at the same time it hasn’t failed to evolve with the times as well, providing attractions, entertainment, activities and competitions that rival many in its same class. For example, its rodeo component is now one of the top 50 rodeos in the country, attracting 70% of the best PRCA athletes in the U.S.

The State Fair provides a strong economic stimulus to the greater Great Falls area as well as other areas of the state. The Fair’s reach extends far beyond the boundaries of its host city. More than 60% of its attendees come from beyond the county line and often from beyond Montana’s borders, drawing patrons from as far away as Canada and Florida.

The **Tourism Partnership of the Year** award was presented to the **Montana Dinosaur Trail**. This unique collaboration of 15 facilities in 12 central and eastern communities includes in addition four tourism regions, two chambers of commerce and four government agencies. Each of the partner facilities offer significant, unique and in some cases, world-class displays and activities for visitors.

The Trail itself has elevated Montana’s prominence as a dinosaur destination by educating visitors and residents about the variety of dinosaur experiences available and the fascinating role dinosaurs have played in Montana’s story. *Newsweek*, *USA Today* and *The New York Daily News* are just a few of the media outlets that have devoted extensive coverage to this experience unique to Montana.

This partnership has not only provided an educational and user-friendly opportunity to highlight Montana's prehistoric treasures but it has also meant a welcome boost to some of Montana's most economically struggling regions.

These awards are presented annually to individuals, events, 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 leading industries. In 2006, over 10.3 million people visited Montana spending \$2.9 billion during their stay. Over 36,500 jobs are directly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in close to \$644 million in total personal income for Montana residents.

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