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## REIST NAMED AS FELLOW AT APPALACHIAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has named Tami Reist, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA) president and CEO, as a 2020-2021 Appalachian Leadership Institute Fellow.

As a Fellow, Reist will participate in the Appalachian Leadership Institute, an extensive nine-month series of online skill-building seminars featuring regional experts, peer-to-peer learning, and case study analysis beginning in mid-October through July, 2021. Topics include:

- Designing effective economic development project proposals;
- Integrating community assets into long-lasting economic development strategies;
- Identifying resources available to spur economic development;
- Locating and accessing investment capital from a variety of public and private sources;
- Preparing competitive applications for public grant opportunities; and
- Using expanded leadership skills to create strong coalitions.

Upon completion of the program, Reist will automatically become part of the Appalachian Leadership Institute Network, a peer-to-peer working group committed to Appalachia's future.

## ANNUAL MEETING

### NEW PROJECTS, RESUMPTION OF MARKETING PROGRAMS UNDERWAY

Nearly 150 tourism professionals from across the region attended the 56th Annual Meeting of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA) at the 210 At The Tracks meeting venue in Gadsden on Thursday, Sept. 24. Along with the Year In Review presentation and the popular PEAK Awards Luncheon, Rita Suiter of FiveStar Customer Service Strategies conducted three informative seminars and the 2020-2021 Program of Work was released.

“It was exciting and encouraging to see so many attend the annual meeting during this time of a pandemic. It was a reflection of the resilience of our profession and shows a strong interest in bringing back our vibrant tourism and travel industry,” said Tami Reist, President/CEO of AMLA.

The North Alabama tourism and travel industry achieved a record \$3.2 billion economic impact on the region in 2019 according a study released recently by the Alabama Tourism Department. The figure of \$3,209,283,833 represents an 7.8% growth over 2018's \$2,926,299,074.

“One of the highlights of the meeting was announcing that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while bad, was not as bad as we had feared with the region reporting new only an 18% downward turn instead of the anticipated 28%-30% projected at the first of the year,” Reist said.



*Some 150 North Alabama tourism professionals attended the 2020 AMLA Annual Meeting while practicing safe distancing at 210 At the Tracks meeting venue in Gadsden.*



*Alabama Tourism Director Lee Sentell opened the AMLA annual meeting with an informed outline of how the state's marketing program adjusted to this year's pandemic.*

## NEW PROGRAMS ANNOUNCED

Along with the resumption of marketing programs delayed by the pandemic this year, the 2020-2021 Program of Work released at the annual meeting includes a number of new targeted projects.

New programs in development, or already completed include a Retire to North Alabama marketing program, a North Alabama Wine Trail app, a North Alabama Legislators

*Continues on page 3, see Annual Meeting*

[ A NOTE FROM TAMI ]

# The Road Ahead

It was exciting and encouraging to see so many attend the annual meeting during this time of a pandemic. It was a reflection of the resilience of our profession and shows a strong interest in bringing back our vibrant tourism and travel industry.

A special thanks to the venue staff and local officials who helped put on an excellent event while still being mindful of taking the necessary precautions to keep all of us safe while doing so.

While this year's pandemic threw many of our marketing projects into neutral, the annual report session at the annual meeting provided the opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments during the previous 12 months.

Display advertising continued in eight consumer publications and six trade publications, reaching an estimated 4.5 million readers. Based on analytics, more than 149,000 people visited our website including nearly 130,000 unique visitors with an average of 15 pages viewed per visit. Our intensive social media marketing program generated 60,000+ followers on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Printrest.

Some 200 story ideas on what to see and do during the pandemic were distributed to newspapers, magazines and online travel editors in five primary state markets. (This is Alabama just picked up Melea's blog on where to view fall foliage in North Alabama this autumn.) Other success included the development of the Safe Stay program and the We Care program, hosting of Miami-based travel photographer Scott Baker who currently has a feature proposed to a national RV magazine, joining the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, launching the Coupons and Specials section on our consumer website, and many more programs.

The annual meeting also let us move out of neutral and into drive for the coming year with the release of the 2020-2021 Program of Work. The road ahead includes resumption of delayed projects, such as the North Alabama Wedding Planner, the North Alabama Vacation Planner, updating and production of all of our trail brochures, and continued development of the Second Helping job program.

Exciting new programs already in development include e-mail/text message apps for the Craft Beer Trail, Wine Trail, and BBQ trail; the launching of Tina's Travels video blog on YouTube and Facebook by Member Services Rep Tina Lawler; a comprehensive guide to state legislators and how to contact them via an easily accessible section on our website; and the launching of the Retire to North Alabama marketing program.

A recently released study by the Destination Analysts organization shows that traveler confidence increases with each successful trip. In fact those who are already traveling have nearly three times the confidence level in their ability to travel safely right now compared to the average American traveler. Even while having to wear the masks, using hand sanitizer, staying away from crowds as much as possible, these travelers had a "wonderful trip" and found the experience to be "restorative" and "fun."

The days ahead are looking promising, and I believe we'll be back on the road to success sooner rather than later during the coming year.

*Tami Reist*

Tami Reist  
President & CEO

*"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." --Helen Keller*



Tami Reist  
President & CEO  
Alabama Mountain Lakes  
Tourist Association

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P.O. Box 2537  
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www.aml4tourism.com

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Katy Norton - Chair  
Jennifer Moore - Incoming Chair  
Danielle Gibson - Secretary  
Sandy Thompson - Treasurer  
Hugh Stump - Past Chair

## Executive Committee Members

Chad Davis, Donny Wilson,  
Lisa Baker, Craig Johnston

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Thereasa Hulgan, Alabama Bass Trail

## STAFF

### President/CEO

Tami Reist

Tami@northalabama.org

### Vice President of Operations & Marketing

Angie Pierce

Angie@northalabama.org

### Visitor Services Rep

Randy Paul Stepleton

RandyPaul@northalabama.org

### Membership Recruitment & Development

#### Legislative Liaison

Tina Lawler

Tina@northalabama.org

#### Social Media Manager

Melea Hames

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#### Member Services Representatives

Owen Chapman

owen@northalabama.org

Jerry Yarbrough

info@northalabama.org

#### Program Director of Alabama Bass Trail

Kay Donaldson

Kay@alabamabasstrail.org

#### Program Coordinator of Alabama Bass Trail

Justin Graves

Justin@alabamabasstrail.org

## AFFILIATE GROUPS:

Southeast Tourism Society,  
Southeastern Outdoor Press Association,  
Alabama Destination Marketing Organization,  
Alabama Hospitality Association,  
Alabama Travel Council,  
Appalachian Regional Commission,  
US Travel Assn., National Tour Assn.  
American Assn. of Retirement Communities  
Leave No Trace

## NORTH ALABAMA COUNTIES

### SERVED BY AMLA:

Blount, Cherokee, Colbert, Cullman, DeKalb,  
Etowah, Franklin, Jackson,  
Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison,  
Marion, Marshall, Morgan, Winston

# ANNUAL MEETING

*Continues from Page 1*

section on the NorthAlabama.org website, representation for tourism on key economic development programs including the Rural Recovery Accelerator Program



*Rita Suiter of FiveStar Customer Service Strategies conducted three informative seminars for members at the annual meeting.*

committee and the Economic Development Association of Alabama, and a new internet program showcasing member destinations with unscripted videos posted on YouTube and Facebook.

See details about these programs on page 4.

## PEAK AWARD WINNERS

Eleven individuals and organizations were recognized for their accomplishments during this past year during the 2020 PEAK Awards Luncheon. The program pays tribute to tourism leaders, attractions, festivals and organizations that set the bar for North Alabama's \$3 billion tourism industry.

**Northern Star Award - Haley Newton, Joe Wheeler State Park Facility Operator.**

The Northern Star Award is presented to an individual, such as a ranger, guide and a front line employee, who has gone "above and beyond" expectations.

**Good Neighbor Award - Philip Formby, Sand Mountain Park and Amphitheatre Operations Director.**

The "Good Neighbor" Friend of Tourism Award is presented to a person or organization whose body of work has had a significant impact on tourism in the past year.

**Chairman's Cup - Fred Hunter, Absolutely Alabama television show, Birmingham.**

The Chairman's Cup Award is given annually to a travel writer or media person who has over time demonstrated support of AMLA, the region and its tourism activities.

**Young Professional of the Year Award - Maryanne Floyd, Decatur Morgan County Tourism Communications Director.**

The Young Professional of the Year "Green Apple Award" is awarded to a person who has been in the tourism business less than seven years and has exhibited extraordinary leadership skills and initiative associated with their position.

**Lasting Impression Award - Scotty Kennedy, Red Bay Museum Curator.**

The Lasting Impression Award is presented to an attraction, event, person or organization that has provided a "lasting impression" on tourists thereby improving the overall image of tourism in North Alabama.

**President's Awards - Hilda Smith, Director Alabama Chapter of Texas Equasearch; Jana Kuner, Huntsville International Airport Public Relations Manager; Mindy Hanan, Alabama restaurant and Hospitality Association President/CEO.**

The President's Award is presented to any person or organization whose tourism-related project created awareness or presented a positive image for North Alabama in the past year.

**Top Performing Ambassador Award - Zenovia Stephens, Huntsville.**

The Top Performing North Alabama Ambassador Award recognizes the impact and achievements of internet bloggers and creators.

**Event of the Year - Apollo 50th Anniversary Celebration, Huntsville.**

The Event of the Year award is presented to the AMLA member special event or festival that has made a great contribution to tourism in the past year.

**Attraction of the Year - Cook Museum of Natural Science, Decatur.**

The Attraction of the Year award is presented to the AMLA member attraction that has made a great contribution to tourism in the past year.

**Organization of the Year - Land Trust of North Alabama, Huntsville.**

The Organization of the Year award is presented to the AMLA member organization that has contributed significantly to the betterment and development of tourism in North Alabama in the past year.

**Tourism Professional of the Year - Pete Doyle, Holiday Inn Research Park General Manager, Huntsville.**

The Tourism Professional of the Year award is presented to an individual or employee of an AMLA member organization who has made a great contribution to tourism in the past year.



*Full scholarships to the Southeast Tourism Society's 2021 Marketing College were presented to 14 North Alabama tourism professionals at the AMLA Annual Meeting. Those receiving the certificates were Roger Steele, Maggie Barnes, Carson Dabbs, Jamie Christian, John Moseley, Katrina Hubbard, Ann E. McDermitt, Lynne Williams, Danielle Gibson, Andrea Turner, Sarah Stahl, Katie Kirkland, Haley Rutland, and Tina Lawler.*



# MARKETING PROJECTS

## INTERNET APPS, RETIREMENT MARKETING ON TAP FOR THE COMING YEAR

The Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA) announced the resumption of a number of marketing programs delayed by the COVID-19 virus during the year, along with a selection of new targeted projects for the coming fiscal year during their recent annual meeting.

Resuming production are the North Alabama Wedding Planner, the North Alabama Vacation Planner, and updates on eight trails brochures - North Alabama Barbecue Trail, North Alabama Scenic Motorcycle Routes, North Alabama Train Depots, North Alabama Waterfalls, North Alabama Craft Beer Trail, North Alabama Outdoors, and the North Alabama Wine Trail.

Topping the list of new targeted projects is the Retire to North Alabama marketing program. Location photography and video, a new website, and a printed guide are all part of the program.

“Alabama has been rated as one of the top 10 states to retire to and AMLA is building off of this to get the North Alabama message out,” AMLA President/CEO Tami Reist said.

The web site, which may now be viewed via a link on the main NorthAlabama.org home

page, includes a cost of living calculation for each of the 16 counties in the region, videos, and a search for finding a neighborhood based on specific interest.

Another new digital program for the year is a Wine Trail app, which is also live on the NorthAlabama.org website. The unique app does not require a download and features realtime information on North Alabama’s wineries and events instantly delivered via text and email.

As part of its advocacy program, AMLA will be adding a new section to their website that will provide information on all of North Alabama’s elected state representatives and senators.

“Advocacy with elected officials on the importance of the tourism industry to the economic health and quality of life of North Alabama is critical,” explained Reist.

“Surveys of our members showed a need to keep them informed on who their local state elected officials are and how to contact them was an important issue. This new component of our website will be the go-to site to easily access this information,” she said.

Advocacy includes research and public education to lobbying elected officials and voter engagement. These activities are especially important when you want to make



The new Retire to North Alabama section of the NorthAlabama.org website is now available.

sure that underrepresented and vulnerable communities have a voice in decisions that affect them.

Economic development is a mainstay of the North Alabama Program of Work, and AMLA will expand on its OPAL: A New Gem in North Alabama’s String of Pearls booklet built around the state Opportunity Zones Alabama (OPAL) incentives. The book includes individual maps of each county in the region showing the designated opportunity zone locations, detailed information about each zone, and how developers can take advantage of the program.

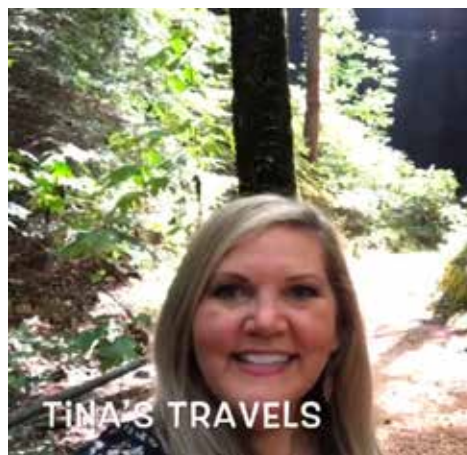
For this marketing year, AMLA’s Tami Reist is serving on the Rural Recovery Accelerator Program committee, and has joined the Economic Development Association of Alabama.

AMLA Member Services Representative Tina Lawler has launched a new internet program showcasing member destinations with unscripted videos posted on YouTube and Facebook.

To refer a new member to AMLA for the publication, contact AMLA Member Services Rep Tina Lawler by calling 256-350-3500 or 800-648-5381. You may also email her at Tina@northalabama.org.



A new Wine Trail app has been released on AMLA’s NorthAlabama.org home page, allowing guests to receive text and email messages on trail destinations.



AMLA Member Services Rep Tina Lawler has launched a new internet program showcasing member destinations with unscripted videos posted on YouTube and Facebook.

[ RECOGNITION ]

# 2020 PEAK AWARD WINNERS

Shown presenting the awards are AMLA President/CEO Tami Reist (left) and AMLA Chair Katy Norton, Marshall County CVB.



**2020 CHAIRMAN'S CUP - FRED HUNTER, ABSOLUTELY ALABAMA, BIRMINGHAM.**



**2020 NORTHERN STAR AWARD - HALEY NEWTON, JOE WHEELER STATE PARK, ROGERSVILLE.**



**2020 PRESIDENT'S AWARD - JANA KUNER, HUNTSVILLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.**



**2020 PRESIDENT'S AWARD - HILDA SMITH, ALABAMA CHAPTER TEXAS EQUASEARCH.**



**2020 EVENT OF THE YEAR - APOLLO 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, HUNTSVILLE.**



**2020 LASTING IMPRESSION AWARD - SCOTT KENNEDY, RED BAY MUSEUM, RED BAY.**



**2020 PRESIDENT'S AWARD - MINDY HANAN, ALABAMA RESTAURANT AND HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION.**



**2020 ATTRACTION OF THE YEAR - COOK MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE, DECATUR.**



**2020 TOP PERFORMING NORTH ALABAMA AMBASSADOR - ZENOVIA STEPHENS, @BLACKADVENTURECREW.**



**2020 GREEN APPLE AWARD, YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR - MARYANNE FLOYD, DECATUR MORGAN COUNTY TOURISM.**



**2020 ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR - LAND TRUST OF NORTH ALABAMA, HUNTSVILLE**



**2020 TOURISM PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR - PETE DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER, HOLIDAY INN RESEARCH PARK, HUNTSVILLE.**



# MEMBER EVENTS & TRAVEL SHOWS

**DUE TO THE FLUID SITUATION WITH THE COVID-19 VIRUS, DATES AND LOCATIONS ARE TENTATIVE. PLEASE CONFIRM ACTIVITY BEFORE TRAVELING LONG DISTANCES.**

**Association of Tennessee Valley Governments**  
October 27-28, 2020  
Gatlinburg, TN

**STS Symposium**  
November 30-December 2, 2020  
Roswell, GA

**Alabama State Tourism Meetings**  
> November 8 and 9  
Auburn, Opelika Conference Center  
> February 8 and 9, 2021  
Location TBD  
> November 15 and 16, 2021  
Location TBD

**2020 STS Marketing College**  
December 6-11, 2020  
Macon, GA

**East Tennessee Fishing Show & Expo**  
January 21-24, 2021  
Knoxville, TN

**Louisville Boat, RV & Sport Show**  
January 27-31, 2021  
Louisville, KY

**STS Connections**  
TBD

**Indianapolis Boat, Sport & Travel Show**  
February 19-27, 2021  
Indianapolis, IN

**Memphis Southern Women's Show**  
March 5-7, 2021  
Memphis, TN

**Canoeacopia**  
March 12-14, 2021  
Madison, WI

**Nashville Southern Women's Show**  
April 9-12, 2021  
Nashville, TN

**Tourism Bash**  
Tourism Bash April 21  
Alabama State Quarterly Meeting  
April 22  
Montgomery, AL

**Women of Joy Conference**  
April 23-25, 2021  
Pigeon Forge, TN

**Atlanta Travel Adventure Show**  
April 24-25, 2021  
Atlanta, GA

**Alabama League of Municipalities**  
May 22-25, 2021  
Mobile, AL

**2021 STS Marketing College**  
May 23-28, 2021  
TBD, GA

**IPW**  
May 10-14, 2021  
Las Vegas, NV

**Men's Gridiron Conference**  
June 18-19,  
Location TBD

**Alabama Press Association Annual Conference**  
June TBA, 2021  
Gulf Shores, AL

**STS Congressional Summit**  
June 21-24, 2021  
Washington, DC

**Hydrofest**  
June 26-27, 2021  
Guntersville, AL

**Tennessee Valley Hunting & Fishing Expo**  
TBD, Huntsville AL

**Alabama Governor's Conference**  
August 28-31, 2021  
Advisory Board Meeting on August 29  
The Lodge at Gulf State Park  
Gulf Shores, AL

**ACCA**  
August, 2021  
Orange Beach, AL

**Rural Tourism Conference**  
October 18-20, 2021  
Sweetwater, TN

**SEOPA Annual Meeting**  
October 6-9, 2021  
Daniels, WV

## 2020-21 BOARD & MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

- **January 19, 2021**  
AMLA Board & Membership Meeting  
Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives  
Athens, AL
- **April 20, 2021**  
AMLA Board & Membership Meeting  
Willow Oak Ranch  
Russellville, AL
- **July 27, 2021**  
AMLA Board & Membership Meeting  
The Charm at Burns Bluff  
Albertville, AL
- **September 23, 2021**  
AMLA Annual Meeting  
Florence Conference Center  
Florence, AL

## 2020-21 SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING

- **February 23, 10am**  
Florence Lauderdale Tourism  
Randa Hovater  
Social Trends for 2021
- **April 13, 10am**  
Huntsville  
Larkin Grant  
Blogging
- **August 24, 10am**  
Wheeler Wildlife Refuge  
Maryanne Floyd  
How to Begin an Ambassador Program
- **October TBD**  
Guntersville  
Lake and River Fun

## EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

- **American Association of Retirement Communities Certification Seminar**  
May 20, 2021  
Jackson Center  
Huntsville, AL

## ALABAMA BASS TRAIL NORTH DIVISION TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE:

- **FEBRUARY 27, 2021**  
PICKWICK LAKE HOSTED BY FLORENCE LAUDERDALE TOURISM BOARD
- **MARCH 13, 2021**  
LAKE GUNTERSVILLE HOSTED BY THE MARSHALL COUNTY CVB
- **APRIL 10, 2021**  
WHEELER LAKE HOSTED BY DECATUR MORGAN COUNTY TOURISM
- **MAY 15, 2021**  
WEISS LAKE HOSTED BY THE TOWN OF LEESBURG
- **JUNE 19, 2021**  
NEELY HENRY LAKE HOSTED BY THE CITY OF GADSDEN

## ALABAMA BASS TRAIL 2021 CHAMPIONSHIP

- **LEWIS SMITH LAKE**  
OCTOBER 22 & 23, 2021  
HOST: CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF WALKER COUNTY

# AROUND THE REGION

## GRAVES JOINS ALABAMA BASS TRAIL

The Alabama Bass Trail (ABT) announced its hiring of Justin Graves, who will serve as tournament director. Graves will be responsible for working with ABT Program Director Kay Donaldson to promote the state of Alabama as a year-round fishing destination and coordinate all events held by the ABT while serving as the main contact for anglers. He will assume responsibilities on November 1, 2020.



*Alabama Bass Trail Tournament Director Justin Graves.*

"I am very excited to welcome Justin to the Alabama Bass Trail staff. Having worked in Division I athletics for numerous years, he is no stranger to large event logistics and execution. Justin is an avid angler who has a passion and love for the outdoors, and we are excited to see what new energy and ideas he brings to the role of tournament director," said Program Director Kay Donaldson.

Graves comes to the ABT with 19 years of professional communications and marketing experience. He spent the previous three years working in Division I college athletics as the Director of Sports Information at Alabama A&M University. While at Alabama A&M, he served as the primary media contact for the university's athletic programs while overseeing gameday operations for football, men and women's basketball, women's soccer and baseball. During 2018, he oversaw a rebranding campaign for Alabama A&M athletics, which included the redesign of the department's website, [aamusports.com](http://aamusports.com). He also oversaw the operations of the Alabama A&M athletics media platforms, which includes the digital streaming of all football, men's basketball and women's basketball games.

Prior to arriving at Alabama A&M, Graves spent seven years as a sportswriter

at The Decatur Daily and five years as the sports editor at The Cullman Times.

A Florence native and a graduate of the University of North Alabama, he now resides in Cullman with his wife and daughter.

## MORGAN COUNTY'S VEST NAMED PRESIDENT OF STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION

Alabama Counties have embarked on a new year in an unprecedented time, and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama announced that Commissioner Randy Vest of Morgan County will lead them through the next 12 months.

Commissioner Vest was unanimously approved to serve as the 2020-2021 ACCA President during the ONE Voice Session conclusion to the 92nd Convention.

Joining President Vest in the ACCA leadership journey are President-Elect and Blount County Commissioner Dean Calvert; Vice President and Sumter County Commission Chair Marcus Campbell; and Minority Director and Coosa County Commissioner Bertha Kelly-McElrath. Also stepping into a new role this year is Immediate Past President and Henry County Probate Judge/Commission Chair David "Ben" Money, who will now serve as Chair of the ACCA Legislative Committee.

## HUNTSVILLE/MADISON COUNTY VISITOR CENTER WINS 2020 TRAVELERS' CHOICE AWARD

The Huntsville/Madison County Visitor Center® has been recognized as one of the best points of interest for visitors in the region, based on 2019 traveler reviews on Tripadvisor. This award is given to the top 10% of establishments listed on the travel website.

The Visitor Center has been recognized with the Tripadvisor Certificate of Excellence for several years, entering into the Tripadvisor Hall of Fame in 2019 for such long-standing commitment to superb guest experience.

The awards are based on a full year of Tripadvisor reviews, prior to any changes caused by the pandemic, and show travelers' ultimate favorite, top 1% of hospitality businesses around the globe.

"Winners of the 2020 Travelers' Choice Awards should be proud of this distinguished recognition," said Kanika Soni, Chief Commercial Officer at Tripadvisor. "Although it's been a challenging year for travel and hospitality, we want to celebrate our partners' achievements. Award winners are beloved for their exceptional service and quality. Not only are these winners well deserving, they are also a great source of inspiration for travelers as the world begins to venture out again."

Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) personnel were delighted to be recognized with this achievement.

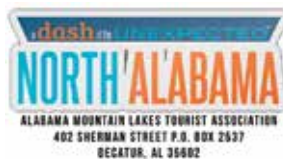
"We are honored to receive this award, and with the outstanding customer service our staff provides, it comes as no surprise," said Judy Ryals, President/CEO of the CVB. "Our Visitor Information Assistants go above and beyond to ensure every guest is shown the Southern hospitality we're known for, and leave them with a positive, lasting impression of Huntsville."

Lynne Williams, Visitor Center Manager for the CVB, added, "Visitors are very appreciative for the assistance they receive from our knowledgeable and passionate staff. Our guests frequently recommend the Visitor Center to others that may be traveling to Huntsville, and those word-of-mouth referrals are crucial to both spreading the word about our services and educating visitors about what Huntsville has to offer as a travel destination."

## ALABAMA STATE PARKS HONORED IN TRIPADVISOR'S 2020 TRAVELER'S CHOICE AWARDS PROGRAM

A total of 11 Alabama State Parks, including six from North Alabama, and another nine attractions located within or adjacent to a state park have been honored

*Continues on next page*



The information in this newsletter is gathered in such a way to ensure maximum accuracy. Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association cannot and does not guarantee the accuracy of all information furnished to it, nor the complete absence of errors and omissions; hence no responsibility for the same can be, nor is, assumed.

## [ AROUND THE REGION ]

# AROUND THE REGION

Continued from previous page

with Tripadvisor.com's "2020 Travelers' Choice Awards."

Travelers' Choice, formerly known as Certificate of Excellence winners, recognizes businesses that earn consistently great user reviews. Travelers' Choice winners rank among the top 10 percent of businesses on Tripadvisor.

"We are honored that once again so many Alabama State Parks have been recognized in Tripadvisor's annual awards," said Chris Blankenship, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "All of the Alabama State Parks system employees are dedicated to making every single visit a first-class experience. Our commitment to excellence is confirmed with this recognition by the people who are actually coming to stay, play and enjoy our state parks."

Below is a list of North Alabama State Parks and amenities honored:

Cathedral Caverns State Park  
DeSoto State Park  
Joe Wheeler State Park  
Lake Guntersville State Park  
Monte Sano State Park  
Rickwood Caverns State Park

DeSoto Falls and the Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge where honored for making the list of attractions within or adjacent to a North Alabama state park.

## FOUR FROM NORTH ALABAMA RECOGNIZED WITH STATE TOURISM AWARDS

A number of North Alabama's key tourism players were recognized at the Alabama Governor's Conference on Tourism with state

tourism awards.

Sue Pilkilton, executive director of the Helen Keller Birthplace in Tusculumbia, was inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame at the event. She was recognized for her 50 years of service at the historic site and for being instrumental in starting the Helen Keller Foundation's Camp Courage for deaf/blind children.

Unclaimed Baggage in Scottsboro was also inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame. Now in its 50th year, the retail store has received national and international attention for its unique approach to the shopping experience.

Alabama Senator Arthur Orr received the Government Advocate Award for being a tireless champion of tourism in the state. As Chairman of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission, he was also a key leader of Alabama's Bicentennial Celebration.

The Marshall County Convention and Visitors Bureau was named the Tourism Organization of the Year. During the past several years, the organization has recruited fishing tournaments, such as the Bassmaster Elite event, which have produced an economic impact of more than \$35 million for the region. Since Katy Norton became president

of the Marshall County CVB in 2013, Marshall County has had a 29% increase in lodging tax revenues with tourism expenditures rising 22%.



### Kayak Bass Fishing Championship

Hundreds of kayak bass anglers from more than 40 states launched into Lake Guntersville in early October vying for the title of the fifth annual Kayak Bass Fishing National Champion. 2020 is the first year the competition is being held on Lake Guntersville. The expected economic impact from this event is anywhere from \$250,000 to \$750,000. (Photo by Brad Wiegmann)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### AMLA BOARD/MEMBERSHIP MEETING

- **January 19, 2021**  
Alabama Veterans Museum & Archives  
Athens, AL

### AMLA EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR

- **February 23, 10am**  
Social Trends for 2021  
Florence Lauderdale Tourism  
Randa Hovater  
Social Trends for 2021

### AMLA TRAVEL SHOWS

- **Association of Tennessee Valley Governments**  
October 27-28, 2020  
Gatlinburg, TN
  - **STS Symposium**  
November 30-December 2, 2020  
Roswell, GA
  - **Alabama State Tourism Meeting**  
November 8 and 9  
Auburn, Opelika Conference Center
- STS MARKETING COLLEGE**
- **2020 STS Marketing College**  
December 6-11, 2020

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS JULY - SEPTEMBER 2020

Hidden Rivers Farm, Hartselle  
Vision Ministry, Inc, Huntsville  
Mentone Trace Magazine, Mentone  
Wild South, Moulton  
Past-Times, LLC Russellville  
Dog's Biker Heaven, Rogersville

**Thank You Reinstated Members**  
Total Members 535