

For Immediate Release

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VISITHATTIESBURG AWARDS SHINING STARS AT 17th ANNUAL LUNCHEON

HATTIESBURG (May 10, 2018)— During the 17th annual Tourism Partners Luncheon yesterday at the Historic Train Depot, VisitHATTIESBURG recognized thirty-two tourism industry workers as Shining Stars as part of its National Travel and Tourism Week celebrations.

The Shining Star award is Hattiesburg's only service-industry recognition. Each year recipients are nominated by leadership from their respective organizations for their excellence in hospitality and customer service.

"Hattiesburg is filled with Shining Stars in the hospitality industry, and we are excited to honor this year's recipients. These front-line professionals add tremendous value to our community by welcoming and serving Hattiesburg's many visitors. Their hard work, enthusiasm, and daily ambassadorship for Hattiesburg creates positive and lasting impressions for our guests," Marlo Dorsey, executive director of VisitHATTIESBURG, said.

This year's National Travel and Tourism week theme is, "Travel...Then and Now", celebrating the growth and evolution of the travel industry. The Historic Train Depot was filled with vintage vacation décor, and guests were served a diner-inspired menu.

During the awards luncheon, Mayor Barker presented a proclamation to the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, officially declaring it Tourism Week in Hattiesburg. The resolution highlighted the valuable contributions of the hospitality sector in Hattiesburg, which supports more than 4,200 jobs and attracted more than \$278 million overall visitor spending in 2017.

The 2018 Shining Star recipients included:

- Meagan Duckworth – Area Development Partnership
- Jamie Jefferson – Baymont Inn & Suites
- Mamie Seals – Baymont Inn & Suites
- Blu Jazz Café Staff
- Mequesha Thompson – Candlewood Suites
- D'Johnny Jackson – City of Hattiesburg
- John McLemore – City of Hattiesburg
- Nelson Cubley – City of Hattiesburg
- Rebecca Acker – City of Hattiesburg

- Jacky Keyes – Comfort Suites
- Pam Sanders – Comfort Suites
- Sue Gann – Comfort Suites
- Judy Haynes – Fairfield Inn and Suites
- Karen Knight – Fairfield Inn and Suites
- Anitra Anderson – Hampton Inn and Home2 Suites
- Michelle McIntyre – Hampton Inn and Home2 Suites
- Roxie Barber – Hampton Inn and Home2Suites
- Rebekah Johnson – Hattiesburg Arts Council
- Cathy Baca – Hattiesburg Convention Commission
- Chad McClendon – Hilton Garden Inn
- Gloria Nelson – Hilton Garden Inn
- Jeannette Bryant – Hilton Garden Inn
- Kristin Smith – Hilton Garden Inn
- Reginald Chapman – Hilton Garden Inn
- Ross Andrus – Hilton Garden Inn
- Austin Byrd – Holiday Inn and Suites
- Jeremy Barnes – Holiday Inn and Suites
- Jermaine Mabon – Holiday Inn and Suites
- Lonny Nelson – Holiday Inn and Suites
- Abby and Brandon Thaxton – The Lucky Rabbit
- Shannon Gandy – TownePlace Suites
- Shuntae Kelly – TownePlace Suites

The Shining Stars Awards Luncheon is one of many events throughout the city that VisitHBURG is hosting this week in celebration of National Travel and Tourism Week. These events highlight the successes and contributions of Hattiesburg's numerous hospitality partners whose efforts have added to the continued growth of tourism in Hattiesburg.

2018 National Travel and Tourism Week Events Remaining:

Friday, May 11: ADP First Friday Breakfast, VisitHBURG Sponsor and Speaker

VisitHBURG is collaborating with the Area Development Partnership to share industry successes and the future tourism outlook with business leaders and area stakeholders.

Friday, May 11: VisitHBURG presents Live at Five from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The community is invited to this encore event of Live at Five, which is a free, outdoor music event held at Town Square Park. The first 100 guests to stop by the VisitHBURG booth will have the opportunity to spin the prize wheel for a chance to win.

For more information on the events of the week, follow VisitHATTIESBURG online at VisitHBURG.org, Facebook or by signing up for the organization's weekly newsletter.

The Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, doing business as VisitHATTIESBURG, is the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the City of Hattiesburg. Created to promote the Greater Hattiesburg Area and its tourism industry to potential visitors, the mission of

VisitHATTIESBURG is to increase overnight bookings for both leisure and corporate travel with the ultimate goal of growing the economic impact of these visitors on the local economy. By marketing Hattiesburg's local hotel, dining, attraction, and shopping options, VisitHBURG has successfully tripled the city's tourism industry since being established in 1990, making HBURG the third most visited city in Mississippi.

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