

## **North Carolina Tourism Industry Welcomes Award Recipients into Winner's Circle**

**RALEIGH** (March 2, 2009) – Six distinguished North Carolinians were honored today at the North Carolina Governor's Conference on Hospitality & Tourism for their significant and continuing contributions to the growth and success of North Carolina's tourism industry. The 2009 Winner's Circle Awards were presented to Dr. Larry Gustke, John and Faye Cooper, Reyn Bowman, and Betty and David Huskins.

“These visionary leaders have given more than just time and effort to enhance the state's tourism product and therefore enhance economic development,” said North Carolina's Secretary of Commerce J. Keith Crisco. “We thank them for their work and dedication.”

### **Winners' Career Highlights:**

**Dr. Larry Gustke**

Dr. Gustke has been a North Carolina State University faculty member in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management since 1989. For the past 20 years, he has worked closely with the NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development and travel industry partners, in conducting tourism research and, most recently, producing and publishing NC Travel Tracker, a Web-based site of North Carolina tourism industry statistics and trends.

In addition, he has been associated with the well-known Randall Travel Marketing firm based in Mooresville for the past 15 years. Gustke has produced many reports for state, county and local agencies and has the unique distinction of being the only non-thespian to be awarded the Mark R. Sumner Award for contributions to outdoor drama in the United States.

**John and Faye Cooper**

In 1980, John and Faye Cooper re-opened a landmark, the Mast General Store in Valle Crucis, originally started in 1883. They have helped permanently establish the store as a tourism destination. They also opened locations in Boone, Waynesville, Hendersonville, and Asheville. The Mast Store has worked with many others to help revitalize downtowns in Western North Carolina to attract both locals and visitors.

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From the beginning, John Cooper worked to bolster tourism in the High Country and with other leaders helped to found the High Country Host organization and later served as president. He currently serves as Chairman for the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.

In 2000, the Coopers were among 40 North Carolinians selected as North Carolina Tourism Leaders of the 20th Century.

#### Reyn Bowman

In 1989, Reyn Bowman helped jump-start the award-winning destination marketing organization for Durham. Under his leadership, the Durham CVB became the first DMO in North Carolina accredited to new international standards for community marketing, receiving an unprecedented 11 exemplary citations.

He even once received a Gold International Clio Award for excellence for the “Wild About Anchorage” campaign.

Bowman is a past presidential delegate to the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism, a two-term president of the Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina and currently serves on the board of directors for Destination Marketing Association International.

#### Betty and David Huskins

Betty and David Huskins collectively represent 60 years of pioneering initiatives in North Carolina's Tourism Industry. Betty Huskins has served as both Chair and Vice Chair of the N.C. Board of Travel and Tourism. She led the effort for passage of Congressional legislation and federal funding for the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. And she created MountainSouth USA, a multi-state initiative that helped brand Western North Carolina internationally.

David Huskins was a founding director of the North Carolina Board of Travel and Tourism. As a lobbyist representing a number of tourism businesses, he has advocated for, written, and promoted key legislative initiatives to help grow the state's tourism industry, including the Rural Tourism Development Grant Program, ABC Tourism Establishment and ABC Tourism Resort legislation.

Since 1975, Betty and David have owned and operated Linville Falls Lodge & Cottages and Spear's BBQ & Grill in Linville Falls.

The Winners Circle Award originated in 2004. Previous recipients include H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, former president and general manager of Lowe’s Motor Speedway; Jerry Richardson, owner of the Carolina Panthers; Hugh Morton, owner of Grandfather Mountain; J. Craig Madison, president and CEO of the Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa in Asheville; Steve Miller, executive vice president of the Biltmore Company; Jack Goldstein, an influential member of numerous tourism related boards and development organizations; Phil Kirk, the former president and CEO of the North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry; Bernie Mann, owner and publisher of the magazine *Our State: Down Home in North Carolina*; and Douglas L. Stafford, former president of the Charlotte and Asheville CVBs as well as the former executive vice president of Lowe’s Motor Speedway.

The premier educational and networking event for the state’s tourism professionals, the Governor’s Conference on Hospitality & Tourism brings together representatives from chambers of commerce, convention and visitor’s bureaus, popular attractions, historical sites, the restaurant and lodging industry, business and state government. More than 400 attended last year’s conference in Winston-Salem.

Tourism remains a robust segment of the North Carolina economy. The travel and tourism industry employs more than 190,000 across the state. In 2007, visitors to North Carolina spent a record \$16.5 billion which is an increase of 7.2 percent from 2006.

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