

Economy Drives Program for Southeast Tourism Society Meeting in Atlanta Sept. 9-10

*'Clear road to recovery' is theme for 12-state travel industry group*

ATLANTA (September 1, 2009) – Looking for the route out of the recession is the theme of a 12-state tourism association's meeting in Atlanta Sept. 9-10.

Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue will welcome members of the Southeast Tourism Society and discuss his state's tourism initiatives as well as examine the importance of tourism to the region. Perdue is former chairman of the Southern Governors' Association.

Bernie Marcus, co-founder of The Home Depot and the driving force behind creation of the Georgia Aquarium, is the keynote speaker. More than 10 million people have visited the aquarium since it opened in November 2005, making it a major factor in regional tourism.

"The tourism industry ranks first, second or third in the economies of each of member states," said STS president and CEO Bill Hardman. "We've been working through the recession, and the industry feels that now's the time to cast off thoughts of 'flat is up.' This conference is designed to help chart a course to better times."

Topics and speakers on the agenda:

+ The State of the Lodging Industry – Mark Woodworth, president of PKF Research, and Sue Stephenson, vice president, community footprints, of Ritz-Carlton, will discuss how the lodging industry has been coping with the recession.

+ Women Make the Rules – Gender and tourism, and why it is that women are the key deciders about family travel, are the topic for Mary Puissegur and Nancy Bauer of Fleishman-Hillard Atlanta.

+ Education in Motion – Representatives of tourism and hospitality programs at Georgia State University, the University of Tennessee and Clemson University will discuss how the region’s colleges and universities can work cooperatively with the tourism industry.

+ Economists’ Crystal Ball – Top economists from the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia and the Federal Reserve Bank/ Atlanta will peer into the future of the general economy and specifically examine the outlook for travel and tourism.

The meeting is at the Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead and includes STS’s annual awards program, the Shining Example Awards.

#### About STS

Founded in 1983, the Southeast Tourism Society ([www.southeasttourism.org](http://www.southeasttourism.org)) is dedicated to the promotion and development of tourism in its member states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Its headquarters are in Atlanta. The membership includes state travel offices, attractions, hotels, motels, resorts, convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, travel media and other travel-related organizations.

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Coverage of individual sessions is welcome. Agenda details are at <http://southeasttourism.org/fall/index.html#agenda>. Media inquiries should go to Neville Bhada ([Neville@southeasttourism.org](mailto:Neville@southeasttourism.org)) (404-364-9847)