

## **Southeast Tourism Society Taps Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal for Tourism Leadership Award**

*Attractions, CVBs, Individuals Also Earn Shining Example Awards*

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (Sept. 8, 2016) – Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal, who vetoed legislation that threatened his state’s convention and visitor industry, has received the Governmental Tourism Leadership Award from the 12-state [Southeast Tourism Society](#) (STS).

Deal accepted the recognition at the annual STS Shining Example Awards program in Birmingham. Shining Example Awards salute performance, productivity and professional achievement in more than a dozen categories of tourism activity.

Deal’s veto was of what was called religious freedom legislation, but which many saw as allowing discrimination in the hospitality industry. The tourism and convention and visitors bureau community objected, and Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau said the legislation would create an economic loss of \$990 million due to cancelled conventions in Atlanta alone.

Georgia received more acknowledgement when the [Booth Western Art Museum](#) in Cartersville was named the Escape to the Southeast Travel Attraction of the Year. The museum, which has the largest permanent exhibition space for western art in America, saw its annual attendance grow by 146 percent and earned numerous accolades, including being named True West Magazine’s “Best Western Museum.”

The Booth Western Art Museum got extra attention when Tom Shinall, its marketing director, received the STS Rising Star Award, which recognizes extraordinary performance by a person with no more than five years’ experience in tourism.

Three tourism promotion organizations received Shining Example Awards for their overall work:

- The [Louisiana Office of Tourism](#) was named the state tourism office of the year.
- Florida’s [Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing](#) received the award for tourism offices with budgets less than \$2 million.
- [Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast](#), which combines the marketing efforts of Mississippi’s three coastal counties, received the award for tourism offices with budgets greater than \$2 million.

Two festivals won Shining Example Awards as the STS Top 20 Event or Festival of the Year. Winners are the [Kentucky Bourbon Festival](#) in Bardstown and the [Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion](#) in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia.

Rick Taylor, executive director of the [Hattiesburg Convention Commission](#) and [Hattiesburg Tourism Commission](#) in Mississippi, received the Beacon Award for leadership in the advancement of tourism.

There were three Shining Example “Best Marketing” selections based on budget size.

- [Bath County Tourism](#) in the Allegheny Mountains of Virginia won for organizations with budgets of less than \$100,000.
- The [Columbus \(Ga.\) CVB](#) won in the mid-range category of \$100,000 to \$499,000.
- [Wild, Wonderful West Virginia](#) won in the category of more than \$500,000

A separate Shining Example Award for niche marketing went to the [Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency](#) for its Emmy Award-nominated video outreach to millennials.

A Shining Example Award for tourism partnerships went to an Alabama consortium that created 26 miles of new mountain biking trails and led to development of a bike park and the emergence of sports marketing. The partnership is between the [Auburn and Opelika Tourism Bureau](#), [Central Alabama Mountain Pedalers](#) and [Chewacla State Park](#).

The STS Tourism for Tomorrow recognizes sustainable tourism, and the 2016 award went to [Ruby Falls](#) in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which was the first U.S. attraction to receive certification from Green Globe International.

"Tourism work in the Southeast is excellent, and STS Shining Example Awards are great recognition," said STS President and CEO Bill Hardman.

Two special awards completed the celebration.

+ The Dorothy Hardman Spirit of STS Award went to Tami Reist, president and CEO of the [Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association](#). Reist and her association have been long-time supporters of the STS Marketing College, the Top 20 Events program and STS advocacy work in Washington, D.C.

+ STS Chairperson Shelley Johnson chose Franci Edgerly of [ITI Digital](#) in Brunswick, Georgia, for the Chairman's Award.

STS started the Shining Example Awards program in 1985. Here is the full list for 2016.

### **Escape to the Southeast Travel Attraction of the Year**

Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville, Georgia

### **State Tourism Office of the Year**

Louisiana Office of Tourism

### **Tourism Office of the Year**

Martin County Office of Tourism & Marketing in Florida (budget less than \$2 million)

Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast (budget greater than \$2 million)

### **Best Marketing**

Bath County (Virginia) Tourism (budget of less than \$100,000)

The Columbus (Georgia) CVB (budget of \$100,000 to \$499,000)

Wild, Wonderful West Virginia (budget of more than \$500,000)

### **Tourism Partnerships**

Auburn and Opelika Tourism Bureau, Central Alabama Mountain Pedalers and Chewacla State Park

### **Top 20 Event/Festival of the Year**

Kentucky Bourbon Festival in Bardstown

Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia

### **Tourism for Tomorrow**

Ruby Falls in Chattanooga, Tennessee

### **Governmental Tourism Leadership Award**

Gov. Nathan Deal of Georgia

**Rising Star Award** (for extraordinary on-the-job performance by someone with fewer than five years in tourism)

Tom Shinall, director of marketing, Booth Western Art Museum

**Beacon Award** (for demonstrated tourism leadership)

Rick Taylor, executive director, Hattiesburg Convention Commission & Hattiesburg Tourism Commission in Mississippi

## **Best Niche Marketing Campaign**

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency

## **Chairman of the Board Award**

Franci Edgerly of ITI Digital

## **Spirit of STS Award**

Tami Reist, president and CEO, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association

## About STS

Founded in 1983, the [Southeast Tourism Society](#) is dedicated to promoting and developing 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, lodging properties, resorts, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, travel media and other travel-related organizations.

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