



**EXPLORE MINNESOTA TOURISM – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Tourism Industry Achievements Highlighted at Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference**

**Mankato, Minn. (March 7, 2018)** – During the 2018 Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference, held at the Verizon Center this week, several individuals, organizations and tourism businesses were recognized at the annual Excellence in Tourism Awards banquet for their contributions to the state’s \$15.0 billion travel industry.

Julie Lunning, executive director of Visit St. Cloud, was named **“Outstanding Individual in Tourism”** for her long-term work on behalf of the Minnesota tourism industry. In addition to serving on many industry boards and commissions, she was instrumental in the community recently hosting several large events, including the 2017 Minnesota Governor’s Fishing Opener and 2018 Hockey Day Minnesota.

Two **“Friend of Tourism”** awards were presented to the Department of Natural Resource’s Mike Kurre and Bois Forte’s Fortune Bay Resort for outdoor promotional efforts and significant tourism efforts in northeast Minnesota, respectively.

Grandma’s Marathon received a **“Minnesota Signature Event Award”** for the race, which generates significant travel dollars to the state of Minnesota, and the substantial national and international media exposure this event has generated.

Explore Minnesota Industry Award winners were:

- **Mall of America: Visitor Attraction of the Year**
- **Schwan’s USA CUP: Event of the Year**
- **Dan Hartman, Glensheen Mansion: Rising Star of the Year**

Explore Minnesota Marketing Awards were presented to:

- **Hutchinson Area Chamber and Tourism: Marketing Campaign**
- **Visit Northfield: Website**
- **Visit Grand Rapids: Social Media**
- **Visit Bemidji: Marketing Campaign**
- **Visit Winona: Branding Initiative**

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## **About Explore Minnesota**

As the state's tourism promotion office, Explore Minnesota pursues an entrepreneurial approach, leveraging the state's tourism investment with increased involvement by the private sector. A council of representatives from the state's tourism industry strongly connects Explore Minnesota Tourism with tourism businesses and organizations.

Tourism is a \$15.0 billion industry in Minnesota, and a key sector of the state's economy. The leisure and hospitality industry—a major provider of tourism services—employs more than 265,000 workers, representing 11 percent of Minnesota's private sector employment. Leisure and hospitality also generates 18 percent of the state's sales tax revenues. Minnesota welcomes nearly 70 million domestic and international travelers annually.

See what's happening right now, only in Minnesota, at [exploreminnesota.com](http://exploreminnesota.com) and join the movement via [@exploreminn](#) on Twitter and Pinterest, or [@exploreminnesota](#) on Instagram and Facebook, using [#OnlyinMN](#).