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Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation to Honor Local Tourism Trailblazers at Annual Toast to Tourism

Champaign, Illinois— The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation will celebrate the hospitality industry, alongside stakeholders and partners at the 11th Annual Toast to Tourism, May 15 from 4:00–6:00 p.m. at Carmon’s. During the event, the Foundation will honor five trailblazers with Tourism Impact Awards for their contributions in making the greater Champaign-Urbana area a better place to live, work, and visit.

The 2024 Tourism Impact award winners include: The Great Pumpkin Patch, Ebertfest, State Farm Center, Urbana Boulders, and Uniting Pride of Champaign County.

“Our awardees play a vital role in welcoming residents and visitors, embracing our brilliant spirit of hospitality and innovation,” states Jayne DeLuce, President & CEO of Experience Champaign-Urbana. “We continue to see people choose the Champaign-Urbana area for a place to live and visit because of efforts that these organizations and their teams have undertaken to create truly unique experiences.”

In addition to the awards presentation, Experience Champaign-Urbana Board Chair, Annie Easterday, will reflect on the past year and look toward the future as the organization continues to promote the greater Champaign-Urbana area as a destination to live, work, and visit. Also presenting will be Lynne Barnes, Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation Board Chair, who will share updates on the many efforts undertaken by the Foundation including IHSA Boys State Basketball and the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail.

The event is held preceding National Travel & Tourism Week, May 19–25, with a focus on the travel’s role in powering the economy and connecting America. According to the U.S. Travel Association, travel is a \$2.8 trillion industry that supports nearly 15 million American jobs while fueling other important industries like manufacturing, health care and agriculture—all which depend on travel to generate business, spur innovation and support education. The travel industry is essential to America’s success—it is an economic powerhouse that unites people, benefits society and is paramount to the United States’ global competitiveness.

\$89 billion in state & local tax revenue across the country supports essential services, like education, emergency response, public safety & more.

Locally, travel to the Champaign-Urbana area, which includes Champaign, Douglas, Moultrie, Piatt, and Ford counties, supported 4,900 jobs (14.8% increase), generating \$160.8 million in



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payroll (17.0% increase.) \$17.3 million in local taxes (21.4% increase) were generated through \$608.8 million in visitor spending (21% increase).

“Our brilliant events and activities are being discovered by individuals and groups from around the world, bringing business in conferences, sports, group travel, and leisure travel to our area,” explains DeLuce. “Continued development and investment in the community, allows us to push our region forward as a leader in the state.”

For more information on Toast to Tourism, go to experiencecu.org/toasttotourism or contact Terri Reifsteck at Experience Champaign-Urbana.

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