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## JOE JAEGER, JR. AWARDED TOURISM LEGACY AWARD BY MISSISSIPPI TOURISM ASSOCIATION

Jackson, Miss. - The Mississippi Tourism Association (MTA) recognized the impact and accomplishments of the state's tourism industry at the annual tourism awards program held during Governor's Conference on Tourism at the Lake Terrace Convention Center in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, October 2-4, 2024. This annual educational and professional development event brought together around 200 tourism industry professionals from across the state as well as tourism partners from the surrounding region.

"Mississippi's tourism industry continues to flourish," said Governor Tate Reeves. "Every day, more visitors are discovering the charm of our state as they are drawn in by its natural beauty and the genuine hospitality of our people. It's no surprise why Mississippi leaves such a lasting impression with our visitors. I want to extend my gratitude to the Mississippi Tourism Association and their members for showcasing all that our state has to offer and congratulate this year's outstanding award winners."

These awards give MTA the opportunity to recognize members who excel in various sectors of the industry. Awards were presented in 22 categories, each focusing on a different aspect of the hospitality industry or individual achievement. This year's recipient of the **Tourism Legacy Award** was given to Joe Jaeger, Jr.

"We are delighted to celebrate these hardworking individuals who consistently go above and beyond for their communities and organizations. The competitiveness of these awards reflects the exceptional quality of work from our partners and highlights the strength of Mississippi's tourism industry. It's a privilege to collaborate with such remarkable professionals as we continue to drive growth and success in our field," said MTA Executive Director, Danielle Morgan.

Joseph Jaeger Jr. was born and raised in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans in 1946. Joe's tenacity, innovation, and profound commitment to community defined his career, which began at age 19 as a "plumber's helper." Joe worked tirelessly into business ownership at age 36 and became one of the largest single hotel owners in New Orleans. In the last decade of his life, Joe continued to expand his impact on the tourism industry by defining his brand of luxury, hospitality, and service through his investments in Mississippi.

Under his visionary leadership, Joe Jaeger Jr. transformed landscapes and revived historic landmarks. He was an innovator in his field, pioneering the use of custom-built, prefabricated building systems still used in many of the region's largest buildings. Joe's team grew into the region's largest mechanical construction firm, employing 1,500.

From successful developer to revered hotel owner, The J Collection of 19 hotels includes iconic establishments such as the Bourbon Orleans, Maison Dupuy, and Audubon Cottages. Joe took pride in challenging development projects that seemed impossible.

In Flowood, Mississippi, he developed a mixed-use 200-room urban resort with a 54,000 square foot luxury convention space - Sheraton Flowood The Refuge Hotel & Conference Center - awarded the award for Venue of the Year in 2023.

Joe did see the potential in all of Mississippi. The J Collection purchased a historic inn in Natchez, Dunleith, in November 2019. At the time, Jaeger said, “We are honored to become the new stewards of Dunleith. This property holds significant historical importance to the Natchez community, and we look forward to being part of its historic legacy.”

Generously supporting the people and communities where he lived and worked wasn’t just a virtue to Joe; it was a way of life. He took immense pride in his thousands of team members across his construction, real estate, and hospitality companies, seeing them as extended family whom he loved. Joe knew the night maintenance crew, housekeeping staff, and the number of children each one had. He often abruptly left conversations with executives or persistent mayors to talk to staff instead. He never stopped in to check up on people, but to check in on his people. He changed the traditional housekeeping uniforms from knee dresses and aprons to scrubs to give dignity after seeing his employees change before riding the bus or running an after-work errand.

Joe Jaeger’s contribution to the tourism industry extends beyond building monumental structures or rescuing historic landmarks. He was a hospitality visionary who believed that genuine care and compassion were as important as luxury and comfort.

He was unwavering in his belief that the true essence of a hotel’s success lies in the genuine connections made between its staff and guests. By nurturing and empowering his team, Joe created a culture where every staff member felt valued, supported, and motivated to deliver exceptional service. This transformed hotel stays into memorable experiences and turns visiting strangers into friends.

Joe Jaeger’s hotels were characterized by a familial warmth. Joe loved and collected art, and his beloved wife, Becky, often climbed ladders rearranged pieces of art in the Sheraton and Dunleith. They made them home to not only guests but also to those who will continue his legacy and who share his belief that hospitality is more than just a business; it is a noble endeavor enriching the lives of others.

“Ralph Marson said, ‘Excellence is not a skill, it’s an attitude.’ It is my honor to commend the Mississippi Tourism Association’s 2024 Governor’s Conference on Tourism Award Winners. Your passion and commitment to tourism, our state’s fourth-largest industry, and its collective contribution to Mississippi’s economy are fervently articulated by the impactful strategic initiatives and professionalism you execute and demonstrate daily. Thank you and your team for your unwavering passion that contributes to the transformational impact for our individual and collective Mississippi communities,” said Dr. Rickey Thigpen, 2024-2025 President of MTA.

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*The voice of tourism, the Mississippi Tourism Association is a membership organization whose mission is to unite all sectors of the tourism industry through advocacy, promotion and education. MTA’s vision is to transform Mississippi’s economy through increased visitor spending and overall travel industry growth. For more than 30 years, MTA has led the Mississippi’s tourism education and advocacy efforts. Membership and organization details can be found at [www.mstourism.com](http://www.mstourism.com)*

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