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TOURISM INDUSTRY NAMES WINNERS OF NATIONAL TOURISM WEEK HOSPITALITY AWARDS

Local Residents and Businesses Recognized for Contributions to Tourism

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (May 16, 2008) – Last night, Visit Jacksonville named the six recipients and five finalists of the National Tourism Week hospitality awards at a ceremony held at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens. The top prize of the evening, the Visit Jacksonville Hall of Fame Award went to **Gator Bowl Association President Rick Catlett**.

The Hall of Fame Award honors an individual whose vision, creativity and passion have had a positive and significant impact on the development and/or growth of Jacksonville's hospitality and tourism industry. As president of the Gator Bowl Association, Catlett has encouraged growth in tourism to Jacksonville and increased the economic impact through collegiate football games such as the Gator Bowl and the Dr. Pepper ACC Football Championship. Last year's inaugural River City Showdown between Florida State University and the University of Alabama generated over 16,800 room nights and \$17.6 million for the local economy.

"Rick's passion for football and Jacksonville has created positive exposure and increased visitor demand for the city adding to the quality of life for local residents," said John Reyes, president & CEO of Visit Jacksonville. "I applaud Rick and all of the other winners for their efforts in increasing tourism and economic impact for Jacksonville and Northeast Florida."

Other winners from the evening included:

- **M.G. Orender, Margo Dundon Leadership Award** – Named for the past Visit Jacksonville Chairwoman of the Board of Directors, this award recognizes an individual who portrays Margo Dundon's vision and commitment to enhancing local tourism. M.G. Orender was chosen due to his leadership and service as a former Chair and current member to Visit Jacksonville's Board of Directors. He also served as Chair of last year's mayor-appointed convention center task force.
- **Donna Deegan, Tourism Advocate Award** – First Coast News Anchor and two-time breast cancer survivor Donna Deegan developed and coordinated the efforts for the first 26.2 with Donna: The National Marathon to Fight Breast Cancer. The event brought more than 7,000 runners to Jacksonville from each of the 50 states and several countries generating \$5 million for the local economy.

- **Twisted Martini, Visit Jacksonville Partner of the Year Award** – Twisted Martini earned the top spot for Partner of the Year due to its support of tourism and Visit Jacksonville. The nightlife hotspot is an active participant in a number of Visit Jacksonville events, including sales buyers’ education trips and other Partner activities.
 - One Ocean Resort & Spa, Finalist: Accommodation
 - Adventure Landing, Finalist: Attraction
 - Twisted Martini, Finalist: Dining/Nightlife
 - The Travel Authority, Finalist: Service/Meeting Facility
 - BROOKSLACAYO Advertising, Branding, and Public Relations, Finalist: Minority Owned Business
- **Sonny Bhikha, Hometown Ambassador Award** – Local hotelier, Sonny Bhikha enhanced the awareness of Jacksonville and its reputation among convention and event planners by bringing the 9,000-attendee BAPS National Youth Convention to Jacksonville during a normally slow period for tourism. The July event generated more than 6,700 room nights with \$3.4 million in economic impact.
- **Bill Cameron, Client of the Year Award** – As owner of the 11v11 Soccer Tournament which has been hosted in Jacksonville since 2004, Bill Cameron has made significant contributions to city. The tournament, which has been listed as one of the “Top 25” soccer events in the country, welcomes more than 150 competitive teams to Jacksonville each year. The 2008 event benefited the local community by adding \$1.8 million to the economy.

The awards ceremony was preceded by a keynote address from best-selling author of *License to Serve* Doug Price, CMP. The address titled “Are You Licensed to Serve Jacksonville?” offered the keys to success in customer service and in gaining customers for life.

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Visit Jacksonville, formerly the Jacksonville & the Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau, is the marketing organization contracted by the Duval County Tourist Development Council (TDC) to champion the growth of business and leisure tourism in Northeast Florida. The tourism industry is a leading economic engine for the region, with 4.6 million visitors generating a \$4.8 billion economic impact and nearly 118,000 local jobs in 2006.