

# 2020 Tourism Award Winners

# Sweet Home Alabama



## Attraction of the Year

### McWane Science Center

McWane Science Center is the Attraction of the Year. For 22 years this state-of-the-art science center, aquarium, and 280-seat IMAX Dome Theater has demonstrated that science can be cool even during a hot Alabama summer. The four-floor center is full of interactive exhibits and activities to help young people play and have fun while increasing their curiosity and understanding of science.



## Hall of Fame

### Unclaimed Baggage

Unclaimed Baggage is being inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame. Now, in its 50th year, Unclaimed Baggage in Scottsboro has received national and international attention. Airline baggage that goes unclaimed – about 7,000 new items a day from laptops and clothes to jewelry and almost anything you can

image – winds up on the mountainous shelves of sale items here, attracting shoppers from across the country.



## Hall of Fame

### Sue Pilkilton

Sue Pilkilton is also being inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame. Pilkilton, Helen Keller Birthplace executive director, is a lifelong Tuscumbia resident and has spent 50 years with the Helen Keller Birthplace, promoting the childhood home of America's First Lady of Courage. She was instrumental in the Helen Keller

Foundation starting Camp Courage for deaf/blind children and has spent her life promoting not only the Helen Keller Birthplace and the "Miracle Worker" play but all of Alabama. She serves on the Colbert County Tourism board, Alabama Mt. Lakes board, the Alabama Travel Council board, the Helen Keller Festival board, the Helen Keller Library board, and in 2019 was elected as the first woman president in the 145-year history of the Tuscumbia Kiwanis Club.



## Event of the Year

### Alabama Bicentennial

The Alabama Bicentennial was named the Event of the Year. The three-year celebration of Alabama's 200th birthday was launched March 3, 2017 in Mobile and culminated Dec. 14, 2019 in Montgomery with

communities, organizations, and schools throughout the state creating projects and hosting events. Events included geocaching contests, cemetery strolls, historic markers, craft fairs, parades, published books, traveling exhibitions and conferences and workshops throughout the state. The Alabama PastPort project inspired people to visit the state's historic sites. Almost 250,000 vehicles sported bicentennial license plates, and the Alabama Beer Brewers Guild sponsored special bicentennial edition recipes in honor of each of the state's five capitals. Every county and tens of thousands of people explored Alabama places, honored its people, and shared its stories, making the 200th birthday the biggest celebration in Alabama's history.



## Government Advocate Award

### Alabama Senator Arthur Orr

Senator Arthur Orr receives the Government Advocate Award for being a tireless champion of tourism in the state. As Chairman of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission, he was also a key leader of Alabama's Bicentennial Celebration. With 14 years in the Alabama Legislature, he now chairs the \$12 billion Senate

Budget Committee for Education and several other legislative committees. His efforts both in and out of the legislature have resulted in Orr receiving many national, regional, state and local awards from education, business, agriculture, government and volunteer entities.



## Organization of the Year

### Marshall County CVB

The Marshall County Convention and Visitors Bureau is the Tourism Organization of the Year.

During the past several years, the Marshall County CVB has recruited fishing tournaments such as the Bassmaster Elite, the FLW Tour and the Bassmaster Team Championship, building Lake Guntersville's reputation as one of the top bass fishing lakes in the country. In March of this year, the organization hosted the 50th Anniversary of the Bassmaster Classic, which produced an economic impact of more than \$35 million for the state. Since Katy Norton became president of the Marshall County CVB in 2013, Marshall County has had a 29% increase in lodging tax revenue and seen tourism expenditures rise by 22%. Norton continues to recruit large events to Lake Guntersville including the return of boat racing with the recent Guntersville Lake HydroFest. In fall 2020, the much-anticipated \$60 million sports facility, Sand Mountain Park, will open.

## Partnership Award

### Mobile Area Lodging Association and Visit Mobile



The Mobile Area Lodging Association and Visit Mobile are being given the Tourism Partnership of The Year award. From a city that was founded in 1702, Visit Mobile was incorporated in 1987 and charged with attracting visitors and conventions to the Mobile area to experience and enjoy a vast history, culture, and attractions in order to further strengthen Mobile's image as a national destination. Founded in 1977, the Mobile Area Lodging Association (MALA) is dedicated to promoting unity and communication within the local hospitality industry, and to give a voice to the issues facing the hospitality community. It was seven years ago when Visit Mobile and MALA first discussed the idea of a Tourism Improvement District as the two organizations wanted a new, innovative way to elevate lodging and tourism in the city of Mobile. Since that time MALA's four board members joined forces to create the Mobile Area Lodging Corporation (MALC) and with Visit Mobile worked with local and state officials to form the first Tourism Improvement District in the state. The district uses a new hotel room assessment that went into effect in July to raise funds to be used to market all Mobile lodging properties with more than 40 rooms. Visit Mobile will develop and implement the plans under MALC's supervision. Together, with vision, focus and the highest degree of determination, these two organizations have positioned Mobile to have a bright future in tourism.

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## Governor's Award

### John Tampa

John Tampa, the president of Ascent Hospitality who is helping shape Alabama's capital, is the winner of the Governor's Award. Ascent Hospitality owns more than 25 hotels across the country. This includes three in downtown Montgomery - the DoubleTree hotel, the Hampton Inn and Suites and a Springhill Suites in the former Bishop-Parker building - with another on the way. He is also converting the historic Murphy House, the former Montgomery Water Works building, into a boutique Marriott Autograph Collection Hotel. Tampa has also purchased two other Montgomery properties - the old BBVA Compass building, the 14-story high rise and longtime former home of Union Bank, and a lot on the 400 block of North Perry Street on which Tampa is considering building a multi-story commercial building.



## Director's Award

### Martha Bouyer

Dr. Martha Bouyer, of Out of the Box Consultants and Travel Services, is being presented the Director's Award. Bouyer is the principal of Out of The Box, which creates interactive field studies, travel experiences, workshops and curricula for varied clientele including the National Park Service, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and TPT Minnesota Public TV. She is Executive Director of the Historic Bethel Baptist Church Community Restoration Fund in Birmingham and serves as the Tourism Consultant for the Alabama African American Civil Rights Historic Sites Consortium and the Alabama Civil Rights Tourism Association representing 20 sites. Her interactive tours create a space for dialogue designed to expand knowledge of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Her premier educational tourism program is "Stony the Road We Trod: Alabama's Role in the Modern Civil Rights Movement."



## Media Advocate

### Gray Television

Gray Television is the recipient of Tourism's Media Advocate award. With the help and direction of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, Gray Media has become a champion of tourism in Alabama, spreading the message of the state's great destinations on some 150 Gray Media television stations. This media helped the state last year, for the first time, reach one billion dollars that tourists paid in state and local taxes.



## Tourism Professional of the Year

### Marion Winn

Marion Winn, senior manager, tourism and convention sales for the Montgomery Chamber Convention and Visitor Bureau, is Tourism Professional of the Year. Winn has been employed with the Montgomery Chamber for 29 years. She currently promotes and markets tourism for the Montgomery area and oversees the daily operation of the Montgomery Visitor Center, ensuring visitors have an enjoyable experience and a heartfelt impression of Montgomery and Alabama.



## Rising Star

### Cat Bobo

Cat Bobo, communications manager for Auburn/Opelika Tourism, receives The Tourism Rising Star award. She has served as a board member and volunteer for several community and professional organizations including the Auburn Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Lee County, the Opelika Chamber of Commerce, and Lee County Young Leaders. She was awarded the Auburn Chamber's Diplomat of the Year and Volunteer of the Year for her service to the Auburn Young Professional's program and the local business community at large. Bobo has also achieved the designation of Tourism Marketing Professional through the Southeast Tourism Society.