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Kansas City Kansas Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. Announces Award Winners at Annual Tourism Celebration on May 4, 2016

Kansas City, KS...The Kansas City Kansas Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc (KCK CVB) celebrated another successful year at its annual Tourism Celebration on Wednesday, May 4, 2016. The luncheon was held at the Jack Reardon Event Center, 520 Minnesota Ave., in Kansas City, KS. Approximately 150 people were in attendance, including elected officials and tourism industry professionals. Six awards were presented to the following tourism advocates and organizations.

A **Special Mayor's Recognition** was presented in honor of Jesse Hope III, proclaiming Wednesday, May 4, 2016 as Jesse Hope III Day in Kansas City, KS. Jesse was the founder and curator of the Old Quindaro Museum and dedicated his life to preserving and honoring the legacy of the families of Quindaro. Jesse passed away in 2015. Unified Government Mayor Mark Holland recognized his countless contributions in preserving the history of the Underground Railroad in America and the significant transformation the town of Quindaro had on our community. The award was accepted by Anthony Hope, brother to Jesse.

The **Excellence in Hospitality Award** was awarded to Mendi Jones, Director of Sales at Country Inn & Suites Village West. The award, chosen by the KCK CVB staff, recognizes Mendi for her support and partnership with the CVB, as well as her professionalism, hospitality and exceptional customer service to all visitors. Mendi came to Kansas City, KS after spending 24 years in the hotel business in Pensacola, FL., where she also had the reputation for going above and beyond. Kerry Green, Meetings, Group and Event Manager of the KCK CVB presented the award to Mendi Jones.

A special **Tourism Partnership Award** was presented to Linda Craghead, Assistant Secretary of Parks & Tourism for Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism. Her primary responsibilities include the operation and promotion of the 26 state parks in Kansas and the overall tourism initiatives for the state. Linda is being recognized for her commitment to each segment of the hospitality industry in Kansas and her collaborative efforts. Linda is passionate about outdoor adventure and nature, but mostly, she is passionate about the people and the tourism industry in the state of Kansas. Bridgette Jobe, Executive Director of the KCK CVB presented the award to Linda Craghead.

The **Tourism Event of the Year Award** was presented to the NCAA Division II Football Championship that was held on December 19, 2015 at Children's Mercy Park. Division II football came to Kansas City after it completed a 26-year-run in Florence, AL. The Championship will be played at Children's Mercy Park through 2017. The attendance at the 2015 championship game was a record-setting crowd of 16,181 fans and was televised on ESPN2. The game generated over 1,100 hotel room nights for the Kansas City region. The ability to host the Division II championship game was the result of the efforts and partnership of several organizations. Matt Lawrence, General Manager of Schlitterbahn Waterpark KC and a current KCK CVB board member presented the award. The award was accepted by Amber Feldman of the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletic Association, Molly Cage of the Kansas City Sports Commission, and Chris Wyche from Sporting KC.

The **Tourism Organization of the Year Award** was presented to Strawberry Hill Ethnic Museum and Cultural Center. The museum is located at 720 N. 4th Street in Kansas City, KS. The Queen Anne style house was built in 1887 as the home to John and Margaret Scroggs, and later became the St. John Orphanage. The orphanage was originally founded after the 1918 influenza epidemic. During its existence, it was home to over 3,000 children. The museum was founded in 1988 and was dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the Slavic heritage prevalent in the Kansas City, KS area. Today the museum preserves the history and cultures of over 16 different nationalities. Over 175,000 people have visited the museum. The award was presented by Unified Government Commissioner Brian McKiernan. The award was accepted by Adrienne Nastav, long time museum volunteer and board member.

The **Tourism Advocate of the Year Award** was presented to Chris Browne, Vice President and General Manager of Kansas City T-Bones for his leadership and contributions to Kansas City, KS tourism. Chris started with the T-Bones in 2002 before their first game was ever played at CommunityAmerica Ballpark in Kansas City, KS. He was named Vice President and General Manager in 2008. Chris served on the Kansas City Kansas Convention & Visitors Bureau Board of Directors from 2012 – 2015, serving two years as board chair. The Tourism Advocate award was presented to Chris Browne by Greg Jackson, General Manager for Dave & Buster's at The Legends and current KCK CVB board chair.

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