



## Huntsville/Madison County Hospitality Association hosts 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Pineapple Awards Ceremony

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**(Huntsville, Ala.)** –The [Huntsville/Madison County Hospitality Association](#) (HMCHA) recognized the outstanding accomplishments of hospitality professionals in the Huntsville/Madison County community at the 26th Annual Pineapple Awards Dinner on Tuesday, January 31, 2023 at The Westin Huntsville.

Each year, the organization holds the Pineapple Awards ceremony to honor members who have exhibited outstanding achievement and professionalism in the hospitality industry. In addition to the awards, HMCHA also provides annual educational and professional development scholarships during the event.

“The Pineapple Awards Dinner is like the Academy Awards for our industry in Huntsville/Madison County and is the highlight of our year,” commented outgoing 2022 HMCHA President, Jennifer Middleton. “It is the culmination of many people coming together to celebrate the successes of the past year and the people who went above and beyond to make those successes happen for our guests, our teams, and our entire community.”

The hospitality industry includes diverse market segments of hotels, restaurants, tourism, travel, attractions, allied services and is one of the state’s largest employment providers.

“This industry employs over 21,000 people in our community and saves every household in Huntsville/Madison County more than \$1000 in taxes as a result of travel expenditures,” continued Middleton. “We are proud of the work we do every day and are grateful to have the opportunity to come together as a hospitality family to celebrate!”

The HMCHA again this year continued a long tradition of recognizing and supporting member employees and their dependents with higher education and professional development scholarships. The association does not require the employee or child be currently taking Hospitality courses as a criteria for the scholarship - the goal is to assist current employees, reward potential leaders, and advance the hospitality industry through education.

### **2023 Hospitality Scholarship Winners:**

1. Isabella Hodge, The Westin – General Scholarship
2. Megan Hartnett, Grille On Main – General Scholarship
3. Shelby McCown, VBC – General Scholarship
4. Jenny McCown, VBC – General Scholarship
5. Hannah Wilkins, CVB – STS Marketing College Scholarship
6. Craig Maples, VBC – B’Lisa King Professional Development Scholarship

As the result of the courage, perseverance, and valor in the face of the pandemic, HMCHA created a new awards category in 2021, the People's Choice Awards. These award winners were nominated by the hospitality community and thereafter voted upon by the membership at large. The two awards were presented for Rising Star, an individual who has shown outstanding achievement within their career of less than five years in the Hospitality Industry; and for Outstanding Team, given to an organization's team who displayed strength and perseverance.

### **2023 People's Choice Awards**

HMCHA Rising Star: Kari Long, AC Hotel

HMCHA Outstanding Team: Sonesta Simply Suites Huntsville

The Red Ribbon Awards are the highest honors for those working in the Hospitality Industry. The winning individuals consistently work to enhance the area's image, promote tourism, and are considered role models to their peers.

### **2023 Red Ribbon Award Winners:**

*Tourism & Travel Category* – Joel Lamp, CVB

*Food & Beverage Category* – Regina Burnett, Boyce Restaurant Concepts

*Allied Category* – Lindsey Patillo Keane, RCP Companies

*Community Service* – Erica Bradford, CVB

*Lodging & Conference Center* – Pete Doyle, Holiday Inn Research Park

Leaders across the hospitality industry are nominated by members of HMCHA for the prestigious **Pineapple Award**. This award is given to an individual who has been involved with a project that has had a major impact on the hospitality industry and/or has been involved in the improvement of an existing project or program that benefits tourism. This year's Pineapple Award recipient is Representative Mac McCutcheon, Madison County Commission Board Chairman and former Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives.

The Association created the **Lifetime Achievement Award** in honor and memory of B'lisa King in 2018. This award is not presented every year and is reserved to recognize an individual who has spent a significant portion of their career in the hospitality and travel profession – contributing to the betterment of the industry in a noteworthy and lasting way over an extended period of time. Someone who demonstrates outstanding service and has a goal of making the hospitality industry a great place to work within, as well as provide lasting experiences for those who travel to the area. This year's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient is Wayne Bonner, immediate past chair of the Von Braun Center Board of Control for his 32 years of dedicated service.

To close out the Pineapple Awards Dinner, the 2023 Huntsville/Madison County Hospitality Association officers and Board of Directors were inducted, followed by the induction of the 2023 HMCHA President, Charles Winters, Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau Executive Vice President.

Special thanks to in-kind sponsors for the event: America's Party Pros and Jeff White Photographer/Clicks Foto, Inc.

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### **About the Huntsville-Madison County Hospitality Association**

The Huntsville/Madison County Hospitality Association is a non-profit membership organization with the purpose to unite representatives of the hospitality and tourism industry, including Lodging, Restaurant, Tourism & Travel and Allied Services for the promotion and protection of their common interests.