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“2017 Governor’s Awards for Innovative Tourism Collaboration Announced”

The 2017 Governor’s Awards for Innovative Tourism Collaboration were presented at the April Pure Michigan Governor’s Conference on Tourism in Detroit. The awards were presented by Dave Lorenz of Travel Michigan, representing the Michigan Travel Commission, and Julie Pingston, representing the Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan (TICOM).

The Governor’s Awards for Innovative Tourism Collaboration were created by the Michigan Travel Commission, in conjunction with the Governor’s Office, to elevate the status of Michigan’s tourism industry and to promote innovative collaboration as an effective, efficient and creative operating principle for the industry. The inaugural awards were presented at the 2009 annual Tourism Conference.

In the **Experience Development & Presentation** category, “**Paddle for Pints**” was given the award. This is a collaborative of 18 businesses and organizations in the greater Traverse City area.

Paddle for Pints is a Brewery Pub Paddle on Traverse City’s Boardman Lake & River and the West Bay. Participants meet at the Filling Station Microbrewery and, at designated times, 100 participants launch for an urban paddle through downtown Traverse City. The experience takes participants along a guided course and they visit 6 breweries along the way. Paddle for Pints has become one of Traverse City’s biggest summer events drawing people from all over Michigan and 23 states. The event began in 2013 with two event dates of 60 people each. Last year, the event consisted of 27 event dates totaling 4,800 participants which sold out in 47 minutes when the dates were announced. The continued innovative collaboration between the local partners is what has sustained the growth and demand of the event and created another sellout year for 2017.

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Up North Trails won in the category of **Non-Traditional Partnerships** as a collaboration of: Top of Michigan Trails Council, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, Networks Northwest Land Information Access Association, Traverse Area Recreational and Transportation Trails, Inc., Cheboygan County, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Northern Lakes Economic Alliance, Flight Path Creative, and 21 County Representatives.

The **Up North Trails Collaborative** brings together regional stakeholders to support and enhance economic development opportunities by developing a comprehensive trail marketing initiative in northern lower Michigan. The common goal of this collaborative is to promote all the trail systems in a 21-county area to create further opportunities for trail enthusiasts. A grand total of 5,358 miles of trail were identified and mapped. After the massive data collection was complete, the information was presented through a robust trail mapping website “upnorthtrails.org”. To take the initiative one step further, 5 pilot communities were chosen to undergo a Trail Town planning process to capitalize on the benefit of trail tourism. The process included consistently branded trailhead kiosk signs, trail guides, trailblazer signs and community gateway signs. The collaboration is truly a unique and geographically wide-ranging effort, resulting in a promotional effort throughout northern Michigan.

The third and final award went to **Lake Huron Discovery Tour** in the category of **Marketing Partnership**. The tour is a collaboration of Michigan Arts & Culture Northeast, Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments/US 23 Heritage Route, Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Mitten Women Productions.

In 2015, a collaboration of individuals, communities, organizations, agencies and businesses contributed over 4,000 volunteer hours to plan and execute a tourism marketing project called Lake Huron Discovery Tour during the fall color season. The tour consisted of a four-day event weekend focused along the US23 Heritage Route and the shoreline of Lake Huron in northeast Michigan. The self-guided tour opportunity included a collection of natural and cultural attractions and over 100 special events for the weekend. The tour was promoted through user friendly, collaborative tools with consistent branding and messaging. This uniform marketing approach promoted this broad area as a regional destination resulting in sold out hotels and visitors being able to discover new experiences along coastal Lake Huron.

The **Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan** is comprised of more than 50 statewide tourism associations, corporations and convention and visitor bureaus whose mission is to promote Michigan’s travel and tourism industry as a vital component of economic development and quality of life through governmental advocacy, public relations, and other promotional and educational efforts.