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**Greater Kansas City Attractions Association Announces**

**Inaugural Heart of Kansas City Award Winners and Welcomes 2018 Board of Directors**

**(Kansas City, Missouri)** – As almost 100 representatives of its membership looked on at its annual meeting, the Greater Kansas City Attraction Association (GKCAA) announced its inaugural slate of **2017 Heart of Kansas City Award Winners**, and installed its 2018 officers and Board of Directors during the organization’s annual meeting at MTH Theater in downtown Kansas City yesterday afternoon.

The Greater Kansas City Attractions Association, founded more than 20 years ago, includes members from many of the region’s top attractions, ranging from sports teams including the Kansas City Royals and Sporting KC, museums like The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, and National Museum of Toys and Miniatures to arts organizations including Starlight Theatre, Kansas City Ballet, and Theater League, theme parks like Worlds of Fun/Oceans of Fun, plus historic sites, major retail centers, hotels, and outdoor experiences on both the Missouri and Kansas sides of the state line.

The association presented its 2017 awards in four categories after nominations were evaluated by a subcommittee of the Board of Directors. Nominees were required to be members or employees or volunteers associated with members and were presented to honor an individual

who had gone the “extra mile” to further the goals, objectives, and spirit of the Kansas City region’s tourism and hospitality industry.

The 2017 honorees are:

**Individual Achievement – Celeste Lupercio**, Director of Sales, Marketing, and Events at The College Basketball Experience, was selected for her commitment to several organizations including SKAL International, the American Royal, the Big 12 Organization Committee, as well as the GKCAA.

“My peers in the attraction industry are as impassioned as I am about our city,” said Lupercio of being presented with the honor. “Although many are vying for the same visitor to buy a ticket, everyone in GKCAA is highly supportive of each other. When it comes to pitching for Kansas City, we are all on the same team, and the results are evident in our industry’s growth.”

**Allied Member of the Year – Visit KC** was selected for this award in honor of its work to support the tourism industry in general throughout the region, and helping grow annual visitation to over 25 million in the last year. Traci Moon, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications, accepted on the organization’s behalf.

“We are thrilled to be named Allied Member of the Year by our friends at the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association and members of the hospitality community,” said Traci Moon, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications, Visit KC. “As the leading sales and marketing organization for KC, our team works diligently and strategically to elevate our great city and ignite passion for KC. As a result, we are continually introducing new and innovative strategies to increase visitation to KC. When KC is in the national spotlight, everyone – residents, visitors and businesses – stands to benefit.”

**Ambassador of the Year** – The Association recognized **Mr. Barry Myers**, Director of Patron Services at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts for his exemplary customer service.

**Attraction of the Year – Union Station Kansas City** was recognized as the Attraction of the Year for its exemplary attendance of over 1.8 million, its world-class special exhibit program, seasonal celebrations and programs like the Makers Faire, and recent upgrades to Science City.

“Our Union Station Board, Staff and Volunteer Family are truly honored with this recognition,” George Guastello, Union Station president and CEO, said. “We work hard every day to maintain the highest level of quality programming possible across our multiple attractions. This Heart of KC Award is the kind of validation that motivates us to dream more and do even more. Kansas City has so many outstanding destinations. Our sincerest thanks for putting us in such great company and affirming the tremendous affection our community has for her historic Union Station home and centering point for STEM education.”

The following individuals were confirmed to serve the second year of a two-year term on the Board of Directors in 2018:

**Mike Vietti**, Director of Marketing, Communications and Guest Services at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, will serve as President; **Angie Jeffries**, Director of the Office of Communications at Jackson County, will serve as Vice President; **Jeff Hays**, Director of Marketing and Sales for the Schlitterbahn Waterpark will serve as Treasurer; and **Andrea Wilson**, Marketing Manager for the Kansas City Ballet will serve as Secretary.

During his remarks highlighting the association’s achievements in 2017, Vietti announced that membership is at an all-time high with over 60 attraction members and nearly 80 total, including allied members which are tourism-related companies including destination management organizations, media companies, hotels and tourism service suppliers.

He also announced that the following individuals will serve on the organization's volunteer Board of Directors in 2018.

Mary Altman – Mid-Continent Public Library/Midwest Genealogy Center  
Eric Burke – Worlds of Fun/Oceans of Fun  
Heidi Markle – Kansas City Missouri Parks & Recreation  
Celeste Lupercio – The College Basketball Experience  
Jason Milbradt – Adams Mark Hotel/CoCo Key Water Resort  
Koni Reese – CTM Media  
Kim Romary – Kansas City Zoo  
Barb Schulte – Starlight Theater  
Matt Schulte – Kansas City Royals  
Chris Thompson – Visit KC  
Rob Thomson – Sporting KC  
Bess Wallerstein Huff – Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts  
Douglas Veach – Madden Media

#### About the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association

The GKCAA is a not-for-profit member organization dedicated to enhancing the success of member attractions through the strategic initiatives of collective marketing, membership services, networking and educational programs, advocacy as a collective voice, and providing opportunities to connect with local businesses interested in supporting the Greater Kansas City area's tourism industry. For a complete list of members and to learn more, visit [attractionskc.org](http://attractionskc.org) or [facebook.com/AttractionsKC](https://facebook.com/AttractionsKC).

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