

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **2022 California Travel Association Awards Recipients Shine Among the Best & Brightest**

Sacramento, CA – Celebrating a year of tremendous change, growth and transition, the California Travel Association is recognizing top talent in the travel and tourism industry from a field of all-stars across the State of California. CalTravel Awards will be presented at the organization's 39th Annual California Travel Summit, held October 3-5, 2022 in Palm Desert, CA.

Awards are given in several categories, all recognizing extraordinary achievement by top professionals in the industry.

"Each year, our CalTravel Awards program impresses me with the depth and quality of our nominees," stated Barb Newton, CalTravel CEO. "This year is no exception, and these 2022 awardees prove that we are resilient and powerful industry full of talented, dedicated and innovative professionals leading us forward to new heights."

The 2022 award recipients are as follows.

#### F. Norman Clark Tourism Champion of the Year: Marilyn Hannes, Senior Vice President, Strategic Relationships, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment

*CalTravel's most distinguished award, The F. Norman Clark Tourism Champion of the Year Award recognizes excellence in California tourism, for activities in a specific year, or to recognize a body of work in tourism. The award recognizes activities that have contributed to building the image of California and helped to increase visitor arrivals to the state.*

Over the course of her 24-year career with SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Marilyn Hannes has been a highly valued leader, mentor, and champion for the travel and tourism industry and the California Travel Association. We are beyond grateful for her thoughtful service and her untiring work to elevate California's travel and tourism industry.

In her current role, Marilyn is responsible for Global Sales for 12 theme parks, strategic partners, alliances, and promotions as well as new sales channels. She previously served as the first woman Park President at SeaWorld San Diego and Aquatica Waterpark, responsible for all operations for both parks with more than 4,000 ambassadors and 12,000 animals.

#### Advocate for the Homeless Award: San Diego Convention Center

*This award recognizes an organization or person whose efforts via direct intervention, advocacy, fundraising or program development have helped California take steps to resolve the homelessness crisis.*

As COVID-19 became a serious public health concern in March 2020, the San Diego Convention Center's team began coordinating with customers on the cancellation or postponement of dozens of events scheduled to take place at the facility. Like most other venues across the country, they soon realized they would likely not host a single event for several months or more. At the same time, the Center's President and CEO, Rip Rippetoe, began discussions with local leaders to convert the Center into a temporary shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness. Ultimately, by the time OSTH concluded in March 2021, the operation served over 4,000 individuals and helped over 1,300 individuals and 43 families find permanent or longer-term housing.

#### Brad Burlingame Award: Joe Terzi, Former President & CEO, San Diego Tourism Authority

*Given to an individual or an organization, this award is in recognition of someone who has elevated travel and tourism advocacy in California by setting an example of commitment, generosity, and effectiveness.*

Joe Terzi is recognized for his continuing extraordinary commitment to the PAC that has extended even beyond his time as CEO of San Diego Tourism Authority. Now retired, his passion for advocacy and fundraising continue to inspire many others to become involved. Joe's efforts over the years have helped CalTravel's advocacy programs and PAC become stronger than ever.

#### Distinguished Travel Champion: Eleni Kounalakis, Lieutenant Governor, California

*This award recognizes an elected or appointed state official who has exhibited outstanding political leadership on an issue or issues of importance to the travel and tourism industry in California.*

Lt. Governor Eleni Kounalakis is the first woman elected to this position. A native Californian, she has been a staunch advocate for travel and tourism through the pandemic and helping lead our industry into recovery. She was an ally in

assisting to secure the \$95 million tourism stimulus for Visit California last year as well as the incremental \$15 million included in the budget this year.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Champion: Jerri Harris, Sr. Advertising Sales Specialist, Autoclub of Southern California/AAA Westways

*By advocating, educating, developing programs, and/or raising awareness of DEI issues, this award recipient has strengthened and affected meaningful change to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the travel and tourism industry.*

As one of the few Black women in the travel industry, and a former chair of CalTravel, Jerri Harris brought attention to the disconnect workplaces have with people of color when it comes to recognizing and responding to social justice issues and the effect it has on people of color. By voicing her concerns, she helped her company make a change in how they respond to employees. She has raised the issue around the industry's inability to keep underrepresented young people staying in travel and tourism to become senior leaders, and she has helped lead and champion CalTravel's DEI work.

Great Workplace Award: The Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles/JW Marriott L.A. LIVE and The Ritz-Carlton Residences at L.A. LIVE

*This award recognizes a person or organization that creates a great environment for employees to thrive and grow through mentoring, innovative recruitment or training programs, high quality of life benefits or other ways to make their workplace a great place to work.*

2021 was a transitional year, not only for the hotel's beautiful location in downtown Los Angeles, but also for the tourism industry as a whole. As the location caters heavily to everything big scale such as sports events, conventions, award shows and concerts, it was extremely important that employees felt engaged, inspired, safe and motivated to welcome back guests. During a time of uncertainty, as COVID cases rose and fell throughout 2021, it was extremely important that employees returned to work. The hotel brought them back by instilling confidence. Each employee sat through a 2 hour "reorientation" that focused heavily on all of the safety protocols implemented in the new world of COVID. Throughout 2021, the Ritz Carlton continued to inspire employees by engaging their hearts, minds and bodies.

Rising Star Award: Lindsey (Guinn) Stevens, Director of Marketing Communications, Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau

*The awardee is an individual, 39 years old or under, who has contributed through their individual efforts, to the promotion of travel, tourism, and hospitality in California. This exceptional individual has demonstrated the skills, talents, attitudes and initiative that are the hallmarks of a rising star.*

Lindsey's nominator stated: As a female person of color and one of the longest tenured team members, I am proud to finally see marketing communication programs that highlight minority-owned businesses and campaigns that include people of color. SeeMonterey has shown real inclusion and diversity in their marketing initiatives, and this is thanks to Lindsey Stevens. Lindsey is thoughtful in not only ensuring equitable representation of people, but also all the multi-faceted regions of Monterey County. From the ocean to the valleys, wildflowers to redwoods, boutique to luxury, and our rich literary and agricultural history, it's easy to see why Monterey County is so special, and thanks to Lindsey it's now better represented. She is the rising star our organization has needed.

Sustainability Advocate Award: Chef Davin Waite, Executive Chef, Co-Founder, Wrench and Rodent, The Plot, and Shootz Fish and Beer

*The award recognizes a person or organization that has successfully reduced waste, improved recycling, or managed travel impacts in a way that inspires others to improve their own practices.*

Chef Davin Waite epitomizes the sustainability ethos; it is genuinely a part of every aspect of his being, including cooking. He embraces total utilization and zero waste cooking as well as dedicates time and resources to volunteer and educate people on this subject matter whenever possible: whether it's other chefs, culinary professionals, or youth at the local elementary schools.

Visitor Experience Award: SF Welcome Ambassador Program, San Francisco Tourism Improvement District In Partnership with San Francisco Travel

*Recognizes a person or organization who, by consistently ensuring extremely high-quality guest services, unique experiences, or customer value, elevates the California brand and inspires more visitors to California.*

As COVID-19 infection rates declined in San Francisco and the city began reopening, San Francisco launched a new Welcome Ambassador Program, fully funded and supported by San Francisco's Mayor London Breed and managed by the San Francisco Tourism Improvement District, in partnership with the San Francisco Travel Association. The program's mission is to encourage visitors and office workers to return to San Francisco by promoting a positive and welcoming experience in San Francisco's downtown and other neighborhoods popular with visitors.

About California Travel Association

The California Travel Association (formerly CalTIA) is the influential, unified advocacy voice for the travel and tourism industry in California. It protects and advances the interests and investments of California's travel industry through advocacy, collaboration, and education.

For more information visit [www.caltravel.org](http://www.caltravel.org)

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