



For Immediate Release

Contact Information: Darien Schaefer
Executive Director Wausau/Central WI CVB
Voice: 715/355-8788 or 888/948-4748
Fax: 715/359-2306
dschaefer@visitwausau.com

Explore Highway 51 Wins Wisconsin Tourism Trailblazer Award

Explore Highway 51, a collaborative project of 15 Wisconsin destinations, has won the Wisconsin Tourism Trailblazer Award for Partnership Projects with a budget over \$25,000. The award was presented by Wisconsin Department of Tourism Secretary Kelli Trumble to representatives of the group at the Annual Wisconsin Fall Tourism Convention in La Crosse, Wisconsin on Friday, November 2, 2007.

“Explore Highway 51 has the unique quality of being able to promote large communities and small equally. Each destination has a story to tell the traveler,” explains Darien Schaefer, Executive Director for the Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Highway 51 reminds travelers that it’s all about the journey, and the journey is all about discovery, and of course, fun.”

Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (WACVB) presents the Wisconsin Tourism Trailblazer awards each year to the best tourism marketing and partnership programs in Wisconsin. Communities participating in the Highway 51 partnership include: Beloit, Janesville, Edgerton, Stoughton, Madison, Portage, Waushara County, Marquette County, Stevens Point, Wausau, Merrill, Tomahawk, Minocqua, Manitowish Waters and Hurley.

The project, which started in May 2006, has gained popularity across the United States promoting the culture and communities found along the highway, similar to the popularity of Route 66. The project includes Official Passports, Journey Journals and a website available to help travelers not just drive the road, but discover the communities along the way.

The website, www.explorehwy51.com, has seen an increase of user sessions of more than 140% in the past year. The site features lodging packages just for Hwy 51 travelers, a calendar of events and printable travel games. Travelers can download a copy of the Official Passport and Journey Journal, send in their favorite Highway 51 stories and vote for the “Best Of Highway 51.”

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The future of Explore Highway 51 includes its expansion into the other 5 states. Highway 51 runs from Hurley, Wisconsin to La Place, Louisiana, traveling through Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana. The expansion also includes more opportunities for local businesses to become involved.

The project has received two Joint Effort Marketing Grants (JEM Grants) for a total of over \$70,000 from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. Part of the grant money was used to feature Highway 51 on Discover Wisconsin television show in May and August of 2007, and again in July 2008.

Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus represents Wisconsin's top destination marketing organizations and initiates cooperative ventures that enhance the state's tourism industry. To learn more about WACVB visit their website at www.escapetowisconsin.com.

To order Official Passports and Journey Journals, or to learn more, see the website at www.explorehwy51.com or call toll free at (866) HWY-51-WI (866-499-5194).

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