



The Best of Vancouver Island Honored at Tourism Vancouver Island's 46th Annual Conference

NANAIMO, October 1, 2009 – Each year Tourism Vancouver Island has the pleasure of recognizing stakeholders who have demonstrated great efforts and achievements in the tourism industry over the past year. Sponsored by The Van Dop Arts & Cultural Guide to BC and The Van Dop Gallery, the annual Tourism Vancouver Island Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony showcases the best of Vancouver Island tourism representatives and businesses. The awards were presented at the Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa on September 23.

“The nominations for the 2009 Awards were impressive and the judges had a challenging time determining the winners from all the nominations.” Says Trudy Van Dop, Owner of Van Dop Gallery and publisher of the Van Dop Arts & Cultural Guide to BC. “The contributions from all of the tourism stakeholders to promote the Vancouver Island region as a premier destination is outstanding.”

The first award honour goes to ***Golf Vancouver Island*** for the **Power of Partners category**. This award recognizes a business or organization that has demonstrated successful partnerships with other Vancouver Island region tourism businesses or organizations resulting in increased visitation to the Vancouver Island region. Golf Vancouver Island is a cooperative marketing organization and a vacation booking service promoting the Vancouver Island destination. This 36 member organization partners with their stakeholders, various tourism attractions in the Vancouver Island region, Tourism BC, Tourism Vancouver Island, Tourism Victoria, and even Tourism Whistler in a collective effort to attract the traveling consumer. In the past year they have seen a stakeholder renewal rate of 90-95% and a 72% increase in new visitation to their website. Their most notable accomplishment in 2009 was their media relations efforts on a significant grand opening event for a member and the industry. They worked as a conduit to key journalists as well as industry partners to bring 10 journalists to Vancouver Island to play on ‘island time’, which has so far resulted in 4 additional journalist visits including a high profile magazine for their product sector.

The **Raising the Bar Award** recognizes a business or organization that has developed or renewed a tourism product or package that captures the attention of travelers and thus increases the desirability of the Vancouver Island region as a destination. The nominations were very strong in this category, resulting in a first-ever tie between ***Pacific Northwest Raptors*** and the ***Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre***. Pacific Northwest Raptors embarked on a mission to increase the knowledge of rehabilitation and research of birds of prey while promoting conservation and the environment through educational and entertaining demonstrations. They have also completed research projects on releasing these birds back into the wild. Most recently they have worked with the Vancouver Aquarium, who shares similar goals, by providing flying demonstrations to emphasize the overall ecosystem, from marine life to life in the air. Guests have visited their facility from all over the world and they have started hosting tour companies from all over the

province and the USA. In 2009 they were featured in 40 different media outlets from local newspapers, to TV stations to travel magazines including Canadian Geographic and Westworld. The Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre had set a goal to entertain and educate the public about the marine ecology of the Salish Sea in order to engender love and respect for the environment. Although they have only been open to the public since June of this year they have already seen over 65,000 visitors through their doors. They have successfully built relationships with the travel trade marketing organizations which has helped them to jump start their travel trade interests. Through their partnerships with the Town of Sidney, the Districts of North and Central Saanich, the Saanich Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, the Peninsula Celebrations Society, and the Sidney Business Association to sponsor Ocean Discovery Days, a month-long celebration of the ocean across the Saanich Peninsula, they have helped to establish a relationship among the municipalities, organizations and businesses that will continue as the group develops a long-term tourism marketing strategic plan.

The **Multi-Faceted Advertising Campaign Award** is awarded to **Tourism Victoria** for its innovative use of various forms of advertising mediums in a campaign that was successful in attracting traveling consumers to their business or organization. Tourism Victoria created a unique, partner-based destination marketing initiative inviting members to buy into a layered marketing program featuring special, limited time package offers based on three seasons. This campaign offered 27 members the opportunity to partner with key organizations to leverage their marketing dollars and collectively focus their efforts on key geographic regions, a prime example of the industry working towards a common goal. Focused on key geographic areas, this cooperative marketing campaign includes print advertising, web advertising, online contesting and television spots. The call to action has drawn 42, 809 unique views to the micro-site, and has resulted in selling out both the Spring and Summer 2009 promotions with the Fall season yet to come.

The **Most Valuable Player Award** is presented to **Blain Sepos, of Oceanside Tourism**. This award recognizes an individual or a tourism business that has demonstrated a commitment to the growth of tourism through outstanding contributions to Tourism Vancouver Island and is nominated by the staff of Tourism Vancouver Island. The recipient of this award was chosen for their *Above and Beyond* contributions, which assisted in increasing the profile of Tourism Vancouver Island to the region's industry and communities. Since joining Oceanside Tourism in the key role of Executive Director he has been an effective influencer and valuable contributor to Tourism Vancouver Island's Marketing Committee and has also actively and consistently supported Trade and Media activities. In addition, he has also participated in many other initiatives such as a Task Force member and other on-going research projects. One of Blains' many attributes is his honesty and support for Tourism Vancouver Island when management teams have sought advice and an objective perspective.

The **Tourism Employee of the Year Award** goes to **Trisha Larsen of Golf Vancouver Island**. This award recognizes a tourism employee that has demonstrated exemplary work performance above and beyond the regular call of duty thereby enhancing business or customer service. The winner of this award has demonstrated exceptional performance in the workplace in numerous ways including these few examples: Trisha took it upon herself to invite 20 writers from different media outlets to visit Vancouver Island and organized itineraries for 8 of the writers which resulted in several articles and thousands of dollars in media for the organization; Even though it has been a challenging economic year, the organization saw an increase in sales and an 11% increase in website traffic as a direct result of her keen eye for the budget and dedication to maximizing their marketing dollars; She singlehandedly

maintains the website, keeps up with developments in web marketing, has built and maintains a database of 11,000 contacts and is always forward thinking in her approach each and every year; and she has shown extraordinary commitment to the organization by deciding to stay on with the organization even though her family has recently moved to the Okanagan.

Perhaps the best way to sum up why Trisha was nominated for this award is this quote by Jason Lowe from her nomination “Her initiative and drive to succeed are beyond what I have seen in the workplace during my career. She makes my job as President much easier than it could be and is a pleasure to deal with. Much of the success of our organization is directly related to having her on our team.”

And new this year is the **Tourism Sustainability Award** which recognizes a tourism business in the Vancouver Island Region that has set out to minimize their environmental impact, conserve natural resources, respect local cultures and benefit local communities in the past 12 months. Their commitment to environmentally responsible tourism and changing the way they conduct business serves as an example to the industry. Strong nominations in this category resulted in an **Honorable Mention** to **Matt Bowes and Jen Smith** of **Gabriola Sea Kayaking**, and the award going to **Arbutus Ridge Golf Club**. Arbutus Ridge Golf Club is only one of five organizations in their sector across Canada to officially measure their Carbon Footprint through a partnership with a national organization using the GHG Par “0” program. In 2009 they have created a greening committee, invested in newer and more efficient alternatives, purchased locally made products and opted to spend more for an environmentally friendly finish and began the process of becoming the 8th organization in BC to be fully Audubon certified. They have issued media releases highlighting their accomplishments which have resulted in seven media articles in major golf magazine publications and local newspapers. They have created awareness by sharing their new initiatives and accomplishments with both staff and consumers and have recently joined the Cowichan Green Community.

“Even in a tough economic environment, our stakeholders continue to exceed expectations and deliver exceptional results.” says Dave Petryk, President & CEO of Tourism Vancouver Island. “The contributions from these tourism representatives and businesses continue to highlight the Vancouver Island region as a premier travel destination to the world, particularly as we lead up to the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.”

- 30 -

Vancouver Island continues to be recognized as a premier vacation destination. Since 2000, Vancouver Island has been rated as the Best Island, North America by the readers of Conde Nast Traveler. This prestigious travel magazine with a per issue readership of over 2 million has been conducting a Readers' Choice award program since 1988. Tourism Vancouver Island is one of six regional destination marketing organizations in British Columbia that administers co-operative marketing and advertising projects for its stakeholders throughout the region. To access information about Tourism Vancouver Island and marketing initiatives, please visit www.tourismvi.ca. For general travel information on Vancouver Island, Victoria and the Gulf Islands, please visit www.vancouverisland.travel.

About our Award Sponsor:

Van Dop Gallery. Showcasing over 100 artists and artisans, the gallery is filled with beautiful objects d'art. The concept is to transform art into an intimate experience, and to show how art can become a part of one's everyday life. Visitors experience both the beauty and functionality of art, feeling the spirit of each piece and seeing how it can enrich their lives.

Arts & Cultural Guide to British Columbia. Since 1999, Van Dop & Associates has published the Arts & Cultural Guide to British Columbia — the only year-round guide of its kind featuring the arts, culture and heritage of BC. With its easy-to-follow format, and its sister website www.art-bc.com, you can create your own self-guided tour around the province.

Media Contacts:

Dave Petryk
President & CEO
Tourism Vancouver Island
Direct: 250-740-1211
Cell: 250-739-9088
dave@tourismvi.ca

Lana Kingston
Media Relations Manager
Direct: 250-740-1213
lane@tourismvi.ca