

Local business owners, executives and employees from hotels and attractions honored, along with outstanding public servants.

Seminole CVB Tourism Awards

Photo by Bob Buckley - R Buckley Photo.com

Tourism activity is still going strong in Seminole County and local businesses which expanded tourism were honored by the Seminole County Convention and Visitors Bureau at its tourism awards luncheon. An annual event, the tourism awards luncheon is a ceremony that recognizes extraordinary individuals who strive to set new standards of excellence in Seminole County, from hotel employees to attractions workers to business owners and police and fire officials.

With more than 100 attendees on hand this year to hear from Tourism Ambassador of the Year Maury Gallagher, President and CEO of Allegiant Airlines, the event recognized many local partners and highlighted the importance of tourism to the county.

"I am delighted that we had the opportunity to highlight and thank so many wonderful people for their efforts on behalf of the county,"

said Sharon Sears, Executive Director of the Seminole County CVB. "I congratulate all those who were honored and I look forward to expanding the reach of the awards luncheon to reflect the importance of the tourism industry in Seminole County."

This year's winners are:

- Tourism Ambassador: Maury Gallagher, President and CEO of Allegiant Airlines
- Business of the Year: AAA, Seminole County (national headquarters)
- Attraction of the Year: Central Florida Zoo
- Outstanding Hotel Employee-Front Line: Valerie Gruber, Holiday Inn, Altamonte Springs



Seminole County
Convention & Visitors Bureau

The CVB offers a variety of services for businesses and individuals. Go to www.visitseminole.com or call 800-800-7832.



- Outstanding Hotel Employee-Support Staff: Sandra Martinez, Comfort Inn & Suites, Sanford
- Outstanding Hotel Employee-Sales Staff: Laura Conway, Candlewood Suites, Lake Mary
- Outstanding Police Officer(s): Deputy Sheriff Daren Tjomstol, Deputy Sheriff Kevin Lang, Seminole County Sheriff's Office
- Honorable Mention: Officer William Crapps, Sanford
- Outstanding Fire Department Employee(s): Fire Station 12 – Engine 12

New Hotels Coming to Seminole County

In hospitality news, the Alaqua Country Club in Longwood has a brand new clubhouse, which opened its doors for business April 2. The 1,100 sq. ft. structure houses a full service restaurant, locker rooms, a pro shop and a fitness center, and is located one lot over from the old facility, which is in process of demolition. Plans are in the works to develop eight one-acre lots on the remaining parcel of land.

A new clubhouse isn't the only new structure in Seminole County. Three new hotel projects will soon add to its offerings.

One is a luxury Westin at the northwest corner of County Road 46A and International Parkway, which broke ground in February and is slated to open in mid 2009. While details are still being finalized, the Westin will feature 250 rooms, a spa offering massages, manicures and pedicures and a full-size salon for men and

women. Plans also call for a full-service restaurant and free standing sushi bar, as well as a sky deck and 14,000 sq. ft. of meeting space.

For visitors planning on an extended stay, Lake Mary will soon have its own Residence Inn. The hotel chain is planning to open a new location at the Heathrow Business Center. With groundbreaking under way, the 84,000 sq. ft., 119 guest room facility will open its doors in June 2009. When it does, guests will be able to enjoy apartment-style suites, each with a full kitchen, complimentary wireless internet access and a 37-inch high definition TV.

"It's a nice experience compared to the typical hotel," said Ron Franklin, president of Pinnacle Hotel Management, who sees the Residence Inn as mostly catering to business travelers, with some leisurely visitors or a combination of the two.

"For instance, if a family is planning to relocate to the area, they could stay at the Residence Inn for an extended period, while they're between homes," Franklin said.

Andreas Meinhold, managing member of Sunshine Hotel Group, concurs. It's the reason he and his business partner chose Lake Mary as the site of their latest hotel venture, the Hyatt Place.

"Lake Mary is an extremely well-planned business community that continues to grow, so we see this as a great opportunity to develop a new brand in a thriving area," Meinhold said.

Slated to open Oct. 1, the Hyatt Place Orlando / Lake Mary, 1255 S. International Parkway, is the first and only hotel projected in Seminole County to be completed in 2008.

Model rooms in the hotel should be ready in mid-to-late August. As the first new construction Hyatt Place in the chain, it represents a new hotel concept of marrying modern décor with technological convenience. To start, guests check in and out electronically at express kiosks in the lobby. Instead of a front desk, it will feature a host stand with personnel available to assist guests 24/7. Also available 24/7 will be the hotel's

e-room, consisting of two computers and a printer. Guests will have the option to print documents directly from those computers or wirelessly from their suites, which will all have wireless internet available.

Unlike other Hyatt Place locations, the 75,000 sq. ft., 128-room Lake Mary version will be four stories instead of six, with Mediterranean style architecture to fit with surrounding buildings. Catering to business clientele, the Hyatt Place will offer a 1,600 sq. ft. meeting room and a 200 sq. ft. board room for smaller gatherings.

Jamie Ross, former manager of the Hilton Garden Inn will be general manager of the Hyatt Place Orlando / Lake Mary, which will also have its own website.

"I love Lake Mary, and I think this will be a great project and a great hotel for the area," she said. "I can't wait until we open. I want my local neighbors to be my guests."

Sharon Sears, executive director of Seminole County Convention and Visitors Bureau, can't wait either.

"I am always excited about the possibility of future growth in the county," she said.

"Anytime we have additional sleeping rooms, whether one night or extended stay, it brings people to our area, where they spend money. Then there's the bed tax."

In short, more beds mean more money for the county, in the form of a "bed tax" – a three percent charge collected on stays at each of Seminole County's short-term accommodations facilities. The tax is used to fund the Seminole County Tourist Development Council, which was established by referendum in 1988 and is marketed as the Convention and Visitors Bureau. Its primary charge is to promote the county's tourism industry and attract visitors, which together create a positive economic impact for Seminole County. Fiscally, the impact of the bed tax was over \$2.6 million, collected between October 2005 and September 2006.

The Palm Island Resort in Sanford will be getting a new look. Under new management since April 1, the hotel, located at 530 N. Palmetto Ave., already has a newly resurfaced pool area, a redone entry area and new landscaping.

"It looks brand new," said Nate Moore, vice president of Accommodation Services, which now manages the hotel.

Also getting a new face lift will be 74 of the Palm Island Resort's guest rooms, which will each be fitted with new carpet, tile, vanities and furniture. The other 21 rooms have already been similarly outfitted. While the hotel will still be open for business, Moore plans to renovate five rooms per week with "a basic overhaul from floor to ceiling."

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