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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Western DMOs Take Top Honors Among Peers Best Idea Program Achievement Awards

Four destination marketing organizations received achievement awards in a recent competition with their colleagues from the West. Sponsored by Destination Marketing Association of the West (DMA West), the annual **Best Idea Program** showcases innovative projects and creative marketing strategies as submitted by DMA West members.

This year's Best Idea Program awards were presented during the 2021 DMA West Education Summit, September 29 to October 1, 2021, in Vancouver, Washington.

Following receipt of the entry forms, a Board-appointed Task Force reviewed the submissions and selected several ideas for presentation. Representatives presented their best ideas during the recent Education Summit.

DMA West congratulates the following member DMOs – Visit Mesa, Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory, Visit Tri-Cities, and Visit Vancouver USA – for receiving outstanding achievement awards for their organizations in the 2021 DMA West Best Idea Program.

Visit Mesa (Arizona)

Project Title: Mesa, Arizona Named Country's First Autism Certified City

Visit Mesa embarked on a year-long quest to tailor travel experiences for individuals with autism that led to a major declaration in November 2019. At the start of this journey, Visit Mesa became the country's first-ever destination marketing organization designated as a Certified Autism Center by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This distinction is a result of the organization's staff and governing board of directors completing hundreds of hours of specialized training to help families and individuals with special needs prepare for their perfect vacation. Upon the heels of that achievement (earned in March 2019), Visit Mesa championed Arizona's third-largest city to become America's First-Ever Autism Certified City. That was achieved November 18, 2019, and marked the beginning of a new movement centered on inclusion that continues to this day. Visit Mesa's staff are all Certified Autism Travel Professionals. By gaining recognition as the first Autism Certified City, Visit Mesa could tap into a market with 32 million annual travelers

who spend more than \$262 billion on autism-related services in the U.S. each year. What began as a localized hospitality campaign quickly evolved into a community-wide initiative as public (Mesa Police, Fire and Parks) and private agencies embraced the efforts of Visit Mesa and united with them to become autism-certified. Mesa hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues participated in specialized autism training geared toward executives and front-facing hospitality service staff to better recognize autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and service the needs of ASD travelers from the planning stages of a vacation to when they arrive in the destination, and throughout their stay. Visit Mesa's strategy to target the family travel market as well as older ASD travelers to consider visitation to Mesa, Arizona, included research and development, video production, the development of planning tools both print and digital, an online website, community engagement and advocacy, and the execution of a robust ad campaign and public relations support.

[VM AutismCertified Centered.jpg](#)

[Supplemental Materials VisitMesa Autism Certified City.pdf](#)

[Autism Travel Guide Cover.jpg](#)

Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory

Project Title: Frontline FAM Virtual Series

For years, Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory has offered frontline FAM tours as an opportunity for visitor-facing staff from area hotels and attractions to see firsthand the incredible experiences available in the area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person frontline FAM tours were neither safe nor feasible. Yet, as the organization looked ahead to the 2021 summer travel season, it was clear that there was a need for reliable tourism and safety information. In response to the identified needs, the DMO adapted its frontline FAM tours to a virtual series model. They expanded the guest list to include additional touchpoints where visitors might get information during their time in Mt. Hood Territory. They added industry sectors like in-destination winery staff, outdoor agritourism experiences, and recreation guides/outfitters, knowing that these groups were experiencing high levels of visitor traffic in the new pandemic environment. The Frontline FAM Virtual Series met monthly over the course of three months – April, May and June 2021 – to prepare for the summer season. Each month the DMO produced a one-page visitor-ready itinerary that participants could share with their guests, along with a box of local goodies delivered to each participant to bring the itinerary stops to life for them. The boxes were a playful take on popular subscription boxes and included locally made items like beer, hot sauce, coasters and even customized Legos, giving participants a surprise to look forward to each month. During each 1.5-hour Zoom call they walked through the itinerary, “unboxed” the items together, and had several guest presenters from local businesses on the itinerary talk about what to expect at their locations. The three itineraries each highlighted a themed day trip. Itineraries focused on experiences that were new, COVID-19 safe, innovative and/or in target impacted wildfire areas. Updates to the program have made the frontline FAM program more representative of Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory as a complete destination with reliable information provided to both visitors and tourism businesses during the pandemic. The virtual series delivered an engaging and meaningful experience while providing easier access to a greater variety of local partner participants, including those who continue to struggle through the staffing shortages we have seen due to COVID-19.

[Mt. Hood Territory Frontline FAM Virtual Series Itineraries.pdf](#)

[Mt. Hood Territory Frontline FAM Virtual Series Snapshots.pdf](#)

Visit Tri-Cities (Washington)

Project Title: Pandemic Response for Tri-Cities, Washington

Like many destination marketing organizations in early 2020, the Visit Tri-Cities (VTC) team found themselves in a usual position: unable to promote tourism to the destination due to a statewide ban on non-essential travel, but seeking additional ways to provide value to the community. The VTC team knew that for the Tri-Cities to advance the work of recovering our local economy and way of life, there was a need to communicate broadly to the residents of the Tri-Cities that all residents play a crucial role in our ability to restore public health, preserve businesses, jobs and our local economy. The behaviors of residents of the region were a key determinant in curbing COVID-19

transmission and the community's ability to keep its economy thriving and promote a safe, and fun, destination to visitors. Visit Tri-Cities secured CARES ACT grant money from local jurisdictions to develop and execute in-market campaigns to encourage COVID-19 mitigation behaviors, provide vaccination information, improve the health of our community, and continue economic recovery. Visit Tri-Cities developed, created and deployed 38 high-quality public service announcements from September 2020 to July 2021 to amplify messaging from local leadership, the Benton-Franklin Health District as well as created unique messaging to mitigate the adverse economic and public health impacts of COVID-19. The campaigns focused on adherence to mask wearing, physical distancing, limiting gathering size and eventual the encouragement of vaccination as it became available. The PSAs were developed in English and Spanish and distributed throughout the Tri-Cities region. One of the catch phrases they created caught on with their community and was widely distributed: "CYA – Cover Your Airholes!"

The Professor: <https://youtu.be/yl-aaVQnla8>

The Violator Zone: <https://youtu.be/pMhmBIP8kD8>

Vax Up, Tri-Cities: <https://youtu.be/9qypJEcsW3w>

Vax Up, Tri-Cities (Spanish): https://youtu.be/o9AWdG5KF_E

Juntos Pero No Reveultos: https://youtu.be/7U_6y7NV33Y

Dr. NoVirus Vaccination (Spanish): <https://youtu.be/-RU5TDCrgjw>

Dr.NoVirus Vaccination (English): <https://youtu.be/tlrXBx2D9Ts>

Best Day Ever: <https://youtu.be/xnDix4quzLw>

Visit Vancouver USA (Washington)

Project Title: Savor the Couve

Savor the Couve was a collaborative weekly take-out dining experience to entice people to support local restaurants during the pandemic. Presented by the Greater Vancouver Chamber, ilani Resort and Visit Vancouver USA, the community came together to give back during a time that small businesses were struggling to keep serving, and indoor dining was heavily restricted. Each week, restaurants, bakeries, breweries, and wineries signed up for one (or more) parts of the five-course meal for two people that usually consisted of an alcoholic beverage, two appetizers, an entrée, and dessert. It gave foodies the opportunity to try new flavors in a contactless manner that aligned with COVID-19 guidelines when it was too cold to eat outside on a restaurant patio. Every Thursday, the 100 meals would get pre-packaged in to-go containers and cooler bags, and handed out drive-by style at the specified downtown location. The meals cost \$100 for two people, with \$25 of every order purchased donated to a different nonprofit each week. From December 2020 to March 2021, Savor the Couve generated \$136,072 for 32 local restaurants. Through the 16 weeks, 3,728 dinners were purchased, and there were 690 repeat customers. In addition, \$46,600 was raised for 16 local nonprofit organizations. The program was so successful that it was extended after the initial planned eight weeks, and will return fall 2021.

[Savor the Couve Flier Visit Vancouver USA.pdf](#)

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The Destination Marketing Association of the West (DMA West) is a regional professional association serving more than 150 destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in the West.

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