



For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Jonathan Jones

Visit Lake County Director of Marketing

847.662.2700

jonathan@lakecounty.org

Visit Lake County Celebrates National Travel and Tourism Week with Forum at Six Flags Great America and names Hospitality Hero Award Winners

Event highlights tourism's nearly \$2 billion economic impact and honors hospitality heroes

GURNEE, Ill. (May 8, 2026) — Visit Lake County (VLC) hosted its annual National Travel and Tourism Week forum Friday, May 8 at Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, bringing together industry leaders and local officials to recognize tourism's vital role in the regional economy.

The event, held during the U.S. Travel Association's National Travel and Tourism Week (May 3-9), spotlighted tourism's impact on Lake County, where the industry supports 16,000 jobs, generates nearly \$2 billion in visitor spending and produces more than \$68 million in local tax receipts annually.

"Through the work of Visit Lake County, we have the third largest destination leadership organization in the state of Illinois," said John Maguire, Visit Lake County president. "Our team works year-round to raise the bar through marketing, sales and community engagement efforts."

Gurnee Mayor Tom Hood joined representatives from the Lake County Chamber of Commerce, Gurnee Chamber of Commerce and the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association at the forum. Michael Jacobsen, president and CEO of the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association, addressed the importance of hospitality careers to Lake County families.

Hospitality Heroes Honored

The event featured the presentation of Hospitality Hero Awards to five long-serving industry professionals:

- Liliana Gomez, executive houseperson at SpringHill Suites Chicago, Lincolnshire (21-plus years with Marriott)
- Fran Clinton, guest services representative at TownePlace Suites, Waukegan (16 years)
- Dani Brey, bar manager at BBQ Productions, Third Lake (10-plus years)
- Rafael Hernandez, houseperson at Embassy Suites North Shore, Deerfield (33 years)
- Kimberly Witt, rides managerial supervisor at Six Flags Great America, Gurnee (45 years)

Six Flags Milestone Recognized

Mayor Hood presented a resolution from the Gurnee Village Board recognizing Six Flags Great America's impact on the region. The park, celebrating its 50th anniversary since opening, has been a cornerstone of tourism growth in Gurnee and Lake County.

VLC, now 42 years old, has seen its growth closely tied to Six Flags' role as a tourism anchor for the region.

Rachel Kendziora, public relations manager for Six Flags Great America, provided insights on the park's history and plans during the forum.

National Travel and Tourism Week, established by the U.S. Travel Association, brings the industry together annually to spotlight travel's impact, from supporting 15 million jobs nationwide to generating tax revenue that funds public services and infrastructure in communities across the country.

For more information about Visit Lake County, visit visitlakecounty.org or follow #letsgolakecounty and #NTTW26 on social media.

About Visit Lake County

Visit Lake County (Lake County, Illinois Convention and Visitors Bureau) is the official destination leadership organization and champion of tourism for Lake County, Illinois. The organization is comprised of 18 community partners plus Lake County, along with 200 industry partners including hotels, attractions and hospitality-related businesses, all who recognize the powerful impact of tourism. Visit Lake County's community engagement and sales and marketing initiatives enhance the public image of Lake County as a dynamic place to live, work and visit. The organization encourages residents and visitors to support local businesses, the foundation of Lake County communities.

#