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SPORTS FOUNDATION OF THE CAPITAL REGION CHAIR HONORED WITH HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE AWARD

Award recognition and 2023 grant recipients revealed at Discover Albany's Annual Celebration of Hospitality Excellence on May 16

ALBANY, N.Y. (May 16, 2023) – Discover Albany, Albany County's convention and visitors bureau, announced its award recipients for both the 2023 Michele L. Vennard Hospitality grant recipients and the Professor Anthony J. Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award.

The awards were announced at its Annual Celebration of Hospitality Excellence on Tuesday, May 16 at ETEC on the University at Albany campus. The celebration also serves as Discover Albany's annual meeting.

"We are thrilled that we get this opportunity each year to share our collective successes, and recognize one partner who stood out above all for their dedication to our destination. Distributing over \$56,000 in Hospitality Grants to Albany County tourism partners is icing on the cake!," said Jill Delaney, president and CEO, Discover Albany.

This year's Professor Anthony J. Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award was presented to Brian Akley, who is the Director of Business Development for Gilbane Building Company and serves as board chair for the Sports Foundation of the Capital Region. The award gives special recognition to travel business as an integral part of this region's economy. While there are many regional awards, The "Toby" is devoted solely to highlighting those who represent the peak of planning, execution, and professionalism within the travel industry.

While at Gilbane, Akley was instrumental in the critical renovation and transformation work that took place at the MVP Arena in recent years which helped win Albany the chance to host various NCAA tournaments and major entertainment and sporting events. Brian Akley has been the point person for the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) of the Sports Foundation of the Capital Region for many years. He lead the 40-person LOC ensuring all the behind-the-scenes details were taken care of. Cars were parked, people were shuttled, and local businesses were filled thanks to the leadership of Brian.

"I am truly honored to be selected for the Professor Anthony J. Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award (Toby) this year. But the credit does not belong to me alone. We had an amazing group of volunteers that worked tirelessly to make the Capital Region shine on the national stage. Albany proved once again that it knows how to welcome our guests in a BIG way!," said Akley.



The Michele L. Vennard Hospitality grants are given in partnership with the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region to organizations creating programs combining art and tourism. The grant supports programs that aid in building and sustaining Albany County tourism destinations, attractions, events and tourism-related activities.

The 2023 Hospitality Grant awarded a combined total of \$56,550 distributed among 17 different organizations. Grant recipients included:

- Albany Barn, Inc.
- Albany Center Galleries, Inc.
- Albany County Historical Association, Inc.
- Albany Institute of History & Art
- Friends of Pruyn House
- Historic Albany Foundation
- Irish American Heritage Museum
- Mohawk Towpath Scenic Byway Coalition, Inc.
- Musicians of Ma'alwyck, inc.
- New York Folklore Society
- Old Songs Inc.
- Organization of Adirondack Rowers and Scullers, Inc.
- Park Playhouse, Inc.
- Pine Hollow Arboretum
- Shaker Heritage Society
- Steamer 10 Theatre, Inc.
- University at Albany Foundation on behalf of the NYS Writers Institute

"The Discover Albany Board of Directors is thrilled to be able to support so many partners with grant funding as they continue to recover and even thrive post-pandemic. We give thanks to the Foundation Grant committee members and our partners at the Community Foundation of the Greater Capital Region for their work in selecting this year's winners and distributing these much-needed funds," said Leola Edelin, board chair, Discover Albany.

Named after the former longtime president and CEO of Discover Albany, the Michele L. Vennard Hospitality Grant recipients are chosen by the Discover Albany board of directors. The grants encourage collaboration between nonprofit organizations, community groups and hospitality businesses to further extend the economic impact of tourism and business.

The Professor Anthony J. Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award, also referred to as "The Toby," is named after the late Professor Strianese, an instructor and chair of SUNY Schenectady's School of Hotel, Culinary Arts, and Tourism and co-author of several hospitality textbooks. This award will continue to honor travel and hospitality entities for their leaders who display the core ideals of the industry and the role they play in our regional economy.

For more information about the Annual Celebration of Hospitality Excellence please visit albany.org/partners/hospitality-excellence-celebration.



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About Discover Albany. The Albany County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc. was established in 1976 to promote the civic and commercial progress of the community through increased development of conventions and tourism. Today, the organization is known as Discover Albany. Discover Albany currently represents more than 300 member businesses and assists each year in hundreds of regional meetings. Discover Albany also operates the Discover Albany Visitors Center, Henry Hudson Planetarium, and the Albany International Airport Information Center. The Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau Foundation was established in 1993 to provide educational opportunities and work with other organizations to secure grants and funding to advance regional travel and tourism projects. For more information, call 518-434-1217 or 800-258-3582 or visit www.albany.org.

