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Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority Presents 2023 Chairman's Award to Experience Grand Rapids

(GRAND RAPIDS, Mich) — The [Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority \(CAA\)](#) has announced the winner of its 2023 Chairman's Award, presented annually at the [Grand Rapids International Wine, Beer & Food Festival](#) to an outstanding individual or organization that has played an integral part of the establishment and growth of the event – named by *Forbes.com* in 2019 as one of a dozen "Fall Wine Festivals in North America You Don't Want to Miss."

This year's recipient is [Experience Grand Rapids](#), the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the region, which has been a promotional partner of the Festival since its inception in 2008. Over the years, Experience Grand Rapids has helped spread the word about this holiday kick-off celebration by sharing details on its website, digital communications and social media channels. The organization has also hosted various receptions and awards programs as part of the Festival over the years and is a dedicated ambassador specifically for the local restaurants, food producers and craft beverage establishments that help make the Festival a success.

"We love working with the team at Experience Grand Rapids and are honored at how they draw attention to our overall event as well as many of the individual businesses that participate," says Dawn Baker, Festival Manager. "Their history with us is rich and diverse, just like our region. Nothing brings a community together like gathering for a meal or a drink, and Experience Grand Rapids works tirelessly to showcase the neighborhoods and events – like ours – that make the area so unique."

Beyond the Festival and this latest accolade, Experience Grand Rapids has racked up an impressive list of promotions focused on the area food and beverage scene. In 2021, the personal finance website WalletHub ranked Grand Rapids No. 17 among its "Best Foodie Cities in America" and earlier this month, Experience Grand Rapids hosted its 14th Annual Restaurant Week GR. Since its inception, this 9-day food celebration has raised more than \$150,000 for educational programs and scholarships at the Secchia Institute for Culinary Education at Grand Rapids Community College.

First declared "Beer City USA" in 2012, beer tourism now accounts for a \$38.5 million regional economic impact to the greater Grand Rapids area (more than triple that of 2015). A 2019 study estimates that local breweries attracted over 94,000 beer tourists during the study year, with 25 percent of those beer tourists coming from outside Michigan. Additionally, beer tourism supports over 375 jobs and \$9.9 million in earnings in Kent County (a significant increase from 2015). Experience Grand Rapids has even created a wildly popular Beer City Brewsader program which complements its Beer City Ale Trail. These collective efforts are why *USA Today* named Grand Rapids the Craft Beverage Capital of the US, thanks to the quality and ever-increasing number of our cideries, distilleries, meaderies, wineries and coffee roasters.

"Experience Grand Rapids has positioned itself as a leader in culinary and beverage tourism, not only in Michigan but throughout the Great Lakes Region and the entire United States," says Rick Winn, CAA Chairman. "The dedicated staff – many of whom are self-professed foodies and fans of the local craft beverage industry – recognize the cultural and economic impact that this niche provides. No one works harder to bring lovers of food and beverage to the Grand Rapids area, on an annual basis, while also sharing our culinary story beyond our state's borders when they're out marketing on our behalf."

Since 2008, thousands of people have gathered inside DeVos Place for the annual pre-holiday celebration focused on the finest foods, restaurants, beverages and producers throughout Michigan and the world. Over the past 15 years, the Festival has grown not only in terms of attendees but also with the number of exhibitors, sponsors and overall square footage inside DeVos Place – including the Steelcase Ballroom, River Overlook, Grand Gallery, Welsh Lobby and Exhibit Hall C (more than three acres or 120,000 square feet) of tasting experiences. In recent years, the Festival has featured more than 1,800 beverages and dozens of restaurants, as well as educational and entertaining workshops and demonstrations presented by culinary and craft beverage leaders.

Past recipients of the Chairman's Award include:

- 2011 — West Side Beer
- 2012 — Meijer
- 2013 — Gemini Publications
- 2014 — Michigan Grape & Wine Industry Council
- 2015 — Ferris State University
- 2016 — Chef Angus Campbell-retired from the Secchia Institute for Culinary Education at Grand Rapids Community College
- 2017 — Daryl Delabbio, retired Kent County Administrator / Controller and Greg Sundstrom, retired Grand Rapids City Manager
- 2018 — Gerhard Schmied, Vice President of Food & Beverage at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel
- 2019 — Darius Quinn, former Chair of the CAA's Community Inclusion Group
- 2020 — Henri Boucher, ShowSpan Vice President and Grand Rapids International Wine, Beer & Food Festival Producer
- 2021 — Steve Heacock, retired Chair of the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority
- 2022 — Joe Borrello, past president of Tasters' Guild International

DeVos Place Convention Center is owned and operated by the CAA, a Michigan statutory authority, which is governed by a seven-member board of directors appointed by the County of Kent, the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan and the private sector. In addition to DeVos Place Convention Center, the

CAA owns and operates DeVos Performance Hall and Van Andel Arena. Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids established the CAA to encourage economic development and job creation in downtown Grand Rapids. The CAA has contracted with ASM Global, a private management company, to run day-to-day operations of the facilities.

ShowSpan and Festival Co-Producer, the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, look forward to presenting this annual culinary celebration to showcase the full menu of food and beverage education and entertainment that West Michigan has come to expect.