

For Immediate Release

GKCAA Marketing Committee

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Greater Kansas City Attractions Association Announces 2022 Heart of Kansas City Award Winners

(Kansas City, MO) – Excellence in tourism and hospitality were recognized on November 3rd as 75 representatives of the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association (GKCAA) were in attendance at the Kansas City Zoo for the announcement of the GKCAA’s 2022 Heart of Kansas City Award winners.

The association presented its Heart of Kansas City Awards in four categories, recognizing individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond expectations to further the goals, objectives, and spirit of the Kansas City region’s tourism and hospitality industries. Nominees are required to be members, employees, or volunteers associated with a GKCAA member organization. All nominations are evaluated by a subcommittee of the GKCAA Board of Directors.

Fox 4 reporter Matt Stewart served as emcee of the event, and along with association Board President Matt Schulte, presented the 2022 Heart of Kansas City Awards to the following honorees:

- **Attraction of the Year – Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum**

A destination for millions of tourists, history buffs, and students to honor our 33rd President, the Truman Library is an American institution. They recently completed their largest renovation since it opened, creating a renewed sense of excitement and purpose that benefits our entire region. The transformation featured stellar volunteer leadership from Kansas Citians and beyond. A \$30 million capital campaign was supported from nearly 25,000 individual donors from every state in the U.S. The funds went to the renovation of the museum, enhanced education programs, expanded public programs, and an endowment for outreach.

With the fresh look, the library breaks new ground in its efforts to make Truman’s life and legacy come alive for new generations of Americans. It showcases a cinematic experience with dramatic storytelling. The new components provide technology-rich, interactive exhibits highlighting the Truman presidency. The renovations provide a new benchmark for how presidential libraries are constructed and presented.

"This is such a significant and humbling honor, especially from our peers," said Deputy Director Kelly Anders. "Our recent renovation is a source of pride for the legacy of our 33rd President, giving his incredible journey new life for a modern audience. We've been delighted by the interest from visitors of all ages, and we look forward to remaining a must-see destination for years to come."

- **Individual Achievement Award – Jeffrey Bentley, Kansas City Ballet**

Jeffrey Bentley, Kansas City Ballet's Executive Director, led the organization through an extraordinary period of tremendous growth with finances, ballet students, and audiences. Because of Jeffrey's leadership, the Kansas City Ballet is one of the more financially stable ballet companies in the country.

When the Kauffman Center opened, Jeffrey made sure to establish the ballet as a resident company. He then also partnered with the musicians next door - the Kansas City Symphony - to bring live music to every ballet performance. He did make sure the ballet had a home of its own – opening the Todd Bolender Center for dance and creativity. Jeffrey spearheaded the site selection, renovation, design, and capital campaign for their headquarters. Additionally, Jeffrey has focused on diversifying its artistic offerings. He led a three company consortia to develop the Wizard of Oz ballet, thereby utilizing a new economically viable template for ballet companies. He also oversaw a capital campaign to build and create an all-new Nutcracker production for the Kansas City Ballet. Jeffrey also negotiated the company's first ever union contract for its dancers.

The ballet company and ballet school are premier institutions that are respected across the nation. Jeffrey is retiring at the end of this ballet season, in June 2023, after 25 years of dedication of cultivating ballet in KC.

"As I draw near to completing my 25 years of service with Kansas City Ballet, it is especially rewarding to be recognized by an organization devoted to ensuring the many entertainment and cultural assets that Kansas City offers can be enjoyed by audiences far and wide. I thank the GKCAA for its generous recognition of the work of Kansas City Ballet and my role as a member of a team of extraordinary excellence and commitment." Said Jeffrey J. Bentley, Kansas City Ballet Executive Director.

- **Special Project Award – Johnson County Museum's REDLINED Exhibition**

What started as an exhibit became a community-wide effort to learn and grow together. The Johnson County Museum has been featuring all year a full-scale exhibit called REDLINED: Cities, Suburbs, and Segregation. This exhibit examines the history and lasting legacies of redlining. Visitors walk thru 1500 square feet of large-scale visualizations that feature more than 120 images and 10 display cases of original objects and artifacts. The locally produced exhibit took 18 months to put together thru research and review, with a prominent collaboration with the Black Archives of Mid-America. The exhibit has spurred additional public education programs, social media posts, blogs, group tours, and was also the springboard for the museum's first-ever Juneteenth commemoration. The exhibit closes in January 2023.

"The Johnson County Museum is honored to receive this recognition from GKCAA, and grateful to have the opportunity to serve the community through our work. We would like to thank our local partners and the tens of thousands of people who have visited the REDLINED exhibit, taken a group tour, and attended programs and panels. The support for this exhibit has been astounding!" said Lindsey Arnold Seevers, Curator of Engagement.

- **Ambassador of the Year – Bruce Turrell, Kansas City Zoo**

He's met people from every state. The job is more than taking tickets. Visitors for the last thirteen years love when Bruce is the first person they see when they enter the Zoo. As a Guest Ambassador, Bruce Turrell is such an asset to the Kansas City Zoo. He is always helpful, kind, friendly, and ready to engage with people coming in. Guests have even written notes to the Zoo praising Bruce, with phrases like "Bruce is the best", "friendliest welcoming face at the zoo", and "he is a jewel".

"We are so proud of our own Bruce Turrell for winning the Ambassador of the Year award! His hard work and dedication to making each guest feel welcomed does not go unnoticed, and we are ecstatic for him to be recognized by the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association. We couldn't think of someone more deserving for this award." Said Sean Putney, the Zoo's CEO/Executive Director.

About the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association

Founded over 25 years ago, the Greater Kansas City Attractions Association (GKCAA) is a not-for-profit member organization featuring many of the city and region's top attractions on both sides of the state line. The GKCAA is dedicated to enhancing the success of member attractions through strategic initiatives of collective marketing, membership services, networking and educational programs, and tourism advocacy as a collective voice. For a complete list of members and to learn more, visit attractionskc.org or facebook.com/AttractionsKC.

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