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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation Announces  
Call for Nominations for Brilliant Spirit Awards**

*Champaign, IL* – The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation will honor community champions at their annual Toast to Tourism: Celebrating Community Brilliance, Wednesday, May 6 at Carmon's, held during National Travel and Tourism Week, May 3–9, 2026.

Nominations are now open for the 2026 Brilliant Spirit Awards for individuals or organizations who have shown innovation, creativity, or collaboration in welcoming visitors and residents to the greater Champaign-Urbana area, including Monticello, Tuscola, Arthur, Arcola, Sullivan, and Paxton. Potential nominees could be a staff member who provides exceptional customer service to guests, an event planner who created significant economic impact, or a business leader whose insight has paved the way for growth in the hospitality industry.

Nominations are being accepted through the Experience Champaign-Urbana website at [www.experiencecu.org/toasttotourism](http://www.experiencecu.org/toasttotourism) through March 21, 2026. Submissions must include an example of how this person has gone above and beyond for the greater Champaign-Urbana area's visitors and residents.

In 2025, the following were honored with a Brilliant Spirit Award: Ruthie Harper, ION Grove at Willard Airport; Little Theatre on the Square; Laura Raney, Comfort Suites; Jan Seeley, Illinois Race Weekend; Irene Macedo Hernández, La Paloma. A list of all past winners is available on the website.

The Foundation is also seeking sponsors to help keep the event accessible to all. Interested businesses or organizations can contact Jayne DeLuce at [jayned@experiencecu.org](mailto:jayned@experiencecu.org). Current sponsors include Hickory Point Bank, First Federal Savings Bank of Champaign-Urbana, First State Bank and Trust, and Hamilton Walker's.

National Travel and Tourism Week encourages cities nationwide to hold rallies to champion travel as a jobs creator and revenue generator. Many events will be staged under the banner of the U.S. Travel Association's campaign to raise the travel industry's profile across the country and among policymakers. The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation's Toast to Tourism will not only honor the award winners but also highlight the many ways tourism drives economic growth in the greater Champaign-Urbana area.

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