



Tourism summit hopes to build on '09 success

By Anthony Cronin

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Organizers call event 'rallying cry for industry'

The region's multibillion-dollar tourism industry is revving up for another annual statewide summit on tourism this spring at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods.

David Quinn, a principal of the New London-based Quinn & Gellar marketing and design firm, says the May 6 event follows the success of last year's first Connecticut Conference on Tourism.

"The time is right for a rallying cry for the industry," he said. Quinn, whose firm is producing the second annual Connecticut Conference on Tourism, said the event's planned speakers and panelists will share their insights "to support an industry that is vital to our economy." He said the May event is designed to improve productivity and performance in the industry.

Despite a prolonged recession, tourism remains an integral part of southeastern Connecticut's overall economy, and this region's tourism attractions, including the Mystic Seaport and Mystic Aquarium, remain the state's leading tourism assets.

Tourism experts say the multibillion-dollar industry employs tens of thousands in jobs ranging from employment at restaurants and hotels to top executive positions at the region's two casino and entertainment complexes.

Connecticut's continuing budgetary problems also have led to steep cuts in state funding toward tourism.

This year's tourism summit is being held in conjunction with the Connecticut Commission on Tourism & Culture, the Eastern Regional Tourism District and the newly formed Greater Mystic Visitors Bureau.

The conference also includes the 13th annual Pineapple Awards presentations from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The awards are given to four individuals and businesses that have made major contributions to the region's tourism industry.

Nominations for the 2010 Pineapple Awards will be accepted through Friday, April 9, at the Mystic and Shoreline Visitors Information Center at Olde Mistick Village. Nominations forms and information can be found at www.CelebrateTourism.com/awards.

Quinn said this year's tourism conference will include a host of speakers covering tourism marketing trends and Web strategies, travel and leisure visitation data as well as discussion panels with state and regional industry experts. A networking luncheon also is planned, followed by an awards ceremony celebrating statewide recipients of the AAA Five Diamond and Four Diamond awards, which recognize the top achievers in hospitality and dining.

This year's conference will include event registration and some logistical planning provided by the tourism and hospitality department at Mitchell College in New London. In addition, 25 students from Mitchell's tourism and hospitality studies program are providing assistance with the overall development of the May statewide tourism summit.

AT A GLANCE

What: The Connecticut Conference on Tourism
Where: MGM Grand at Foxwoods
When: Wednesday, May 6, 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Information: Visit www.CelebrateTourism.com or call (860) 444-0448