



MGM To Host Statewide Tourism Conference

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Local Eastern Connecticut is home to some of this state's leading tourism attractions, and next month it will be home to a statewide conference on the \$10 billion industry that's expected to attract hundreds to the MGM Grand at Foxwoods.

The first Connecticut Conference on Tourism will be held at the high-rise hotel and conference center on Wednesday, May 27, and its major sponsors read like a "Who's Who" of tourism: MGM Grand, Mohegan Sun, Olde Mistick Village, the Mystic Coast & Country Travel Industry Association, Mystic.org and the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism.

David Quinn, a principal in the Quinn & Gellar marketing agency in New London that is producing the daylong tourism conference, said tourism is a vital component of the state's, and eastern Connecticut's, economies so it was important to hold a major industry conference in this region.

He said there was a void created after the state of Connecticut held its last Governor's Conference on Tourism in 2007. "It was a great opportunity for us to join in," said Quinn.

State officials say that tourism, along with historic and cultural attractions, are responsible for 170,000 jobs across Connecticut and \$14 billion in annual gross state product. Tourism alone accounts for some \$10 billion. But because of the state's increasing fiscal pressures, lawmakers are considering proposals for drastic tourism budget cutbacks. Gov. M. Jodi Rell's proposed 2008-09 budget would place the state Commission on Culture & Tourism within the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and substantially cut funding for the state's regional tourism districts, including the Eastern Regional Tourism District based in New London.

Quinn said the May 27 conference, designed to become an annual event, will feature a keynote address, numerous educational seminars and panel discussions. Conference planners are expected to soon announce the names of those invited to the daylong conference, including industry leaders from throughout the United States.

The conference begins at 11 a.m. with registration, and in the evening will feature an AAA awards ceremony where the annual "Pineapple Awards" will be presented to those who contributed the most to this region's tourism industry. In addition, the AAA will announce its Four Diamond award winners for excellence in hospitality and dining. This year's recipients, including one that will receive the AAA's coveted Five Diamond Award, represent hospitality and dining establishments across Connecticut.

"Tourism is a vital component of our state's economy, and we want to create an event that allows all the travel and leisure partners from throughout the state an opportunity to network and speak one-on-one with industry experts," Quinn said.