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ILLINOIS TOURISM ADVOCACY GROUP UNVEILS NEW NAME AND ICONIC IMAGE TO BETTER COMMUNICATE MISSION

Visit Illinois board and industry professionals unanimously approve name change to Illinois Tourism Alliance

Chicago, Ill. – January 31, 2007 – A new name and image for the Visit Illinois advocacy group will make its official debut at the Illinois Governor’s Conference on Tourism, held February 7-9 at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago.

The organization, which focuses on advocacy, education, and information resources for the tourism industry will unveil the newly anointed Illinois Tourism Alliance (ITA) along with its new identity. The identity, designed by Rockford-based creative team GrahamSpencer, cleverly combines an international symbol with their interpretation of one of Illinois’ most famous iconic personalities, Abraham Lincoln.

“We worked hand-in-hand with our leading public and private sector industry partners, and together we determined that our previous name did not clearly identify our mission of advocacy and education. Too often, we were mistaken for a consumer tourism marketing agency,” said Nina Winston, executive director for the organization, which has a goal of doubling its member and partner base in the next year.

Grant DePorter, ITA chairman and president of Harry Caray’s Restaurant Group in Chicago, said, “This group has evolved over the past 20 years to become the official voice of an industry that has generated an economic impact of more than \$26 billion and 300,000 jobs in our state. This brand change is an important step in our strategy to ensure continued growth in the visitor industry.”

David Preece, president and CEO of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, led the communications task force responsible for developing the new identity and a communications plan. Task force member Jay Graham, co-creative director and partner at GrahamSpencer, presented the project’s graphic recommendations to the Visit Illinois board, which were unanimously approved.

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According to Preece, re-naming the organization was a strategic necessity to clearly communicate the role and goals of the industry group. He said, "The name *Visit Illinois* implied that the organization existed to promote Illinois' tourism assets to outsiders but it is actually a trade group for industry organizations." "The new brand, *Illinois Tourism Alliance*, suggests exactly what the mission has always been: advocate for the Illinois tourism industry," he added.

Graham explained that his creative team sought to create an identity that was both credible and relevant and described the image by stating, "Abraham Lincoln is our state's greatest cultural/historic icon. Lincoln says 'Illinois' better than anything else can, with the possible exception of the outline of the state which is used by the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. Placing a suitcase in Lincoln's hand allows us to say 'Illinois' and 'tourism' in one image, with an added touch of whimsy appropriate for the hospitality business. The international symbol of a man was chosen for ease of reproduction and to give the mark a look that is not rooted in a particular point in time."

Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism, said, "The repositioning of the newly branded Illinois Tourism Alliance is an exciting new step for a growing, dynamic organization. We are fortunate in Illinois to have a strong team of partners within our industry."

Winston said that by choosing the new tag line, "The Voice of the Visitor Industry," the organization's core mission is pulled into sharper focus. This is a vital, strong industry that means business - and we are here to represent it," she added.

ITA brings together public and private sector organizations working to promote Illinois tourism. It is the only organization representing the entire tourism industry. Members and partners of the organization include tourism associations, groups and the vendors who service the tourism industry, and Illinois state, county, and local government entities, with the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Bureau of Tourism (DCEO/IBOT) leading the way. In addition, throughout the year the Illinois Tourism Alliance monitors state legislation and communicates with lawmakers on behalf of the tourism industry.

For more information, visit www.illinoistourismalliance.org email info@illinoistourismalliance.org, or call 312-658-1047.