

# AL ★ MS ★ TN RURAL TOURISM CONFERENCE

SWEETWATER 

## OCTOBER 18-20, 2021



Rural  
Tourism  
Conference

#ALMSTNRTC21

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## Pre-Conference Tour Monday, October 18, 2021

No cost thanks to our generous Sponsors!  
Pre-registration required

Join the Sweetwater and Monroe County team for an afternoon of fun in the Sweetwater Valley.  
Board the Shuttle at the Holiday Inn & Suites or Quality Inn or Days Inn at 3 p.m.



**Tour of The Lost Sea, America's Largest Underground Lake**  
This guided tour is ¾ mile round trip down a wide path. Alternate activities onsite include the gift shop, nature trail, gem mining, and more!

The shuttle will return you to Sweetwater Main Street for a beautiful evening on the Sweetest Street in Tennessee



Sweetwater Main Street will host local farm to table hors d'oeuvres, beverages, and live music, followed by private shopping hours in the local boutiques and dining opportunities in the eateries and bartending by Dalton Jones.

Shuttle will return to hotels on a regular route

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Choose Network "Rural Tourism" – Password "Sweetwater"

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## Tennessee Governor Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee Welcome you to Tennessee!



Bill Lee is a seventh-generation Tennessean and the 50th Governor of Tennessee. He was raised in Franklin, where he still resides today with his wife, Maria, on his family's farm. He's the proud father of four adult children (Jessica, twin sons Jacob and Caleb, and Sarah Kate) and eight grandchildren. After attending Williamson County Schools, Governor Lee attended Auburn University, where he studied Mechanical Engineering. After graduation, he returned home to Franklin to join the family business his grandfather started in 1944, a comprehensive mechanical construction service company. He became president of Lee Company in 1992.

Since becoming Governor in 2019, Governor Lee has focused on several priorities including quality education, economic development, public safety, and supporting families, all with a particular focus on the accelerated transformation of rural Tennessee. Under his leadership, Tennessee has strengthened career and technical training, expanded school choice, passed the most pro-life legislation in the country, achieved meaningful criminal justice reform, cut taxes, and sharpened the effectiveness of government.

Additionally, Tennessee was named the number one best fiscally managed state in the country, the best business climate in the U.S., number one in the nation for advanced industry job growth and the best state for small business growth. Since Governor Lee took office, the state has garnered 272 project commitments to create almost 40,000 jobs and \$12.9 billion in capital investments, with Amazon, FedEx-Logistics, Smile Direct Club, Isee, General Motors, Mitsubishi and dozens of other companies choosing to invest in Tennessee's business-friendly environment.

The Governor and First Lady are people of strong faith. They are active in Grace Chapel Church and in numerous faith-based ministries, which have taken them all over the world to serve people in need, including to Africa, Haiti, Central America, and the Middle East.



Maria was raised in Silver Spring, Maryland as one of five children. It was her heart for service that first brought her to Tennessee through a summer mentorship opportunity with her church. Twenty-five years later, Maria is still proud to call the state home.

As first lady, Maria plans to motivate others with her passion for service. In 2019, she launched Tennessee Serves, an initiative designed to engage Tennesseans in serving one another and their communities. Maria hopes Tennessee Serves will continue to act as a mobilization mechanism to increase volunteer efforts across the Volunteer State.

When traveling the state with her husband, Maria enjoys meeting so many wonderful Tennesseans. She is deeply grateful for the privilege to serve as first lady to the great state of Tennessee.

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Conference Schedule

Tuesday – October 19, 2021

- 8:00 – 8:45 **Welcome:** Sweetwater Mayor Doyle Lowe & Monroe County Mayor Mitch Ingram  
Video Welcomes by Governor Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee  
Welcome from TN Tourism Assistant Commissioner Melanie Beauchamp
- 8:45 – 9:45 **Walking on Water: Capitalizing on the Great Outdoors** - Moderator: Kasey Muench  
Panel – Travis McLeese, Blaina Tallent Best, Melissa Woody.
- 9:45 – 10:30 **Break** – Introduction of Vendors, Snacks provided by Towns Toffee
- 10:30 – 11:45 **Preaching a New Sermon: The Main Street Revival** – Kathy Laplante\* **\* Sponsored by**
- 11:45 – 1:00 **“Sunday Dinner on the Grounds”** with live entertainment by Cousin Tommy & Rev. Beardsworth  
Visit with Vendors
- 1:00 – 2:00 **Hallelujah, Amen and Pass the Peas: Growing a Vibrant AgriTourism Business During Challenging Times** – Conversation with Andy Holt, John Harrison, Callie Brackett, Kacey Troup
- 2:00 – 2:15 **STS Scholarship** presented by Tina Robbins, Executive Director of Aberdeen MS Visitors Bureau
- 2:15 – 2:45 **Break** – Visit with Vendors, Snacks provided by Grain Bin Commodities
- 2:45 – 3:45 **Toppling Tables at the Synagogue: Perception is Reality: Creating a Crisis Communication Response** – Cory Cart – BandWagon
- 3:45 – 4:45 **Are You Born Again: Reimagining For Survival** – Berkeley Young



Shuttles return to hotels and will begin shuttling for the evening Dinner at the Notch at 6 PM

*Dinner at the Notch*

TSALI NOTCH  
VINEYARD

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2021

*Six Thirty in the Evening*

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Conference Schedule

Wednesday – October 20, 2021

8:00 – 9:00 **Turning Water Into Wine: How to Set Up Your Destination For Success on the Smallest Budget** – Kristen Luna

9:00 – 9:45 **Take Time to Testify** – 45 Ideas in 45 Minutes

9:45 – 10:15 **Agnes Zaiontz Award Winner Announced** – by Tami Reist

**Break** – Visit with Vendors, Snacks provided by Hunters Café

10:15 – 10:45 **Bringing Eternity Into Focus: Tips to Shoot Better Tourism Photos With Your Phone** – Alison Hunter, Journal Communications

10:45 – 11:45 **Adding to the Choir: It's Not Just FB Anymore** – Will Crockett and Wayne Emerson Advance Travel & Tourism

11:45 – 12:00 **Benediction:** Draw for Evaluations

Announce Silent Auction Winners

Announce 2022 RTC location

Wine & Spirits Pull



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## Speakers



### **Blaina Tallent Best**

Blaina Tallent Best was born and raised in Monroe County, TN. She currently lives in Madisonville, TN with her husband of 10 years and her two young daughters. After graduating from Hiwassee College with a Bachelor of Science Degree and Liberty University with a Master of Arts Degree, Blaina worked in higher education for the first decade of her career. No stranger to the outdoors, she was excited to take on the role as Director for the Monroe County Department of Tourism to promote the extensive outdoor recreation available in the area. Along the way, she has been able to learn so much more about tourism from so many people and considers herself still very much a “student” in the industry. In her spare time - when spare time exists - she enjoys hiking, kayaking, and traveling with her family. Fun fact: While in college, Blaina cheered and played basketball.



### **Callie Brackett**

After almost 2 decades in the corporate world of cable television and insurance, Callie realized her lifelong dream through Grain Bin Commodities, established in 2017. From baking cakes through Facebook and a mobile setup, Grain Bin Commodities was born. To love on others through food and share the farm her family has spent 50 years on, as stewards of the land. The Holt Farm has been a part of the Sweetwater Valley for half a century, from a Tractor Dealership to the milk its dairies produce. After business began booming, the Bracketts realized the Holt Farm was the right place for their bakery's location. Through the bakery, event space, fall activities, and more to come, they bless the TN Valley with delicious baked goods and an amazing view of a working farm. Come visit for a taste of Caramel Crack or some other delectable treat they are making that day. "We make old fashioned baked goods. The kind your grandmother made. A memory in each bite!" Craig has added to the bakery with a converted barn to event space, a pizza oven, and tractor shed for vendors. "Here we get to celebrate the land, share recipes from generations back, and make new friends.

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**Cory Cart**

Cory Cart, APR, has destination and hospitality marketing experience that includes Visit Oxford, MS; Gallup, NM; New Mexico Tourism Department; Ruth's Chris Steak House; Google Cultural Institute; Clearwater, FL; Aiken, SC; Sunland Park, NM; Destination Bryan, TX; Maine Tourism Department; Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation Department; Enjoy Corinth, MS; and many more. A nationally accredited PR practitioner, Cory's clients have been featured by Wall Street Journal, NBC's Today, New York Times, Travel+Leisure, National Geographic, and hundreds of other media outlets. As the chief client officer at **Bandwagon**, Cory guides clients through integrated destination marketing campaigns built around strong brand differentiators. He also leads the firm's crisis communication and planning team. Cory was honored by the Southern Public Relations Federation as a Sr. PR Practitioner and was selected as the 2016 Public Relations Practitioner of the Year by the Public Relations Association of Louisiana. He is one of four partners at Bandwagon which was just selected as the 2021 PR Firm of the Year for the US and Canada by judges of the 18th annual International Business Awards.

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### **Will Crockett**

Will is an experienced and certified Tourism Marketing Professional based in Nashville, Tennessee. In his six years working in the tourism industry, he has experienced tourism at almost every level of destination marketing, from his hyper-local beginnings at the Downtown Tupelo (MS) Main Street Association, to the mid-sized destination market of the Tupelo Convention & Visitor's Bureau, and two plus years at the state level working with the Tennessee Dept. of Tourist Development. Now with Advance Travel & Tourism, Will enjoys applying his learnings from his destination marketing origins to help craft successful digital marketing campaigns in the Tennessee and Kentucky markets. His favorite part about working in tourism are the passionate and friendly people who have welcomed him into their destinations across the Southeast for many years.



### **Wayne Emerson**

Wayne cut his teeth in the advertising industry leading media strategy and planning teams at MEC, BBDO and Luckie & Company. After 25 plus years spanning virtually all marketing categories, he joined Advance Travel and Tourism to apply his Retail and Travel Industry experience from Alabama Tourism Department, Delta Air Lines, AT&T Wireless and other national brands to help DMOs and attractions create online brands and drive tourism to their destinations. Wayne currently works with destinations and attractions in Alabama and Georgia. He thrives on building successful digital solutions with clients, but also relies on his offline experiences to help round out their overall media strategy.



### **John Harrison**

John Harrison, along with his wife Celia, operates a diversified farming operation in Loudon, Monroe and McMinn counties. Their business involves dairy, beef, cheese production, tourism and a café that was opened in 2019. The farming operation includes 3,500 acres for corn, hay and pasture production. Sweetwater Valley Farm was recognized in 2012 as IDFA's innovative farm of the year and continues to be an innovator with the startup of an 8-robot Lely XL operation in 2018 which is home to 450 lactating cows and can be expanded to 16 robots. By the end of 2020, the operation included 1,800 mature cows, 2,000 replacement heifers, 600 beef cows, 400,000 lbs. of cheese produced annually and 100,000 visits to the store and farm.

John is director or member of numerous boards or organizations in the community. Celia, a physician, is the Medical Director of the Emergency Department at Sweetwater Hospital Association. John and Celia have five children. Mary Lyndal, their oldest daughter, is director of marketing at the farm. Charles Allen, their youngest son, graduated from UTK with a degree in Ag Business and joined the family business operations.

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### **Andy Holt**

Andy Holt currently serves as Director of Business Development in support of economic development initiatives, as well as agriculture and forestry industry expansion for the Department of Agriculture (TDA).

Holt served in the Tennessee House of Representatives, District 76 covering Weakley County and parts of Carroll and Obion Counties from 2010 to 2020. During his tenure, Holt served on several committees and was chairman of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee. He and his wife, Ellie, own and operate Holt Family Farms, an agri-tourism and diversified livestock farming operation in Dresden. Holt is a former Financial Services Officer at Farm Credit Services and former Greenfield Fertilizer Manager at Weakley County Farmers Cooperative.

Holt's educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Economics and Business with a minor in Animal Science from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. He earned his Master of Business Administration from the University of Tennessee at Martin with a focus on Economics and Finance.



### **Kristin Luna**

Tennessee-based journalist Kristin Luna is a magazine veteran with 20 years of industry experience under her belt; she has contributed to 50+ major publications, including *Travel + Leisure*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Afar*, *Newsweek*, *Southern Living*, *Real Simple*, *Redbook*, *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur* and *USA Today*. She also has authored more than 15 guidebooks for Frommer's, Globe Pequot and Sasquatch Books.

As a byproduct of her love for traveling and storytelling, Kristin launched *Camels & Chocolate*, a collection of narratives about food, travel and home renovation, in 2007. Through her blog, she has collaborated with myriad brands and DMOs; among them, Visit Britain, Visit Cayman Islands, Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, Tennessee Whiskey Trail Airbnb, Viator, Fairmont Hotels, Visit Lexington, South Dakota Tourism, West Virginia Tourism, Visit New Orleans, Airbnb, Contiki, Natchez Trace Compact, and countless Southern CVBs and chambers of commerce.

In 2012, Kristin and her husband Scott van Velsor launched their own content marketing agency, Odinn Media; the pair consults and creates marketing assets for tourism and hospitality entities across the United States with a strong focus on helping promote rural CVBs and chambers of commerce. In 2018, Kristin and Scott fused their love of tourism and art to form DMA-events, a creative placemaking 501(c)(3) that has installed more than 30 large-scale murals in towns across Tennessee, including one in Sweetwater. Kristin frequently speaks about best marketing practices and how to elevate brand awareness at travel media events and governor's conferences across the country.



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### **Marty Marbry**

Marty Marbry currently serves as West Tennessee Division Manager for the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, a position she has held since 2005. In this role she works with 26 counties developing both domestic and international tourism opportunities. She works to create and implement strategic marketing plans, works with media to inform of the importance of tourism to the local and state economies. She also serves as the department liaison to Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association for the planning of the annual Governor's Conference. Prior to joining the state she spent 10 years in retail-tourism management as marketing/tourism director for Urban Retail Properties, Wolfchase Galleria. In this position she was selected to work with eleven other premier shopping destinations across the United States in the Ultimate Shopping Excursions program. This rewards program promoted shopping as the international and leisure tourist activity, offering discounts and shopping rewards.

Marbry graduated with a B.S. in Communication from the University of Memphis. She currently serves on the AL MS TN Rural Tourism Conference Board, in 2012 was appointed to the Tennessee Tombigbee Waterway Authority Board by Governor Bill Haslam and has served on the Southeast Tourism Society board of directors, Metro Memphis Attractions Association, as well as the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau Tourism Foundation board of directors. Marty and her husband Greg live in Bartlett TN.



### **Travis McLeese**

Travis McLeese is the CEO of the Paris-Henry County Chamber of Commerce. A Paris, Tennessee native, Travis graduated from Henry County High School before attending Bethel University on a performing arts scholarship. There he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration. In 2008 Travis received the Governor's Star Award for Community Service. That same year, he received the Loyal Patriot Award, the highest honor that any Henry Countian can receive. He is a 2019 graduate of the WestStar Leadership Program.

Travis currently sits on the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce Executives Board of Directors, The Tennessee Association of Community Leadership Board of Directors, the West Tennessee PBS Board of Directors, The Henry County Healthcare Foundation, The Henry County Agriculture Advisory Committee for the Henry County School System, and the Friends of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge Board of Directors. He is also a member of the Paris-Lakeway Kiwanis Club. Travis is married to Jessica Montoya of Munford, Tennessee. She is the Director of the Inman Middle School Chorus Program. They have three children Gavin (8), Ollie (6) and Millie (3).

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**Kasey Muench**

Kasey Muench is the Community Relations Director of the Paris-Henry County Chamber of Commerce. A Paris, Tennessee, native, Kasey graduated from Henry County High School before attending The University of Memphis where she earned a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a concentration in Graphic Design, and was the recipient of the prestigious Carson Circle Award.

Kasey currently serves on the Henry County Bicentennial Committee and is a 2019 graduate of the Leadership Henry County Program. She is a member of the Paris Rotary Club and a longtime active member of First Christian Church in Paris. Kasey is married to Ryan Muench of Paris, Tennessee, a teacher and assistant football coach at Henry County High School. They have two children Aubrey (5) and Graham (3).



**Kathy La Plante**

Kathy La Plante is a Senior Program Officer and Senior Director of Coordinating Program Services at the National Main Street Center, headquartered in Chicago. Kathy has over 30 years' experience working with the Main Street program. Working for the National Main Street Center, she provides training and technical services for cities of all sizes. Prior to this position, Kathy was the first Director of the New Hampshire Main Street Center for over 10 years and assisted 23 communities in initiating local Main Street programs in the state.

Ms. La Plante began her Main Street career in 1989 as the Executive Director of the Chippewa Falls (Wisconsin) Main Street Program, a 1996 Great American Main Street Award winner that recognized the top five downtown revitalization programs in the country.



**Alison Hunter**

Alison Hunter is the Photo Director for Journal Communications, a custom content marketing company in Franklin, Tenn., which publishes the *Official Tennessee Vacation Guide*, *Tennessee Home & Farm*, and *Mississippi Farm Country*. In her role, Alison art directs photographers, evaluates images for quality, and retouches photos to be used in print and online. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in Graphic Design from the University of Memphis. With 20+ years of experience in photography management, Alison knows a thing or two about what makes a good photo, and will be sharing her best tips as part of this session.

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**Kacey Troup**

Kacey joined TDA's Business Development team in 2019. As a Business Consultant, she focuses on expanding the Agritourism industry. Before becoming a Business Consultant, Kacey worked for UT/TSU Extension in Rutherford County with their 4-H Youth Development program and the Rutherford County Farmers Market.

Growing up in Southern Maryland, Kacey was raised on her family's Agritourism farm. She moved to Tennessee to attend Middle Tennessee State University where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness as well as a Master of Education in Ag Educational Leadership. While at MTSU, Kacey chartered and served as the first president of the Agritourism Club. She also served as the Student Coordinator for the MTSU School of Agriculture's two annual Agritourism events.



**Melissa Woody**

Melissa Alley Woody has worked in local public relations and marketing since 1992. For the past 22, she has served as vice president for Tourism Development at the Cleveland/Bradley Chamber of Commerce. She earned an Associate degree from Cleveland State Community College, and Bachelor and Masters degrees in Communications from the University of Tennessee. She taught part-time at Lee University for 14 years in the School of Communications and the Arts.

She is past president of the Tennessee Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus, past president of MainStreet Cleveland and currently Chair of The Alumni Community of Cleveland State. Melissa is a longtime member of the Cleveland Media Association and a past recipient of the association's Excellence in Communications Award. Melissa and her husband Dewey are members of First Baptist Church where she is active in choir. You may see her in the occasional community theater production or appearing around town as Loretta Lynn or Minnie Pearl.



**Berkeley Young**

Berkeley Young is President of Young Strategies, Inc and he has twenty years of travel/tourism research, marketing, management, speaking and retail experience. He specializes in destination research, planning and strategy. Young's travel industry experience includes management positions at a destination marketing organization, a Chamber of Commerce, a resort and a research and planning firm. In 2004 Young formed his Charlotte, NC based company focusing on research and strategic planning for all aspects of travel destinations.

Young's firm is known for its custom-tailored approach in using research to address specific issues for DMOs. In the last fifteen years Young has worked with over 100 destinations in thirty-four states and is a popular speaker at regional and national conferences and conventions.



The AL MS TN Rural Tourism Conference would like to especially thank the 2021 RTC Planning Team:

Marty Marbry, Jessica Morgan, J. Thomas Chesnutt, Hugh Stump, Cheryl Pate, Candace Johnson-Beers, Jasmine Rainey, Ralph Antonelli, Bill Buchanan, Christy Burns, Jessie Campbell, Nancy Carpenter, Rachael Carter, Trisa Collier, Colleen Coury, John Dersham, Frances Glenn, Rochelle Hicks, Mary Beth Hopper, Rene Lance, Reid Nevins, Hope Oakes, Beth Pippin, William Poindexter, Patti Presley-Fuller, Teresa Prober, Jasmine Rainey, Tami Reist, Tina Robbins, Jed Smart, Lynsey Smith, Pam Stenz, Maggie Lowery Stevenson, Ann Tackett, Kim Terrell and Local Planning Team: Blaina Best, Brandy Gentry, Sonya Crush, Hayley Isbill, Ashley Myers, Karen Carey, Chuck Whited, Merian Brewster, Kimberly Anderson.



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