

Tourism Professional of the Year and Tourism Scholarship Recipients Named at 2018 Newport News Tourism Appreciation Luncheon

Newport News, VA, May 11, 2018 – The Newport News Tourism Professional of the Year and two scholarship recipients were announced at the annual Newport News Tourism Appreciation Luncheon May 9 at the Holiday Inn Newport News at City Center.

Kerry Ann Lee, who works as an evening Executive Lounge Attendant at the Newport News Marriott at City Center, was named the “*Gregory Cherry Tourism Professional of the Year*,” while Princess Harvin and Spenser Burns were awarded Newport News Hospitality Association scholarships of \$1,000 each.

Newport News Mayor McKinley Price presented the awards during the luncheon, hosted by Newport News Tourism in celebration of National Travel & Tourism Week.

According to the nomination, Lee was a “*natural*” for the award due to her ability to leave a memorable impression with the Marriott’s guests. Daily, she works with colleagues to ensure returning customers always receive their favorite things – whether it’s a plate of their favorite food or their preference for a particular room.

One of the most over-the-top ways Lee exceeded customer expectations involved working behind-the-scenes to make a wedding proposal extraordinarily special for a guest. Prior to the proposal, Lee was able to secure for the guest (and his soon-to-be fiancée) a specific table on a terrace overlooking the city; a bottle of champagne delivered to their room; and a room upgrade: This was all done from the Newport News Marriott for a proposal that took place in **PARIS, FRANCE!**

The nomination letter further stated that Lee “*knows what our guests like and quickly adapts to accommodate their preferences.*” Lee started working at the Marriott in April 2014 as a housekeeper, then moved to banquet server, and was “*so terrific at taking care of guests that when the p.m. concierge lounge position became available, the transfer request was a slam dunk!*”

The “*Gregory Cherry Tourism Professional of the Year Award*” is given annually to a hospitality industry employee who demonstrates superior customer service while also promoting travel and tourism in the city. It was named in memory of Gregory Cherry, a former travel counselor at the Newport News Visitor Center and owner of the James A. Fields House, who died in 2007.

Since 2008, the Newport News Hospitality Association has awarded college scholarships annually to students interested in careers in travel & tourism or hospitality management. The students can either be high school seniors living and going to school in Newport News or they can be adults already working in the Newport News hospitality industry who are enrolled in or plan to take classes in travel & tourism.

About scholarship recipient Princess Harvin: Princess is a Front-Desk Clerk at the Holiday Inn Newport News at City Center. She is also a full-time student at Tidewater Community College, majoring in Hospitality Management. Princess's goal is to one day be a General Manager of a hotel, preferably in the Caribbean, where she also plans to retire. In her application for the scholarship, Princess wrote the following: *"While I understand that being employed full-time, being a mother and being a student will be challenging, I am willing to face this challenge head-on."*

About scholarship recipient Spenser Burns: Spenser, a Newport News resident, will attend the University of South Carolina in the fall to major in hospitality management. An avid hockey player, Spenser has spent many hours volunteering to teach the sport to children ranging in age from 4 to 10. As a result of this interaction, Spenser has learned, *"giving a little of my time to help others, I can make a huge difference."* Spenser said he is drawn to a career in hospitality and tourism because it will give him a chance to meet people from all different walks of life.

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Photo #1: Newport News Mayor McKinley Price with Councilwoman Sandra Cherry and Kerry Ann Lee, an employee at the Newport News Marriott at City Center who received the Gregory Cherry Tourism Professional of the Year Award.

Photo #2: Liz Parker, president of the Newport News Hospitality Association (NNHA), with Princess Harvin, an employee of the Holiday Inn Newport News at City Center, who was one of two NNHA scholarship recipients.

Photo #3: Liz Parker, president of the Newport News Hospitality Association (NNHA), with Neil Burns, father of Spenser Burns, one of two NNHA scholarship recipients. Spenser was unable to attend the ceremony so his father accepted the scholarship on his behalf.