

TOURISM COUNTS AWARD 2017

Presented by Tourism Manager, Jennifer Welsh

The Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce “**Tourism Counts**” Award is presented to an individual, business, or organization who, by their leadership and efforts, have made a difference in the promotion and development of tourism in our area. The name of the award reflects the chamber’s desire to impress upon the community that tourism does count in the bigger economic picture, and that it does impact the vitality of our city.

This year’s recipient is the force behind an annual event which will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2018, which draws spectators and participants from as far as Mississippi and Florida, and which highlights the history of our area.

Hoard Historical Museum Director Merrilee Lee shared, “His enthusiasm, energy, and respect for history are inspiring. This was the museum’s first year of administration and I had no worries about taking over such a large event because I knew that Joel Winn would go out of his way to ensure that the event and the museum were successful.”

Joel first got a taste of the “Buckskinners Rendezvous,” after Project LEAD created the event in 1994 to recreate life on the frontier during the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade era. Joel attended and immediately

joined the tribe, making the event the unique tourist attraction that it is today. Joel's leadership, dedication and passion for both history and his hometown are what make this event a success. Throughout the year, he attends similar Rendezvous' across the Midwest, dressed in Buckskins, to recruit re-enactors and demonstrators to come to Fort Atkinson.

Former Executive Chamber Director Dianne Hrobsky added, "How lucky are we to have someone that not only has the fire to sustain an event like ours, but also the knowledge to pull it off with a new theme every time. Tourists love it and we appreciate it because we know that he does it all with his whole heart."

Much credibility is afforded Fort's Rendezvous because of support it receives from the city, the chamber and historical society. Dianne asked, "Does Joel keep the rendezvous alive? or Does the rendezvous keep Joel going? Absolutely, both. Just watch his expression when the thousands of 4th graders begin to arrive!"

Joel is dedicated to the upkeep of the fort replica at Rock River Park. He has worked to acquire funding through the Fort Community Foundation for roof repair of three guard towers in the stockade that needed new shingles.

Merrilee also shared that Joel has given much to the museum. He is a board member for the Fort Atkinson

Historical Society, volunteers at the Museum, and he and his wife Linda contributed significantly to the 2007 expansion as well as other projects.

Fort HealthCare's CEO Mike Wallace recalls when his family relocated to the community and how Joel graciously invited them to Rhythm on the River. Mike says, "He also told me where to shop locally and 'informed' me how to spend my Memorial Day weekend at the Bucksinner's Rendezvous. Both events are wonderful opportunities to showcase Fort Atkinson."

Joel, thank you for all that you do to make Fort Atkinson such a great community, and for managing an event that continues to highlight our storied past and welcome visitors to our area.

Please join me in congratulating Joel Winn, also known as the "booshway" and "Mr. Fort Atkinson", as the Chamber's 2017 recipient of the Tourism Counts Award.