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Southwest Florida's Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel earns USTA's top national tourism marketing award

LEE COUNTY, FL – The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) earned top tourism marketing honors in the nation, with a Destiny award from the U.S. Travel Association (USTA) in the “Complete Marketing Program/Full Campaign” category awarded during the organization’s ESTO conference in Lake Tahoe, Nev., Sept. 1.

It is the fifth time the VCB has earned recognition in the prestigious awards competition - with previous honors in 2007, 2002, 1996 and 1994 – but it’s the first time the organization won the top honors for a full campaign. In addition, the VCB is the only one in the country that has won more than two Destiny awards.

The coveted award comes on the heels of the VCB’s earning state honors with a Flagler award from VISIT FLORIDA on Aug. 24 during the Florida Governor’s Conference on Tourism. In the competition’s Web site category, the VCB was honored for its campaign “The Beach Brings Balance” instant-win promotion designed to drive visitation. The VCB also was recognized as a finalist in three other Flagler award categories and has earned 22 of the top awards since the competition began in 1999.

“Receiving these top national and state honors back-to-back acknowledges our inventive creative and showcases the VCB’s strategic marketing achievements. Our campaigns are driven by proprietary research that makes them strategically sound and results driven,” said VCB Executive Director Suya Davenport, who acknowledged the contributions of VCB’s advertising agency, BVK, and Miles Media to the award-winning work. “We could not have earned these honors without the agency’s research and marketing efforts,” she said.

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The pinnacle Destiny award was granted to the organization for its integrated *Island Sanctuary* brand marketing campaign, which delivered 4.2 million visitors who spent \$2.9 billion in the destination. Overall bed tax collections were up 2 percent over the prior year.

The campaign was driven by the results of an Attitude Awareness and Usage study in which survey respondents cited the destination's iconic imagery and its sense of being an island sanctuary. Hence, television, outdoor, print ads, co-op programs and collateral materials prominently featured these visual icons to position the destination as a unique place of shelter and protection where one can nurture one's whole being and relationships. As part of the campaign, the VCB also created the innovative *Island Treasures Tour* in which a 40-foot-long recreational vehicle wrapped in dramatic destination images made 200 appearances at consumer and trade events throughout the year to entice first-time visitation.

Created in 1993 by USTA's National Council of Destination Organizations (NCDO), the Destiny award is designed to recognize USTA members for excellence and creative accomplishment in travel marketing and promotion and to foster the development of imaginative and innovative destination marketing promotion programs and activities.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres.*