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**The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau recognizes excellence
in local tourism/hospitality**

Celesta Powell honored with Peter J. Walker Spirit of Hospitality Award

State College, PA, Nov. 5, 2025 – Standouts in Centre County’s tourism and hospitality community were celebrated at the **Fourth Annual Happy Valley Hospitality Awards & Gala on Wednesday, Nov. 5 at Brass 16823** in Bellefonte, PA.

“The contributions of our tourism and hospitality community matter greatly to our destination marketing mission,” said Fritz Smith, President and CEO of The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau. “We created this event to thank and celebrate the individuals who serve as our front line ambassadors to visitors to Happy Valley, PA.”

Smith said for every headline celebrating record visitation and record visitor spending, for every announcement about another marquee event calling Happy Valley, PA, home or returning in a big way, for every social media post or online article from a travel writer or content creator sharing the best of Happy Valley, PA, with other would-be travelers, there is a team of people whose day-to-day work ensures a memorable visitor experience.

“The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau’s mission is to drive visitation to the county,” Smith said, noting that Centre County has the fastest growing visitor economy in the state since the pandemic. “The experience visitors have while here determines if they come back. Our data tells us they are coming back. That is a credit to our amazing hospitality community.”

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Smith said 58 nominations were submitted for the seven award categories.

Finalists and winners, which were announced at the event, were selected by an independent selection committee comprising local leaders and destination marketing industry peers: Todd Erdley, Regional Director, Ben Franklin Technology Partners; Cheryl Johnson, Executive Director, Private Industry Council of Centre County; and Lisa Rager, Executive Director of Visit Johnstown.

“Being a judge for the HVAB Gala was an amazing reminder of the passion, quality, and dedication shown by literally everyone in the hospitality industry,” Erdley said. “Everyone in Centre County would have been proud to read about the selfless works, skilled dedication, and overwhelming desire to provide incredible experiences to all visitors that come to Centre County.”

The 2025 Happy Valley Hospitality Award winners are:

- Tourist Attraction of the Year – Woodward Cave
- Festival/Event of the Year – Central PA Festival of the Arts
- Volunteer of the Year – John Wainwright, Columbus Chapel and Boal Mansion Museum
- Rising Star – Dave Wigfield, Director of Marketing and Business Development, Woodward Cave
- Excellence in Tourism/Hospitality Teamwork – The Hublersburg Inn Front of House team
- Excellence in Tourism/Hospitality Service – Jeannie Ishler, Penn Stater Hotel & Conference Center
- Excellence in Tourism/Hospitality Leadership – Phil and Kathy Breidenbaugh, Bellefonte Bed & Breakfast

“Our workforce is the driving energy of our hospitality industry,” said Dave Caperella, Chair of The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau Board of Directors. “The creativity, skill, and dedication to excellence of our Happy Valley Hospitality community is unequalled.”

The Gala also honored this year’s HVAB-selected recipient of the [Peter J. Walker Spirit of Hospitality Award](#) – Celesta Powell, marketing manager for the Central PA Tasting Trail and owner of Powell’s Presence.

The award is named after the late longtime manager of Penn's Cave & Wildlife Park, who passed away in 2022.

Smith said Powell is a driving force behind many events and organizations in Centre County and represents the true spirit of hospitality that the award exemplifies.

"To be recognized as the spirit of hospitality with the Peter J. Walker Award is a complete honor," Powell said. "Being a reflection of the spirit of Happy Valley and all the amazing things we do here is humbling and much appreciated."

Prior recipients of the Peter J. Walker Spirit of Hospitality Award include Pat Romano, We Are Inn/Happy Valley Live; the Downtown State College Clean Team; Liz Grove, proprietor, Pine Grove Hall and Flour & Stone; and Gary Brandeis, CEO, Scholar Hotels.

More than 300 hospitality leaders, community partners and elected officials attended the Gala.

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