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Local Meetings Professionals Take Home Awards for Excellence at Georgia Association of Meeting Professionals Annual Phoenix Awards

The meetings industry's best and brightest surface at "Under the Sea" themed event

ATLANTA—(June XX, 2006)— A recent Thursday night marked an evening of achievement for members of the Georgia Association of Meeting Professionals International (GaMPI), as more than 300 professionals from across the region assembled to celebrate the achievement of both the chapter and its members at the organization's annual Phoenix Awards.

"Tonight we celebrate you, the member, for your many achievements during the 2005-2006 year," said outgoing GaMPI President Leigh Ann Waters in the event's opening address. "From membership to communications, and special events to education, our members excelled in all areas. It's a great time to be in the meetings industry and members of GaMPI are posed to make the most of the opportunity."

Individual Phoenix Awards went to **Kenna L. Thomas**, CMP: Hall of Fame/Lifetime Achievement Award; **Georgia Brown**, CMP: Hayward C. Cox, Jr., CMP, Continuing Quality Award winner; **David O' Connor**, CHME, CMP: Chapter Leader of the Year; **Natalie J. Nardone**, CMP: Planner of the Year; **Sara J. Smith**, CMP, Supplier of the Year; and **Abby Freeman**, Rising Star of the Year. Organizational awards went to GaMPI's BreakOut Committee: Committee of the Year; the 2005 Phoenix Awards, won Special Project of the Year; Active Production and Design won Sponsor of the Year honors and Maestro's at Castlebery Hill, won Venue of the Year.

East Cobb resident Georgia Brown, CMP, Vice President, Conferences & Events, Benchmark360, Inc., was surprised to find that she had not only been nominated by her peers, but was the recipient of the Continuing Quality Award. A GaMPI member since 1993, Brown spent two years as a member of the Monthly Program Committee, during which time she analyzed the processes and developed systems that are still in place today and continually result in added revenues for the organization. Since that time, Brown, the 2000 recipient of Meeting Planner of the Year, has coordinated everything from previous Phoenix Award events to educational roundtables.

Kenna L. Thomas, Managing Director of Global Events, Inc. serves on several GaMPI committees, and was the recipient of the Hall of Fame/Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her shining example of professional excellence through cumulative organizational involvement and career achievement. Thomas is currently chair of the 2006 Summer Educational Alliance (SEA) Committee, and serves on the 2006 Meetings Exploration Conference Advisory Board and the Membership Ambassador Committee. An active member since 1991, Thomas is also a former president of the organization and was instrumental in the creation of the WOW committee. Outside of GaMPI, the Dunwoody resident regularly donates her time to several charitable organizations, including the Atlanta Community Food Bank, March of Dimes and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

David O' Connor, CHME, CMP, president, Meeting Connections, Inc., serves extensively on the Membership committee and was the recipient of this year's Chapter Leader of the Year award. Similar to the Lifetime Achievement Award, this award is presented annually to a member of GaMPI that has served in a leadership role, in recognition of outstanding contributions to GaMPI's Strategic Plan, including association, industry and community contributions, and leadership and professionalism. O'Connor, a North Georgia, Clay county resident, was a former Board director of the Clay County Communities Foundation, Clay County Chamber of Commerce and the Clay County Historical and Arts Council. He authored several articles for GaMPI's BreakOut magazine and was instrumental in reorganizing the organization's recruitment efforts, while also drafting a member rewards program designed to encourage members to participate in organizational activities.

Natalie J. Nardone, CMP, President, Nardone Consulting Group, was the recipient of the Planner of the Year Award and serves on the Education, Membership and Communications teams of the BreakOut, CMP Study Group and eConnect committees. The East Cobb county resident contributes regularly to the BreakOut magazine and was recently elected to serve on the GaMPI board of directors.

Sara J. Smith, CMP, Assistant Director of Sales, Westin Atlanta Airport, won the Supplier of the Year Award for her contribution to the WOW, Gathering and Education committees. Smith, a Fulton county resident, works with four charitable organizations outside of GaMPI, including the Red Cross, Georgia Transplant Foundation and Helping Hands Helping Hearts; and has contributed numerous articles to BreakOut.

East Cobb resident and relative newcomer Abby Freeman, CMP beat out fellow Shining Star recipients Kristen Cook, CMP and Megan Ditka, for Shining Star of the Year. Freeman, director of meeting services for Thomson American Health Consultants, was the recipient of the September 2005 Shining Star award for her outstanding contributions to the organization's award-winning newsletter, e-Connect. As editor of the online publication, she was instrumental in incorporating GaMPI's new "Fuel the Fire" theme into both the newsletter and its sister publication, Break Out; and was heavily involved in the recruitment of new committee members.

The BreakOut Committee took home the Committee of the Year in recognition of its outstanding contributions to the organization's Strategic Plan. This award is based on chapter participation, setting and meeting organizational goals and objectives, and displaying teamwork.

Atlanta-based Active Production and Design took home Sponsor of the Year in recognition of outstanding financial and in-kind contributions to the chapter.

Maestro's at Castleberry Hill, the posh location of this year's Gathering, GaMPI's premiere fund-raising event; was the recipient of Venue of the Year in recognition of the impactful results garnered as a result of their hosting the annual event/program for GaMPI.

The Phoenix Awards, held this year at the new Georgia Aquarium, were also a celebration of the Chapter's accomplishments. Earlier this year, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) announced at its Professional Education North American conference that MPI Georgia was one of three Chapters of the Year winners for 2005-2006 activity. The association, the world's largest for meeting professionals, awarded the Georgia chapter the award for the chapter in the highest membership category.

ABOUT GAMPI

Meeting Professionals International (MPI) is the premiere organization devoted to the educational and professional needs of people in the meeting industry. With over 19,000 members globally, MPI serves both meeting planners and suppliers to the industry.

The Georgia Chapter of MPI (GaMPI) is currently the 5th largest chapter, with more than 900 members. Throughout the year, GaMPI offers superior educational opportunities including retreats and workshops, and coordinates several social outings annually, as well as networking receptions prior to each monthly meeting. For additional information, please logon to www.gampi.org.