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MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ACVB Honors Heroes of Tourism: Then and Now

ABILENE, Texas -- The Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau thanked community leaders for bringing travel business to Abilene at its annual Heroes of Tourism Luncheon in the clubhouse at Abilene Christian University Wildcat Stadium today.

The annual tradition is a highlight of National Travel and Tourism Week, a time each May when the industry celebrates tourism and educates leaders and the public about its impact on their communities.

A HOT Host is anyone who helped bring Abilene that requires a total of 100 hotel room nights or more, helping fund Abilene's Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue. The luncheon honored 74 people whose clubs, businesses or organizations brought 151 meetings to town – for an economic impact of \$18.5 million.

“Abilene would not enjoy the success it without these HOT Hosts,” said Nanci Liles, ACVB executive director. “Their efforts helped bring Abilene half of the 300 meetings and events on the books this year. They are one reason Abilene has a reputation as a hospitable community.”

Meetings and events contribute to Abilene's \$455-million tourism industry, which supports more than 4000 jobs and provided \$12.9 million in tax revenue last year.

The “Community Awareness Award” was presented to the Abilene Tennis Association for its work hosting this summer's Texas Slam Championship, the largest youth tennis tournament in the nation.

ACVB board member and volunteer Betty Hukill was bestowed with the prestigious “Hats Off Award.” The surprised, soon-to-rotate director of the Historic Paramount Theatre also emceed the lunch.

The 2018 theme for National Travel & Tourism Week is “Travel: Then and Now,” and the bureau honored some of the industry's early champions. Dwayne Chitwood, Jack North, H.C. Zachry and former State Rep. Bob Hunter were feted for their longtime advocacy. Chitwood, North and Zachry served on the 1960-1970 Chamber of Commerce's Tourism Committee, back when Hunter served on the City Council: On June 25, 1970, then City Councilman Bob Hunter proposed that Abilene collect a 2 percent hotel tax from visitors. The motion passed 5-2, launching Abilene's work to roll out the welcome mat to travelers.

Located in the T & P Depot landmark downtown, the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau leverages local hotel tax into economic development. The ACVB's tourism professionals harness the latest travel trends, research and strategies to bring group and leisure visitors to Abilene. Travelers to the Abilene MSA produced more than \$12.9 million in local receipts in 2017 bringing happy people to stay in local hotels, shop, dine, and enjoy sports, arts and attractions. Established as an affiliate of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce in 1970, the bureau has improved the quality of life and enhanced the Abilene visitor experience for nearly 50 years.