



Gary Wheat Selected as New Macon CVB CEO



(10/31/2016) MACON, GA -- The Macon Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau (MBCVB) is proud to announce Gary Wheat as its new President and CEO, effective January 3, 2017. Wheat will relocate from Aurora, Colorado, where he has served as President/CEO of Visit Aurora, a destination marketing organization he launched in 2010. Wheat has led four CVBs, two of which he launched, and has been successful in developing innovative approaches to growing tax revenues and creating tourism products.

"I am excited about the opportunity to join the Macon-Bibb County community," said Wheat. "I look forward to being an ambassador for tourism and contributing to the economic growth of the Central Georgia region." After conducting a national search, the decision was made by a six-member search committee that included CVB officers, plus representatives from the hotel and tourism industry, Greater Macon Bibb Chamber of Commerce, and Macon Bibb County

Commission. A welcoming reception to introduce the new CEO to the MBCVB's 130 members is planned for mid-January.

"Gary is a change agent who has established and grown destination marketing organizations in two regions that have assets and challenges that are similar to those in Macon-Bibb County," said MBCVB Board of Directors President Susan Welsh. "An engaged leader with more than 16 years in the tourism industry, Wheat brings valuable experiences in key areas of business and financial management, media relations, plus sales and marketing. He has demonstrated considerable success in developing strategies to grow not only leisure and cultural tourism but also healthcare and transportation industry-related tourism. We are excited to see what he will accomplish in our region."

In 2010, Gary Wheat became the first President/CEO of Visit Aurora, a new destination marketing organization serving a city of 350,000 outside Denver. Within five years, Wheat and Visit Aurora were recognized with two national awards after successfully increasing hotel occupancy by 15% and growing lodgers' tax revenues by double digits for several consecutive years. Like Macon, Aurora offers strengths of a central location within the state, close proximity to a large urban area along three interstates, vibrant cultural assets, sports-related convention visitation, plus growing healthcare, military, and transportation industries.

Prior to joining the tourism industry, Gary Wheat worked in coaching and sports administration at the University of Southern Mississippi and Virginia Tech. A native of Prentiss, Mississippi, Wheat earned a Bachelor and Master of Science in Sports Administration from the University of Southern Mississippi. He began his tourism career as Director of Sports Development with the Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1999. In 2004, he relocated to Iowa to lead the Waterloo Convention and Visitors Bureau. In 2008, he was recruited to establish the Longmont Area Visitors Association in Colorado, where he served until launching Visit Aurora in 2010.

Gary has been active in numerous organizations and community leadership roles during his career including Rotary International, Special Olympics, the Colorado Freedom Memorial as well as serving on Boards for the Aurora Symphony Orchestra, Aurora Cultural Arts District, Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Aurora, and Cycle of Hope.

"Building on the success of the past several years, we are well positioned as a city to move forward at a fast pace with a leader like Gary Wheat," said Welsh. "Celebrating its 35th year, the MBCVB is nationally accredited and respected across the Southeast for its professional staff and innovative programs. Growing our tourism industry, which currently generates nearly \$9 million a year in local tax revenue, will positively impact the entire region."

The mission of the Macon Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau is to unify and lead our community in marketing the Macon Bibb County area as a superior visitor and meeting destination. For more information, please visit www.VisitMacon.org.