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FOUR MORE REASONS TO CELEBRATE IN MOUNTAINEER COUNTRY: REGION BRINGS HOME FOUR STATEWIDE TOURISM AWARDS

[MORGANTOWN, W.Va., Sept. 23, 2026] — There's a lot to celebrate in Mountaineer Country, and Visit Mountaineer Country is bringing home the hardware to prove it. Visit Mountaineer Country Convention and Visitors Bureau (VMC) is celebrating four Almost Heaven Achievement Awards following the 2026 West Virginia Governor's Conference on Tourism held in Charleston this week. The honors recognize the region's growing impact on West Virginia's tourism industry, from innovative destination development and creative marketing to community partnerships and outstanding leadership.

Mountaineer Country received recognition in four categories:

Special Project of the Year - Mountaineer Gravel: With more than 40 routes spanning 1,500 miles, Mountaineer Gravel is putting the communities it serves on the map, connecting visitors with local businesses and giving adventure seekers a new way to explore Mountaineer Country.

Marketing/Ad Campaign of the Year - Destination Dupes: VMC's Destination Dupes campaign puts a playful spin on travel inspiration, showcasing affordable alternatives to popular vacation destinations and proving that unforgettable getaways don't have to come with a hefty price tag.

Spirit of Almost Heaven - West Virginia Botanic Garden: With continued growth and expansion, the West Virginia Botanic Garden has blossomed into a beloved destination, inviting visitors and residents alike to explore, connect and experience the natural beauty of Almost Heaven.

Tourism Professional of the Year - Susan Riddle: A driving force behind tourism in Mountaineer Country, former VMC President and CEO Susan Riddle was recognized for her visionary leadership and dedication to growing the region's tourism economy. Now serving as CEO of Mylan Park, she's continuing to make her mark on the destination she helped shape.

"Bringing home four awards is exciting, but what I'm most proud of is the work – and people – behind them," said Hannah Winaught, Interim Executive Director of Visit Mountaineer Country. "Our team isn't afraid to try something new, think a little differently and turn big ideas into

something meaningful for our communities. These awards are a reflection of that creativity and the incredible partners who help bring those ideas to life."

The statewide recognition comes as Mountaineer Country continues to build on its tourism momentum, with lodging tax collections on pace to make 2026 the organization's strongest year yet. For VMC, that momentum represents more than a successful year; it reflects the collective efforts of the region's lodging partners, attractions, and tourism stakeholders who help turn first-time visitors into lifelong fans of Mountaineer Country.

"We're proud to see Visit Mountaineer Country continue to be a leader in tourism across the state, setting the tone for innovative marketing and destination development," said Terry Jackson, Chair of VMC's Board of Directors. "These awards reflect the talent of our team, the strength of our partnerships and our commitment to finding new ways to grow tourism. As a board, we're excited about the direction of the organization and the opportunities ahead."

With four more statewide awards to its name, VMC is looking ahead to 2027 with a renewed commitment to working alongside the communities it serves. By leaning into the knowledge and perspectives of local leaders and partners, the organization aims to identify new opportunities, tell the stories that make each community unique and ensure tourism continues to create meaningful economic opportunities throughout Mountaineer Country.

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