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County Tourism Staff Take Home National Honors

Oregon City, Ore. – Two members of Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory, the tourism agency for Clackamas County, were honored Monday at the annual U.S. Travel Association's ESTO conference in Minneapolis, MN.

Casey Knopik and Aaron Liersemann, both Tourism Specialists focusing on destination development, received the Destination Council's Rising Star Award. The award is given to someone who works within a destination marketing organization with three or less years of experience and is creating positive change in the industry. This is the first year that more than one person was granted the award, which is a reflection of all the duo has achieved as a team.

"Casey and Aaron's team approach to their work is integral to the success of our destination development efforts. They started in the industry within six months of each other with specialized areas of focus and quickly defined the work to leverage each other's strengths," wrote Executive Director Danielle Cowan who nominated the duo.

She noted that Knopik's "outstanding writing, design and marketing skills bridge the gap between development and promotion ensuring all Mt. Hood Territory's work seamlessly moves from development to consumer-facing with the professional polish and high standards our brand demands" earned him the nomination.

Knopik also developed a partner training program that has increased the number of lodging properties that are now working with tour operators and building new business opportunities. His efforts have earned rave reviews from both local partners and tour operators.

Liersemann's ability to understand the needs of tour operators and local businesses to generate positive results earned him the nod. Said one major receptive tour operator recently at IPW, the largest travel trade show in the country: "Beautiful Mt. Hood has always been there. You could look but not touch. Now we as tour operators have access to the mountain. It is a bookable tour product that Aaron made happen."

In addition, Liersemann led the revamping of the county's Teletales Heritage Sites program, updating it and rebranding it as the Mt. Hood Territory Heritage Trail. The changes have

brought renewed interest to the county's heritage and cultural assets by modernizing the program through technology, signage and partner engagement.

Knopik and Liersemann aren't the first from Mt. Hood Territory to win the Rising Star award. Annie Austin, Public Relations manager, also received that honor in 2015.

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About Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory: Please visit us at: www.mthoodterritory.com. Clackamas County Tourism & Cultural Affairs (branded "Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory"), is dedicated to economic development through visitor spending, and is funded by transient room taxes from area lodging facilities and campgrounds. Clackamas County Tourism is a contributing partner in enhancing Oregon's quality of life by strengthening the economic impacts of the state's \$10.3 billion tourism industry.