

2019 NEBRASKA TOURISM CONFERENCE

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

OCT. 22-24, NORTH PLATTE, NE

Jenna Bartja



Ecotourism is Jenna's passion. She relishes in seeking out authentic cultural experiences through thrilling, off-the-beaten-path itineraries and, through her travels, has gained a strong appreciation of the natural world. Spawned from the many camping trips enjoyed with her family growing up, her infatuation with the outdoors later influenced her interests in science and research, leading to her B.S. in Environmental Science. But it was the last five years spent working at Grand Canyon National Park that inspired a true love and sincere respect for wilderness. There, she worked to inspire stewardship by enriching visitor experiences through nature-based teaching and discovery. She is now pursuing exciting new challenges within her role as Adventure Travel Specialist for Nebraska Tourism. When not working, she enjoys hiking with her husband and fur-baby.

Karen Barrett



Karen Barrett has worked for the Nebraska Department of Revenue for over 44 years in many capacities. For the last 15 years she has worked as a Tax Specialist in the Policy Section where her daily assignments involve developing tax policy based on state law, related to the sales tax and lodging tax areas. She works with county officials by helping them with the county lodging tax questions. She loves Nebraska and is a strong supporter of local tourism and activities.

Samantha Crespo



Even when Samantha Crespo isn't working as a full-time travel writer and editor, she's likely traveling – or writing. Her book projects include a travel guide/love letter to the city of Memphis, *100 Things To Do in Memphis Before You Die*, in which she shares the essential experiences of her adopted hometown. Her travels expand to destinations near and far, where she enjoys exploring big cities to small towns, camping and trail-running.

Randy DuTeau



Randy is VP of Strategy and Development for Sports Strategies. Prior experience includes serving as Executive Director of Columbia County (GA) CVB, Sports Development Manager of the Augusta Sports Council and General Manager of the Atlanta Olympic Shooting Complex. Event management experience includes USA Cycling and AAU XC National Championships, ISSF World Cup Shooting, NCAA D2 Soccer Championships, Ironman 70.3, and the Atlantic Olympics and Paralympics.

Randy has a BS in Park and Recreation Management from Georgia State University. He is a Certified Sports Event Executive (CSEE) through the National Association of Sports Commissions and has earned Travel Marketing Professionals (TMP) certification through the Southeast Tourism Society. He lives in Evans, Georgia with his wife and two children.

Anne Faricy



Anne's first-ever ad gig was as a Vladimir Jones summer intern in 2003. After graduating from CU Boulder, she spent 12 years on the Los Angeles and San Francisco ad scene at DDB, RPA, Venables Bell and Goodby Silverstein. As a strategic lead, she's helped build brands as well as consumer and client experiences for Wells Fargo, Southern California Edison, American Honda, Farmers Insurance, Intuit, Intel and Adobe, as well as a slew of new business endeavors. Returning to VJ in 2017, Anne leads brand strategy, consumer insight and cultural trend work for new business and all current clients. She's obsessive about sharp writing, psychology, and the connectedness of seemingly unrelated things, people, places and concepts.

Cody Gore



Cody has been with Vladimir Jones for 14 years, managing regional and national accounts of all shapes and sizes, and in all industries. Over his time here, he has supported category-breaking work for each of his clients, exceeded his clients' business goals, mentored strong account teams and led some of the agency's largest clients' brands including Otter Products, Xcel Energy, Snowmass Tourism, TOURISM Santa Fe, Visit Telluride, Black Hills Energy and State of Nebraska Tourism Commission. In the utility category, he's helped shift consumer perceptions from apathetic to engaged, and transformed brands into trusted partners, rather than transactional commodities. In the tourism space, his clients have seen record-breaking visitation and their brands elevated from 'places on the map' to 'places in the hearts' of consumers.

Jacque Harms



Jacque Harms is an award-winning Associated Press and Nebraska Broadcast Association journalist in North Platte, Nebraska. She is the current News Director/Midday Anchor/Reporter/Producer for KNOP-TV. She oversees the daily newsroom operations in their new studios in downtown North Platte. She coordinates all on-air news products in addition to the digital and social media platforms. She also coordinates newscast production with her sister station KNEP in Scottsbluff and leads special project collaborations with the other four Gray Television stations in Nebraska.

Jacque strongly believes in First Amendment rights and serves of the People's Bench Committee for the Nebraska Supreme Court. She was part of the 8-year court research project which culminated in cameras in Nebraska's courtrooms last year.

Jacque strongly believes in community involvement as she serves on numerous charity boards, and just finished the role of "Mother Superior" in the North Platte Community Playhouse Production of "Drinking Habits."

Melanie Hinton



Melanie Hinton is the Senior Director of Communications & Marketing where she oversees all of the communications and marketing needs of the association.

Hinton has appeared in a number of media outlets including CBS This Morning, The New York Times, Associated Press, Washington Post, NPR, Politico, Charlotte Observer, Los Angeles Times, Smithsonian Magazine, Bloomberg News, ESPN, Livability, Washington Technology, Orlando Sentinel, Flightglobal and The BBC.

Hinton earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism and political science from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. She resides in Alexandria, Va., with her husband and daughter.

Greg Hollingsead



Greg Hollingsead is assigned to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, National Protections and Program Directorate, Office of Infrastructure Protection as a Protective Security Advisor for the Nebraska District. In this capacity, he is responsible for working with State and local governments and the private sectors in the protection of our Nation's critical infrastructure within the State of Nebraska.

Greg entered the United States Air Force in 1978 and retire from active duty in June 2004. That's when he accepted a position with Headquarters, United States Strategic Command, Office of Command Security, as the Ballistic Missile Defense Security Program Manager and Anti-Terrorism Program Manager.

His education accomplishments include a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from Troy State University. In June 1997, Greg graduated from the prestigious Federal Bureau of Investigations National Academy, 185th Session. He is currently enrolled at Bellevue University and is finishing his Master's Degree in Cybersecurity.

Heather Hogue



Heather grew up on a family farm in southcentral Nebraska near Fort Kearny State Historical Park. She is a graduate of the Lincoln School of Commerce Travel and Tourism Program, and previously worked in customer service through the Walt Disney World College Program, as an accredited IATA travel agent, and as a travel agency Quality Control Operator. Heather has worked for the state tourism office for 19 years in a variety of roles, and enjoys the challenges involved with the continuously changing world of the tourism

industry. Currently, Heather oversees the Nebraska Tourism Commission's grant opportunities including the Tourism Marketing Grant and Community Impact Grant programs, funding assistance programs that encourage Nebraska communities to work together to promote their destinations and events. Heather also manages administrative and program operations for the Commission in relation to state government policies, supervises the internship program, and performs program support for the agency director. Heather lives in Lincoln with her husband, Mike and their daughter, Maggie. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, dabbling in the arts, antiquing with girlfriends on the weekends, and supporting local animal causes.

Roger Jasnoch



Roger is currently the Director of the Kearney Visitors Bureau where he has served for the past 33 years. Prior to that Roger served as President of the Kearney Area Chamber of Commerce. He has also worked for the North Platte and York Chamber and Visitor Bureaus, making him in the tourism industry for over 40 years.

Roger is very involved in industry organizations and on a state and national basis. He can be found hanging around the State Capitol during legislation season monitoring industry bills. Roger is currently serving on the State Tourism Commission.

Roger is an avid hunter and involved in numerous wildlife organizations. According to his wife Susan and two children, Scott and Becky, if you can't find Roger at the office, he is probably in his boat fishing or in a duck blind in season.

Mike Kesselring



Mike Kesselring has been an active part of Nebraska Tourism for over 20 years. Current activities include membership in Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition, Chair of the Sioux County Travel and Tourism Board and the Sioux County Fair Cookie Judge for the last 4 years. Mike is a veteran, and upon discharge, he attended Mankato State College in Minnesota. Mike and his wife Linda have called Nebraska, home, since 1998 and currently reside in Harrison. From 1998-2018 Mike and his family built, owned and operated High Plains Homestead, Home of the Drifter Cookshack and Bunkhouse located in extreme NW Nebraska. In March 2019, Mike joined the Chadron, Nebraska KCSR/KBPY Radio Team in the Sales and Promotions Department. Although new to radio sales, Mike has many years of experience in both sales and promotions in a variety of venues as an owner and entrepreneur.

Shebby Lee



Shebby Lee is the founder and President of Shebby Lee Tours. She is a historian, writer and tour operator specializing in the historic and cultural heritage of the Great American West. She is a frequent presenter at numerous history conferences and trade association meetings. Her monthly travel blog, Trail Talk, covers a wide range of topics relating to travel, events, destinations and the history of the Great American West.

Shebby Lee is a Certified Tour Professional (CTP), a founder and proud partner in Travel Alliance Partners, 28 Premier North American Tour Operators Offering Guaranteed Departures Worldwide

Her early training was in the theatre and she served a tour of duty as an entertainer with the USO. She is also an Admiral in the Nebraska Navy.

Rachel Morgan



As a Program Specialist at the Nebraska Arts Council, Rachel works with organizations to provide meaningful arts opportunities across the state. She oversees the Basic Support Grants, Annual Series and Events Grants, Project Grants, Mini Grants and Touring Artist Roster. She currently serves on the Opera Omaha Engagement Panel, teaches classes at the Blair Family YMCA and has served as a panelist for the Arkansas Arts Council.

Before joining the team at the Nebraska Arts Council, she was the Foundation & Public Relations Director at Holdrege Memorial Homes in Holdrege, Nebraska and helped build a new library at the facility. She was the Executive Director of the Tassel Performing Arts Center in Holdrege for many years

and worked with a multitude of amazing artists, teachers and community members. She received her BS in music education at Peru State College and currently resides in Blair, Nebraska.

Vicki Osman



Vicki Osman has been with ABA since 2004. As the Senior Director of Meetings, Events Technology & Education, Vicki has increased enrollment in and the graduation rate for the Certified Travel Industry Specialist (CTIS) program, of which she herself is an alumna; she has developed marketing pieces and campaigns for membership and Marketplace; and she has developed database and other meeting technology to enhance the member experience. Vicki also serves as the staff liaison for the Marketplace Resource Central Subcommittee, Marketplace Education Subcommittee, CTIS Committee and Women in Buses Council.

Deborah Park



As Vice President of the travel team for TURNER, Deborah plays a strategic leadership role on both tourism and resort clients across TURNER's domestic and international media relations for VISIT DENVER, the Convention & Visitors Bureau. Her diverse resume also includes both agency and in-house work in the entertainment and consumer products industry.

Andy Pollock



Andy S. Pollock is a partner with the Nebraska law firm of Rembolt Ludtke. Andy's principal practice areas are telecommunications law and government relations. On behalf of the Nebraska Travel Association, Andy led advocacy efforts resulting in passage of the Agritourism Promotion Act. The law, enacted in 2015, limits liability for farmers and ranchers who open their properties to agritourism and ecotourism activities.

Andy grew up hiking, camping, and fishing around Lake McConaughy and continues to enjoy the vast Nebraska backcountry with his friends and family. He founded and continues to direct the Sandhills Marathon, a 26.2-mile race on a one-lane blacktop road in the middle of Cherry County. Andy recently completed a novel set in the Nebraska Sandhills. While it is being edited, he plans to publish a collections of stories and essays about life in Nebraska and its history.

Dave Rendall

During the last fifteen years, David Rendall has spoken to audiences on every inhabited continent. His clients include the US Air Force, Australian Government, and Fortune 50 companies such as Microsoft, AT&T, United Health Group, Fannie Mae, and State Farm Insurance.

Prior to becoming a speaker, he was a leadership professor and stand-up comedian. He also managed nonprofit enterprises that provided employment for people with disabilities.

In between presentations, David competes in ultramarathons and Ironman triathlons.

David has a doctor of management degree in organizational leadership, as well as a graduate degree in psychology. He is the author of four books.

- Pink Goldfish, The Four Factors of Effective Leadership, The Freak Factor, & The Freak Factor for Kids



John Ricks



John Ricks is the Executive Director of the Nebraska Tourism Commission. He joined the Commission in January of 2017.

John is architect of the state's new award-winning marketing campaign, "Nebraska. Honestly. It's not for everyone." The new campaign garnered press worth over \$7.1 million in the month after its unveiling and is already setting records for visitor spending and tax revenue this summer.

John has spent more than 25 years working in tourism destination marketing for a number of different states. As an advertising agency executive, he led marketing efforts for Wisconsin and Wyoming. Working with Wyoming, he led strategy efforts that created the award-winning "Forever West" campaign. Previously he was Associate Director of the Colorado Tourism Office where he launched the very successful "Come to Life" marketing strategy that resulted in five consecutive years of record-setting results in terms of visitation, visitor spending, tax revenue generated and marketing ROI.

Son of an Army officer, he was born in the Philippines and has lived in destinations around the world including Hawaii, Japan and Okinawa, where he graduated from high school. He's also an adventure traveler having trekked on Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco, the wide open spaces of Patagonia and in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains in Bhutan.

Maria Sheetz



Maria Sheetz is the Senior Director, Partner Engagement for Brand USA, the nation's destination marketing organization with the mission of increasing international visitation to the United States. In this role, Maria leads the Brand USA partner engagement team and is responsible for developing and maximizing partnership participation in Brand USA co-op marketing programs.

Maria concentrates on working with destinations, state tourism boards and corporate travel partners helping them to market and reach international audiences. With 20 years of travel/hospitality experience in sales, strategic partnerships, marketing and advertising, Maria came to Brand USA from Amtrak, where she was the senior director, national sales and business alliances. Prior to that role, she worked at Choice Hotels International in the strategic partnerships group.

Vicky Soderberg

For nearly 30 years, Vicky's passion has been helping communities understand who they are and what they have to work with. She digs in to help places build upon and enhance their strengths in ways that improve quality of life and create remarkable, resilient destinations.



A solid partner for DMOs, event organizers, Chambers, Main Streets, and cultural districts, Vicky's hands-on approach results in successfully implemented plans, well-designed events, and effective navigation of political and other challenges.

In her spare time, she tries to avoid falling off gravel, single-lane mountain roads and is attempting to run a half marathon in all 50 states.

Joey Spellerberg



As a second-generation family business owner, Joey has ignited the growth of one of the Midwest's premier tour operators. Leading a team of over 30, Moostash Joe Tours continues to exceed passenger expectations by offering new and innovative tours at a great value. His continued focus on service, value, and commitment to each traveler has allowed this 40+ year company to double its annual passenger count in the 6 years of his leadership. In 2019, Joey was recognized by Groups Today Magazine as a 10 Top Next Gen of group travel, and Moostash Joe Tours was also awarded the prestigious TODAY! Award at the ABA Marketplace in Louisville, KY. The TODAY! Award recognizes an ABA Member that demonstrates it has what it takes to make an impact on the group travel industry. Joey is a graduate of the University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB) with a degree in Marketing and Sales. He lives in Fremont, NE with his wife Ashely, and his two daughters, Sarah and Hannah.

Jim Steele



Jim has been the president of the South Sioux City Area Chamber of Commerce since August of 2016. Prior to coming to the Chamber, Jim worked for the City of South Sioux City for 14 years. Jim is very involved in the Siouxland area athletics, serving on both NAIA National Championship committees for volleyball and women's basketball. Jim and wife Linda will celebrate 25 years of marriage this December. They have four children: Ben and wife Kenzi and grandson Parker live in Syracuse, Neb.; Noah and Andrew are Juniors; and Maggie is an eighth grader.

Amber Steffens



Joining TURNER in 2011, Amber is a senior account director specializing in integrated communications for tourism destinations and hospitality brands. Prior to TURNER, Amber was the PR manager for San Diego North CVB where she represented more than 30 distinctive local communities with 100+ tourism partners. She is a self-proclaimed geek, bringing a creative-meets-analytical lens for media campaigns that actually inspire visitation.

Chris Thompson

Christopher L. Thompson is president and CEO of Brand USA, the nation's public-private partnership dedicated to increasing international visitation to the United States through marketing and promotional efforts. In this role, Chris is responsible for accelerating the organization's efforts to build and execute effective marketing strategies to increase U.S. travel exports, create jobs, strengthen the economy, and help enhance the image of the United States with people all over the world. Under Chris' leadership, Brand USA has nearly tripled its partnership network and more than doubled its partner contributions and program offerings.



Throughout his career, Chris has been honored with a number of industry awards and recognized for numerous accomplishments, including being named the first recipient of Skål International's USA National Tourism Leadership Award in 2018 in recognition of his "very meaningful contribution to the growth and success of tourism in the United States." In 2015, Chris received the NTA National Tour Association's (NTA) Pioneer Award for his accomplishments in producing significant changes in the travel industry. He was named one of the "Top Twenty-Five Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales and Marketing" by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International in both 2009 and 2013.