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Restaurant Association Embraces the Future of Tourism & Hospitality in Maryland.

Leader of Restaurant Association of Maryland Certified as a Baltimore Tourism Ambassador

(Columbia, MD) - Paul Hartgen, President and CEO of the Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM), has joined the group of nationwide leaders creating the future of tourism and hospitality across the region. Recently, Hartgen was officially licensed as a Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA) for the city of Baltimore, part of the national Certified Tourism Ambassador™ Program.

The Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association (BACVA) is leading the ambassador program in Maryland, spearheading the search for new candidates and inspiring volunteers to join in the efforts to promote Baltimore city and the surrounding areas. “The response to the CTA program has been overwhelming,” says Tom Noonan, president & CEO of BACVA. “We expect to have more than 500 trained tourism ambassadors working in the destination by year’s end and the participation of the Restaurant Association of Maryland is critical to the overall success of the program.” “I am proud to be part of such an innovative, hands-on tourism program that has the potential to benefit many of the restaurants in the Baltimore area, especially at this difficult time in our national and state economies,” said Hartgen.

The Certified Tourism Ambassador™ Program serves to increase tourism nationwide by inspiring front-line hospitality employees and volunteers to work together to turn every visitor encounter into a positive, memorable experience. CTAs in training complete numerous exercises embodying the elements of tourism, regional attributes and attractions as well as customer service. The concept is simple, especially for those in the hospitality industry. The Ambassadors are responsible for providing quality service to visitors in the area they represent and visitors who have a positive experience are much more likely to return.

“The CTA program was built to encompass a multitude of objectives, many of which inherently benefit the hospitality industry as a whole. It augments the economic impact of tourism, increasing business for our restaurants one table at a time” commented Hartgen. “I am confident that this certification will assist RAM in promoting, protecting and improving the hospitality industry. The promotion of Maryland’s largest city will result in the support of local businesses, restaurants included and everyone benefits, especially our economy!”

Destinations continually strive to attract newcomers to their area. According to BACVA, Baltimore has set the standard for urban revitalization and serves as a travel destination welcoming 12 million visitors each year. Those visitors spent 2.96 billion dollars in 2007, an all time high. The city is currently undergoing a second renaissance with more than \$1 billion in new development planned. “Baltimore has a rising culinary scene and our members and local restaurants play an immense role in its tourism. With the kitchen back at home, visitors turn to neighborhood dining establishments from Mount Vernon to Canton and throughout the city to enhance their visit,” added Hartgen.

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with some of the challenges facing the economy and the Foodservice Industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.