



## NEWS RELEASE

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# **Hospitality industry awards honor outstanding customer service in Lee County**

**LEE COUNTY, FL** – To increase public awareness of extraordinary customer service provided by hospitality employees throughout Lee County, workers were recognized by receiving the **Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards** at the 14<sup>th</sup> annual ceremony in Bonita Springs today.

Visitors from around the world submitted a record 612 nominations, giving high praise to those local employees who provided outstanding customer service. Produced by the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) and The News-Press Media Group, the “E Awards” is a collaboration with various local businesses to encourage and support service excellence being provided by Lee County hospitality professionals.

Nomination criteria included service satisfaction, leadership, work ethic, job knowledge and performance skills, familiarity with the destination and assistance during an emergency.

Selected for their distinctive service and dedication:

- Cara Pennetti, Sundial Beach Resort & Spa, Sanibel Island
- Guillermo Espinoza, Courtyard by Marriott Gulf Coast Town Center, Fort Myers
- Peter Towle, Bailey’s General Store, Sanibel Island
- Captain Brian Holaway, Captiva Island
- Jason Barrett, Lee County Port Authority, Fort Myers
- Luke Wilcox, Fiber Solutions, Fort Myers
- Best Tourism Boss: Brian Holly, Holiday Inn Fort Myers Airport at Town Center, Fort Myers
- Honor of Distinction Winner: Jim Niccum, Edison & Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers

For summaries on the individual stories of the above-mentioned award recipients, log onto <http://www.EAwards.org> (click on 2014 Winner Stories).

**The Honor of Distinction award**, sponsored by Geraci Travel, for best overall representative of outstanding service for the year, was given to Jim Niccum, site historian, Edison & Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers.

Although there are many nominees who exemplify the best in customer service and let their love of the job and destination show in their work, the Honor of Distinction winners are unique to an even greater degree.

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A nominator describes Jim Niccum as “90 years young.” He has worked at the area’s most popular historic site for more than 25 years. During that time, he has given tours and assisted guests wherever and whenever needed. For example, Niccum’s kind, calm demeanor, along with his certification in advanced first aid and CPR has comforted many guests. His leadership skills have proven valuable for mentoring younger site historians, both in knowledge and customer service.

Niccum’s roles at the Estates are as diverse as the man himself. As a retired chief chemist, his knowledge of historic lab equipment was a tremendous asset while assisting the curatorial staff interpret the Edison Botanic Research Laboratory during the restoration project. Niccum brings further hands-on experience to the Estates by maintaining many of the antique vehicles, even driving them in local parades. As a young man, he worked at his father’s gas station repairing Model A Fords.

A characteristic of Niccum’s that truly shines is his generosity in sharing information with others. When visitors ask questions, he thoroughly answers, making each person feel special. His thoughtfulness extends to his co-workers, as he gives birthday cards to every staff member, year after year.

When asked what keeps him going, Niccum replies “People. I love meeting people. I get to meet people from all over the world at Edison Ford. I like to find the things we have in common and go from there.”

Sponsors of this year’s E Awards include The News-Press Media Group and Geraci Travel, along with other businesses listed below.

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**Editor’s note:** Images of all winners available upon request.

**E Award Sponsors:**

- DiamondHead Beach Resort
- GullWing Beach Resort
- Pink Shell Beach Resort
- Pointe Estero Beach Resort
- South Seas Island Resort
- ‘Tween Waters Inn Island Resort
- Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village
- Adventures in Paradise
- Billy’s Rentals
- Edison & Ford Winter Estates
- Miracle Baseball Club
- Miromar Outlets
- Sun Harvest Citrus
- Sun Splash Family Waterpark
- Tarpon Bay Explorers
- Veranda & Rib City Restaurants