

Conference Speaker Bios



Carol Schlegel

Carol Schlegel has been the Tourism Director for McCook/Red Willow County since 2011. However her tourism experience spans the past forty years due to growing up in her family's motel and restaurant operation. Beginning with the most entry level positions, dishwashing and housekeeping, Carol learned the business from the ground up, eventually taking on the duties of Convention Services, Sales, Restaurant Manager and Motel General Manager. During her time working in the family business, she served on the Red Willow County Visitors Committee as Chairman and a representative of the lodging community.

A passion for Nebraska—our way of life, our people, our historical heritage, our diversity and uniqueness—and the desire to share it all with those not fortunate enough to call Nebraska home...is what Carol brings to the Nebraska Tourism.



Dean Savoca

Dean Savoca, M.Ed., BCC, CSP™ is the performance development partner for hospitality leaders who want highly-effective teams that are focused, aligned and inspired. Simply put, Dean helps leaders coach their people. A 25-year veteran of the meetings and events industry, Dean combined an early career in hospitality sales, operations and leadership with Maritz and a Colorado-based DMC with a Master's Degree in Organizational Performance and Change. He's spent the last 15 years speaking, training and coaching on leadership and development, primarily in the hospitality and tourism industry. Dean helps people identify the core issues they face daily that impact performance development, people

management and team alignment – and rallies them to action, often right there in the room. The result is a better bottom line – boosted by improved performance, higher productivity, and more cohesive teamwork. Dean is a board-certified coach and has conducted 10,000 executive coaching sessions. He is also a Certified Speaking Professional™, conferred by the National Speakers Association, and actively involved in several industry associations.



Jameon Rush

Jameon received his bachelor's degree in web communication design from Hastings College. He gained professional work experience serving as the Assistant Vice President / Marketing Director for Heartland Bank from 2011 – 2017. In this role, Jameon coordinated and oversaw the bank's marketing department. In the spring of 2017, Jameon left the bank to manage and operate Optix Digital Media full-time. With a marketing and web design background, Jameon understands how digital video marketing can help a business meet their marketing goals. In addition to producing

commercial projects, Jameon is also an adventure vlogger. You can follow along on his many adventures at

www.JourneyUnbound.com.



Jean Todd

Jean Todd currently administers the Highway Beautification Program at the Nebraska Department of Roads. She graduated from South Sioux City High School and attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. She obtained her Abstracters License from the State of Nebraska in July 1978. After working in the title industry for many years, her employment with NDOT began in February 1990 as a title research agent in the Right-of-Way Division. She transferred to the Rail and Public Transportation Division and served as Highway Agreements Specialist with the Railroads from August 1999 to December 2003 before accepting the position of Highway Beautification Supervisor back in the Right-of-Way Division.

Jean resides in Lincoln, Nebraska. During her spare time, she enjoys Nebraska football, Cubs baseball, camping, and playing golf.



Jon Schmieder

Jon has over 20 years of direct experience in the sports tourism industry having held senior leadership roles with three different sports commissions; Phoenix, Tulsa, and Denver. Schmieder brings a wealth of experience in sports tourism and economic development having also served in lead staff positions for the Senior Olympic Games and Pop Warner Football and Cheerleading. Schmieder served as Chairman of the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) and was on the organization's Executive Committee for six years. While Schmieder served as the President of the Phoenix Regional Sports Commission, the NASC chose the organization as the 2012 Large Market Sports Commission of the Year. Schmieder was also named 2012 CEO of the Year by the Phoenix Chapter of the Organization of Non-Profit Executives. In 2016, Jon was named an industry "Game Changer" by Connect Sports.

Schmieder holds a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Arizona. He also holds a master's degree in higher education leadership from Northern Arizona University.



Kevin Balanger

Kevin Balanger is a trail planner at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in Washington, D.C. Kevin is the lead planner on the Great American Rail-Trail, an exciting effort to connect the country via a 3700-mile coast-to-coast rail-trail from Washington, D.C. to Washington state. Learn more at www.railstotrails.org and www.greatamericanrailtrail.org.



Matt Neeman

Matt Neemann was raised in Lincoln, graduated from Lincoln High School and received a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from UNL in 1999. He began working at the Nebraska Department of Transportation (then Roads) in 1995 as a student and has held various positions since. In 2007, he moved into his current position in the Traffic Engineering Division with responsibilities over signing, pavement marking, traffic signals, and work zone traffic control on all highways throughout the state.



Patrick Ward

Pat is currently the Director of the Missouri State Arboretum which is located on the campus of Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. He and his wife, Barb, own about 50 acres in rural central Illinois. They consider themselves very fortunate to have their three children and five grandchildren all living in central Illinois as well.

After graduating from Illinois College, Pat taught Environmental Science at the middle school level for a number of years. He then owned and operated a landscape nursery operation for more than 30 years. While in the landscape business, he was served on the Illinois Green Industry Board of Directors, including in the role of President of the association.

During the off-season from his landscape work, Pat led bird watching tours throughout the United States and 14 other countries. He has also served on the Illinois Audubon Society Board of Directors. He and his wife are still leading tours when he is not working at the Arboretum

Pat and Barb have co-authored more than 20 science books for middle school students encompassing a range of subjects from nuclear energy to geology to human anatomy.

The Wards take advantage of the sugar maple trees on their property to produce pure maple syrup in the winter months and have recently taken up beekeeping as well.



Rebecca Schademmann

Rebecca Schademmann is a program representative for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED). In this position, she oversees grants under the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. CDBG grants provide a crucial source of financial support to help communities make quality-of-life improvements in areas such as housing, economic and tourism development, and community revitalization. Schademmann is a graduate of the University of South Dakota and currently resides in Lincoln.



Shane Ideus

Shane joined UNICO in 2009 as a Risk Consultant for the Property and Casualty division. In 2016, Shane was promoted to Executive Vice President and currently leads the of sales and marketing department as well as serving as a Risk Consultant for UNICO.

Shane's primary expertise is in managing risk for telecommunication companies, social services, and property-owners. Helping his clients manage their risk to protect their assets is Shane's number one priority. He is constantly identifying coverage gaps, emerging risks and finding the best carrier partner for placement for his clients. Shane offers his clients a full perspective of their

risk management program and aims to teach them along the way.

Shane lives in Omaha, NE with his wife, Rachel, and three children, Jaxon, Breeley and Madelyn. He enjoys attending sporting events, playing golf and basketball, and spending time with family and friends.



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.



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 portfolio. In her previous role, Deborah handled domestic and international media relations for VISIT DENVER, The Convention & Visitors Bureau. Her diverse résumé also includes both agency and in-house work in the entertainment and consumer products industry.



Virginia Sullivan

Virginia “Ginny” Sullivan is the Director of Travel Initiatives at Adventure Cycling Association, North America’s only organization dedicated to bicycle tourism and travel. Programs under Ginny’s direction include: working with state and local partners to officially designate interstate bicycle routes into the U.S. Bicycle Route System, currently at almost 12,000-miles; co-leading the Amtrak Bicycle Task Force, with a goal of seeing carry-on bicycle service available on all Amtrak lines; education and outreach to state and national public land managers on bicycle tourism amenities and accommodations; and advocacy efforts that protect and improve Adventure Cycling’s 47,283-miles of mapped and documented bicycle routes across North America. With the support of Adventure Cycling’s 53,000-members, Ginny is growing bicycle tourism through outreach to communities across the country. She also advocates for improved road conditions and safety for cyclists. Ginny’s work is partner focused and her efforts are driven by the Adventure Cycling mission to inspire and empower people to travel by bicycle.