

Commissioner Susan Whitaker
Tennessee Department of Tourist Development

Susan Whitaker, a veteran tourism marketing executive, was appointed in January of 2011 by Governor Bill Haslam's cabinet as Commissioner of Tourist Development. Whitaker was initially appointed to the position in 2003 by Governor Phil Bredesen, and reappointed under his administration in 2007.

In this role, Whitaker is responsible for marketing Tennessee's tourism industry domestically and internationally. Tourism is one of Tennessee's largest industries, providing a \$13.3 billion direct economic impact and generating over \$1 billion annually in state and local sales tax revenue for the past four years.

Whitaker oversees the development and implementation of statewide tourism's comprehensive marketing, publicity and promotions campaigns, all designed to stimulate growth of tourism in Tennessee. Of note is the state's award-winning consumer website, tnvacation.com, as well as the state's 14 highly rated Welcome Centers.

Under Whitaker's leadership, the Department of Tourist Development launched the Discover Tennessee Trails & Byways program. The program features 16 comprehensive, statewide trails that will guide visitors from our big cities to our off-the-beaten-path attractions throughout the state. When complete, this initiative will include all of Tennessee's 95 counties as well as the state's five National Scenic Byways.

As the co-chair of Tennessee's Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission, Whitaker is a strategic part of the planning and overseeing of Tennessee's 150th Civil War commemoration. In preparation for this Civil War milestone, Whitaker launched the Tennessee Civil War Trails Program. To date, markers are in place at more than 200 Civil War sites throughout Tennessee. Tennessee's Inaugural Sesquicentennial Signature Event was held in Nashville Nov. 2010 with more than 9,000 participants. Annual Signature Events, as well as numerous symposiums, special events and the launch of a five-part Civil War documentary series, will take place during the five-year commemoration.

Whitaker launched Tennessee's Sustainable Tourism initiative with the 2008 Great Smoky Mountain Sustainable Tourism Summit, positioning the state as a national leader in sustainable tourism. Further outgrowth of the Summit has been Tennessee's launch of a sustainable tourism website, featuring a complete online toolbox, 10 statewide sustainable tourism workshops as well as a six-part webinar series. Tennessee's program has been recognized by U.S. Travel Association as a national best practice and included on the travelgreen.org website.

Whitaker serves on the Policy Council and Board of Directors of the U.S. Travel Association, the Travel South USA Board of Directors, the National Council of State Travel Directors, and the University of Tennessee's Retail, Hospitality and Tourism Management Advisory Board. She serves as the co-chair of Tennessee's Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission and is a member of the Smoky Mountains Park Commission.

Whitaker is a Chicago native and a direct descendent of Tennessee's first Governor, John Sevier. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications from Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. Prior to her state cabinet post, Whitaker served as vice president of marketing for Dollywood, Tennessee's most visited tourist attraction.

Throughout her career, Whitaker has received many awards and honors. She has earned the Telly and Addy Awards for her broadcast and advertising work and was presented the Pacesetter Award from the Stennis Center for Public Service.