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**Subject:** Awards at Rural Summit recognize leaders making an impact in rural South Carolina

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## **Awards at Rural Summit recognize leaders making an impact in rural South Carolina**

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – Governor Nikki Haley and the South Carolina Department of Commerce gathered leaders from across South Carolina yesterday for the 23rd annual South Carolina Rural Summit, challenging attendees to make a difference in their communities. The Rural Summit was held at the Municipal Center in Aiken, S.C.

Rural community leaders, economic developers and state officials shared ideas, experiences and practical knowledge to improve rural South Carolina. Gov. Nikki Haley spoke at this year's Rural Summit about her vision for the state's rural areas.

"Rural areas are the heart of South Carolina," said Gov. Haley. "It's important that individuals in our rural areas become the drivers of change that can help make their communities successful. By working together, community leaders can help attract new industry to their areas. The future is bright for our rural communities."

Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt said, "Congratulations to the winners of this year's Rural Summit awards. We are glad to have them as part of Team South Carolina, and we know their work is making a difference in our state's rural areas."

At the Rural Summit, Gov. Haley presented awards for Rural Leadership, Rural Education, Small Business and Agribusiness and Rural Development Service.

### **Rural Leadership – Ralph U. Thomas**

The Rural Leadership award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated effective leadership skills and has addressed issues of both short and long-term significance to community growth.

Ralph U. Thomas has spent his career working to attract investment and jobs to the Southeast. Thomas has served as the president of the South Carolina Power Team since its inception in 1988, and will retire from the position in May. The Power Team has become an integral player in South Carolina's economic development efforts. Under his leadership, the Power Team has been part of more than 600 industrial or expansion projects, representing more than \$9.3 billion in investment, more than 52,400 new jobs and more than \$2 billion in annual payroll.

Thomas also made significant contributions to the economic development profession at large. He is a past vice chairman of the International Economic Development Council and is an honorary life member and former board member of the Southern Economic Development Council. Thomas is a recipient of a Rural Leadership Award from the National Rural Economic Developers Association. He is a past president of the S.C. Economic Developers Association and received the organization's Distinguished Service Award in 2011.

### **Rural Education – Carvers Bay Branch Library in Georgetown County, S.C.**

The Rural Education award recognizes those who have improved South Carolina's rural education system either through volunteer efforts or daily commitments.

In the spring of 2006, the Carvers Bay Branch Library was opened in the rural northwestern portion of Georgetown County. The opening provided the first public library in an area where the poverty rate hovered at 20 percent and the illiteracy rate approached 30 percent. The library was made possible with the help of a

Small Business Administration Grant, as well as county and state funds. The local Frances P. Bunnelle Foundation provided a special grant for a technical center for teens.

By August of 2006, WebJunction, a web-based learning center for libraries, named the Carvers Bay facility the National Library of the Month. In January 2007, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation highlighted the achievements of the library in a video called Keeping Your Community Connected. The Carvers Bay Branch Library became the first in South Carolina to receive the National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Within two years, the library card registration rate in the area had gone from one in 50 to one in six. Of those new library card holders, 42.7 percent were under 18 years old, and 56.8 percent of these juveniles were checking out library materials regularly.

Today, the tech club at the library features video game design classes and digital arts productions. Due to the program's success, the club was expanded to all parts of the county. The library has continued to add and expand its educational programs, including one designed to teach young people about money management issues.

### **Small Business and Agribusiness Award – Dupre Percival, owner of 302 Artisans**

Dupre Percival owns and operates 302 Artisans at Senate's End, a Columbia retail shop stocked exclusively by South Carolina Specialty Food Association members' products. The shop includes a wide range of specialty food, from jams and preserves, to pickles, to chocolates, to grits from the Ace Basin. 302 Artisans also features numerous pieces of art crafted by local artists. Through his business, Percival promotes "keeping it local."

For more than 20 years, Percival has provided catering to all sorts of clients, from large corporate customers to personal gatherings. Through his work at 302 Artisans, he's helped give much wider exposure to local food producers. Sallies Greatest Jams, one of the local products Percival features, was promoted by Oprah Winfrey on her 2012 Favorite Things list.

"Dupre has opened many doors for me, the most recent being to a major food distributor. This would have never happened without Dupre! He is truly a blessing to SC," said Sallie Dent Porth, founder of Sallie's Greatest.

### **2013 Rural Development Service Award – Moe Brown**

The Rural Development Service Award recognizes the Commerce project manager who best demonstrates confidence in rural South Carolina through their actions.

Moe Brown, a project manager with Commerce's Global Business Development Division, more than met that challenge by successfully working with seven different companies that announced new investment and jobs in seven different rural counties – a first-time accomplishment for a recipient of this award. Brown worked diligently to match the needs of companies with the attributes each rural community offered. His efforts have contributed to the economic viability and self-sustaining capacity that comes through the creation of jobs and capital investment.

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