



**Senator Robert (Bob) Robbins has been selected to receive the Bill Knecht Tourism Award. (2014-06-06)**

Two of the highest honors given by VisitMercerCountyPA (the official tourist promotion agency for Mercer County) are the Bill Knecht Tourism Award and the James E. Winner Jr. Tourism Initiative Award. For 2014 Senator Robert (Bob) Robbins has been selected to receive the Bill Knecht Tourism Award.

Senator Robbins has been a strong supporter of the tourism in Mercer County and with our regional partnerships. He was one of the co-sponsors of the bill that instituted the hotel tax which drives our efforts to attract travelers to our beautiful county. Regionally, he sponsored Act 183 in 2006 which designated part of Route 6 as the "Gateway to the West" and Act 68 of 2011 where portions of roads were designated "Crawford Lakelands Byways". All of this has enhanced Mercer County and the region as a tourist destination and enriched our communities.

Bob's most recent endeavor was to assist in securing a \$4 million dollar grant for the construction of the Wendell August flagship store; a major tourist attraction in Mercer.

In the early days of the tourism agency Senator Robbins would go with us "on the road" to promote Mercer County as a tourism destination.

VisitMercerCountyPA is proud to present this award to Senator Robbins for his outstanding contributions to tourism.

The recipient of the James E. Winner Jr. Tourism Initiative Award for 2014 is Avenue of 444 Flags and Hillcrest Memorial Park. This award recognizes an innovative organization or company that brings widespread attention to Mercer County as a destination. The Avenue of 444 Flags began on February 11, 1980, 100 days after a mob seized the United States Embassy in Tehran, Iran, taking its entire staff hostage. On that day, under the leadership of Tom Flynn, 100 flags were raised along the Avenue leading into Hillcrest Memorial Park. Another flag was added each day until the hostages were released on January 20, 1981, 444 days after they were captured. National and international media covered the development of the Avenue, culminating in its appearance on the cover of Time Magazine after the hostages were released. 444 flags continue to fly along the Avenue as a tribute to all veterans, and as a reminder that freedom isn't free.

Hillcrest's ongoing commitment to veterans continued with bringing the Vietnam Moving Wall to Mercer County, construction of the War on Terror Veterans Memorial, and on Veterans Day 2012, the cremated remains of nine veterans were interred among the flags, establishing the site as a Veterans Cremation Garden designed to include the remains of thousands of veterans.

The Avenue of 444 Flags and Hillcrest Memorial Park remain at the cutting edge of both the memorial and cemetery fields. They have developed a web site that features stories and video interviews of veterans from all eras. They are also partnering with other groups and web sites to facilitate genealogical research. They have begun to photograph and document every grave marker not only in Hillcrest Memorial Park, but also of every other cemetery in Mercer County. When completed, people will be able to use their smart phones to find anyone's grave site through GPS and instantly access whatever pertinent genealogical information is available on the worldwide web.

Through the web site, the Avenue of 444 Flags is reaching out beyond its physical limits to touch people all over the world and draw them to Mercer County.



VisitMercerCountyPA is proud to present these awards at the agency's annual dinner on June 12th at Gallery Grille in Greenville, PA. For ticket information call 724-346-3771.

For more information about events in Mercer County, log onto [www.VisitMercerCountyPa.com](http://www.VisitMercerCountyPa.com) or call 1-800-637-2370.