

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northwestern Ontario Tourism Leader Gerry Cariou to Receive 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award

Toronto, ON — Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) is proud to announce that Gerry Cariou, Executive Director of Ontario's Sunset Country, will receive the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Air Canada, recognizing more than three decades of leadership and dedication to tourism in Northwestern Ontario.

The prestigious honour will be presented at the Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence on Thursday, October 22, 2026, as part of the [2026 Ontario Tourism Summit](#) at The Westin Ottawa.

A Champion for Northwestern Ontario

For more than three decades, Cariou has worked to strengthen tourism businesses, communities and destinations across Northern Ontario.

After beginning his career in economic development, Cariou moved to Northwestern Ontario in the mid-1990s and worked with Lake of the Woods Community Development Inc. In March 1999, he became Executive Director of Ontario's Sunset Country, a position he has now held for more than 27 years.

Throughout his tenure, Cariou has helped the region navigate enormous change. An early adopter of digital destination marketing, he led Sunset Country as social media transformed how destinations connected with travellers and today continues to explore how artificial intelligence and new search technologies are changing trip planning and tourism marketing.

But his impact extends well beyond marketing.

With Northwestern Ontario's tourism economy closely connected to the U.S. market, Cariou has repeatedly helped businesses navigate periods of disruption and uncertainty. Through economic shocks, border closures and changing visitor behaviour, he has worked alongside operators and industry partners to share information, adapt strategies and pursue new opportunities for growth.

Colleagues describe Cariou as a leader who freely shares his knowledge, embraces new ideas and maintains a deep commitment to the businesses, communities and people of Northwestern Ontario.

"Gerry's leadership through challenges big and small, his ingenuity, and his dedication to promoting Northwestern Ontario have made an incredible impact on the region's tourism

industry. He has continually stayed ahead of new ideas and methods, while always being willing to help businesses and others in the industry with his knowledge and insight. His passion for Northwestern Ontario and everything he does is undeniable.” Matt Rydberg, Crawford’s Camp

Cariou’s contributions have also been recognized by his peers. In 2008, he received the Executive Director’s Award from Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario and currently serves on NOTO’s Board of Directors.

“Gerry’s career represents the kind of leadership we need as Ontario tourism moves forward: resilient through change, deeply connected to operators and communities, and always looking for the next opportunity. For more than three decades, he has been a champion for Northwestern Ontario and a steady voice for the businesses that make its visitor economy possible. The industry’s Forward Motion strategy is about building a stronger tourism future across every region of Ontario, and Gerry’s lifetime of leadership embodies that spirit. TIAO is incredibly proud to recognize his contribution.” Andrew Siegwart, President & CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario

Join us in Ottawa to celebrate Gerry Cariou and the changemakers shaping Ontario’s tourism future.

About TIAO

The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) represents the voice of tourism in the province, advocating for the interests of its diverse industry membership and working with stakeholders to promote growth and create a favourable business environment.

www.tiaontario.ca

About the Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award

The Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Air Canada, recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions to the development and promotion of Ontario’s tourism industry and established a visible, long-term record of accomplishments.

Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence

Date: Thursday, October 22, 2026

Location: The Westin Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario

Tickets: [2026 Ontario Tourism Summit](#)

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