



# FRENCH LICK RESORT®

FRENCH LICK & WEST BADEN · INDIANA

## JOE VEZZOSO, FRENCH LICK RESORT V.P. OF SALES, HONORED WITH PRESTIGIOUS SAGAMORE OF THE WABASH HONOR

**FRENCH LICK, Indiana (June 8, 2021)** — Recognizing 36 years of service to the regional hospitality industry, French Lick Resort's Joe Vezzoso is the newest recipient of the prestigious Sagamore of the Wabash.

Vezzoso, the resort's Vice President of Sales, was presented with the award at the resort Tuesday morning by Gov. Eric Holcomb, who is himself a two-time recipient of the high honor given by the State of Indiana acknowledging notable achievements or civic contributions. The day was doubly memorable for Vezzoso, who also celebrated his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday Tuesday. Several family members joined the surprise celebration including his wife, Melody, daughter Ashley Vezzoso-Schaefer (a sales manager for the resort) and her husband, Steve.

Vezzoso is in his 13<sup>th</sup> year at French Lick Resort, during which time the resort has made significant additions attracting the group business sector to southern Indiana. In 2015, a \$20 million expansion of The Event Center was completed, and in 2019 the Exhibition Hall was refurbished to become a dedicated meeting and event space for larger expos, trade shows and events.

During Vezzoso's tenure as Vice President of Hotel Operations and VP of Sales, French Lick Resort has booked nearly 700,000 overnight rooms via group business. In total, 1.1 million guests visit French Lick Resort annually, with group travel an ever-growing piece of that puzzle.

Holcomb called French Lick Resort "a global gem" and lauded Vezzoso for being "way ahead of the curve" in building tourism as a major economic development tool in southern Indiana. The proof is in the number of first-time and repeat visitors to the small Orange County communities of French Lick and West Baden Springs, Holcomb noted.

"Once we get people here, they like to stay or they like to come back, and you define that whole 'Destination Indiana' approach and really put us on the map," Holcomb said while presenting Vezzoso with the award. "I can't thank you enough, and my only hope is that among all of your awards and recognitions, there's room for the state's highest award, the Sagamore of the Wabash. You showed the right way to do it."

Vezzoso, an Evansville native who attended the University of Southern Indiana, grew up in the construction business and spent years working for his father's construction company specializing in office complexes, schools and stadiums. In 1985 when the River House Hotel in Evansville was being renovated, Vezzoso was asked to stay aboard as the hotel's general manager. That's when he pivoted to a career in hospitality and tourism.

After managing the River House Hotel, Vezzoso moved on to work in operations at Casino Aztar (now Tropicana Evansville), the Executive Inns of Evansville and Owensboro, and Evansville Country Club before joining the sales team at French Lick Resort following its multi-million dollar restoration in the mid-2000s.

In addition to boosting French Lick Resort's profile in the group travel market, Vezzoso is highly involved in Resort Charity Events, which benefits several entities locally and statewide. Through Resort Charity Events fundraising efforts, more than \$1 million will be raised for Riley Children's Foundation in conjunction with the Senior LPGA Championship held annually at the resort since 2017. The Symetra Tour's Donald Ross Classic also makes an annual charitable contribution to the local Orange County Habitat for Humanity on behalf of Resort Charity Events.

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#### **ABOUT FRENCH LICK RESORT**

French Lick Resort is a \$600 million historic restoration and casino development project that includes West Baden Springs Hotel, French Lick Springs Hotel and French Lick Casino. This Midwest premier resort destination features 757 guest rooms and suites; a 51,000 square-foot casino; 45 holes of golf including the fully restored 1917-designed Donald Ross Course at French Lick and the 18-hole Pete Dye Course at French Lick; two full-service spas with a combined 36 treatment rooms totaling 42,000 square feet; meeting and event space totaling 169,000 square feet; and an array of dining and entertainment options.

#### **Media Contact:**

Dyan Duncan

Director of Marketing

French Lick Resort

W: (812) 936-5926

C: (812) 639-7891

[dduncan@frenchlick.com](mailto:dduncan@frenchlick.com)