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Gov. Chafee to receive award for highway beautification

NEWPORT, R.I. – Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee will receive Scenic America’s Stafford Award for his leadership in establishing a highway beautification program aimed at improving the visual appearance of the state’s roadways. The award will be presented on September 5th during a reception at Bellevue House hosted by the group’s chairman, Ronald Lee Fleming. An award for excellence in transportation leadership will also be given to Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RI DOT) Director Michael P. Lewis for his skill in implementing the program.

“We applaud Governor Chafee for his visionary leadership and Director Lewis for guiding this exciting initiative,” said Mary Tracy, president of Scenic America. “Communities all over the country are recognizing the value of attractive gateways, and Rhode Island is leading the way in creating beautiful scenes for all to enjoy.”

Begun in 2012, the beautification program seeks to strengthen tourism and promote economic development while also improving the aesthetic character of key gateway areas to the state. One unique aspect of the program involves commissioning local artists to design murals depicting scenes of historic, aesthetic or cultural significance to Rhode Island. The images are then installed by professional muralists on abutments and retaining walls along some of the state’s busiest roadways.

The first mural went up last year on the Wampanoag Overpass Bridge, visible on I-195 West in East Providence, and depicts sailboats in a Narragansett Bay waterscape. The image was designed by renowned local artist Anthony Russo and was selected by the Governor. In addition to improving the visual appearance of the state’s roadways, the murals are intended to help discourage vandalism and graffiti.

The Stafford Award is named for former U.S. Senator Robert Stafford of Vermont, for his concern for the environment and efforts to strengthen federal highway beautification laws. In 1993 Scenic America presented the award to the Governor’s father, Senator John Chafee, for his longtime support of scenic byways and context-sensitive road design. Other previous recipients include Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, Governor Pete Wilson of California and U.S. Transportation Secretary Federico Pena.

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Scenic America is the only national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the visual character of America's roadways, communities and countryside.