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VISIT PHILADELPHIA® NAMES JEFF GUARACINO PRESIDENT & CEO
*Respected Industry Executive & Tourism Expert Selected
To Head Nationally Recognized Destination Marketing Organization*

PHILADELPHIA, September 6, 2018 – The Board of Directors of VISIT PHILADELPHIA® today announced that following an extensive national search, Jeff Guaracino, current president and CEO of Welcome America, Inc., has been selected to lead VISIT PHILADELPHIA and its talented staff as president and CEO beginning on October 29, 2018.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA is an economic engine for Philadelphia’s tourism industry, generating more than 1 million hotel room nights in Center City in 2017 alone. That same year, the Greater Philadelphia region welcomed 43.3 million people, and 88% of them were here for a leisure purpose. These visitors produced more than \$11.5 billion in economic impact for the region. Visitor spending in the region supports local businesses, creates jobs, generates taxes and ultimately enhances residents’ quality of life. (Sources: CBRE and Econsult Solutions, Inc.)

Guaracino has been part of VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s growth since its early days. He joined the organization in September 2001 and spent more than a decade in leadership roles. In 2012, he left to serve as chief strategy and communications officer for the Atlantic City Alliance (ACA), a New Jersey-based destination marketing organization and later became that organization’s executive director. In 2016, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney recruited Guaracino to serve as president and CEO of Welcome America, Inc., a non-profit organization in a public-private partnership with Philadelphia to produce citywide events.

“After an extensive search that identified top-tier national candidates, Jeff was the unanimous choice of our search committee,” said Manuel N. Stamatakis, chair of VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s Board of Directors. “With more than 20 years of national and international tourism industry experience, a proven track record and deep Philadelphia roots, Jeff is uniquely qualified for this position. He has built a remarkable career in destination marketing, and we are confident that Jeff’s leadership will further elevate Philadelphia’s stature for both U.S. and global audiences.”

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During his time at VISIT PHILADELPHIA, Guaracino worked on many of the organization's signature marketing campaigns, including **Philly's More Fun When You Sleep Over®**, **With Love, Philadelphia XOXO®**, **With Art Philadelphia®** and **Philly Homegrown**. He also developed the groundbreaking marketing campaign **Philadelphia – Get Your History Straight And Your Nightlife Gay®**.

“Jeff is passionate about Philadelphia, and I'm confident in his expertise to become the president and CEO of VISIT PHILADELPHIA,” said Mayor Kenney. “This new role is a natural expansion of his longstanding enthusiasm for Philadelphia and will enable him to leverage his expertise to drive tourism to our great city.”

Guaracino has built an international reputation for his work in Philadelphia and Atlantic City. He is the author of two books: *Gay and Lesbian Tourism: The Essential Guide for Marketing* (Elsevier, 2007) and *Handbook of LGBT Tourism and Hospitality: A Guide for Business Practice* (Harrington Park Press/Columbia University Press, 2017).

During his time with the ACA, Guaracino was instrumental to the success of the DO AC marketing campaign, which drove leisure visitation and non-gaming revenue to the city as it experienced increased competition from the expansion of gaming in nearby states. He also led the destination's recovery strategy after Superstorm Sandy.

Under his leadership at Welcome America, Inc., Guaracino launched a new strategic plan and rebranding campaign for Wawa Welcome America, which led to a more robust schedule, new corporate partnerships and increased event attendance. Additionally, he expanded the organization's mission to produce citywide events all year, including the annual Philly Holiday Festival.

“As a native Philadelphian, I'm excited to return to VISIT PHILADELPHIA at a time when there is so much opportunity in the tourism industry to showcase our beautiful city and region and to generate additional dollars for our economy,” said Guaracino. “The work at VISIT PHILADELPHIA doesn't just bring visitors to our region, it helps make Philadelphia a more vital and better place to live and do business.”

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Guaracino succeeds Meryl Levitz, VISIT PHILADELPHIA's founding president and CEO, who announced in January 2018 that she planned to leave her position. Levitz spent 22 years developing VISIT PHILADELPHIA as a globally recognized industry leader in tourism marketing, cultivating an outstanding staff, changing the city's perception worldwide and developing the leisure tourism segment—a segment that did not exist strongly prior to 1997. As Levitz prepares to depart her role, one-third of Center City hotel room nights are occupied by leisure visitors—a first in Philadelphia's history. In addition, overnight leisure visits to the five-county region have more than doubled from 7.3 million in 1997 to 15.1 million in 2017. (Sources: CBRE and Econsult Solutions, Inc.)

"I'm delighted that Jeff has been selected to lead the talented team at VISIT PHILADELPHIA," said Levitz. "Jeff's experience in destination marketing is proven, and I have the utmost confidence that with him leading our skilled staff, VISIT PHILADELPHIA will continue to produce record-breaking room nights, great stories and an outstanding quality of life and economic benefits for those who live, work and play in Philadelphia."

Guaracino's hiring reflects the organization's commitment to recruiting the best talent and being welcoming to all. VISIT PHILADELPHIA employs the same values-based processes in staff hiring as it does with its Board of Directors selection, vendor and advertising decisions and more—ensuring a reflection of Philadelphia itself. The organization remains well-positioned to continue achieving its mission: building Greater Philadelphia's image, driving visitation and boosting the economy.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA® is our name and our mission. As the region's official tourism marketing agency, we build Greater Philadelphia's image, drive visitation and boost the economy.

On Greater Philadelphia's official visitor website and blog, visitphilly.com and uwishunu.com, visitors can explore things to do, upcoming events, themed itineraries and hotel packages. Compelling photography and videos, interactive maps and detailed visitor information make the sites effective trip-planning tools. Along with Visit Philly social media channels, the online platforms communicate directly with consumers. Travelers can also call and stop into the Independence Visitor Center for additional information and tickets.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos and high-definition B-roll of Greater Philadelphia, visit the Photos & Video section of visitphilly.com/mediacenter.