

STS Member Spotlight: J.R. Shaw

Name: John Robert Shaw – most everyone but my family calls me J. R.

Occupation: Executive Director of Visit Rogers, Executive Vice President of the Rogers Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce

City/State: Rogers, Arkansas



Have you always worked within Tourism? What is the path that got you to your current role? *Oh, heck no. I have done a little bit of everything in my working career, from selling insurance, radio advertising and electrical supplies (not all at the same place, but that would be an interesting place to work) to driving cement trucks, managing a linen delivery service and acting full time. In 1993 I went back to college to pursue my degree in Hospitality Management at the University of New Orleans, and the rest is history. I worked for Holiday Inn and Hilton properties in New Orleans, then got a wild hair and took a completely different job and a transfer to the Pittsburgh, PA area. September of 2000, I became the Group Sales Manager at Visit Pittsburgh and I have been in the DMO business since. We landed in Rogers and Northwest Arkansas in 2015 and are blessed beyond measure. Being part of a Five-star Chamber of Commerce provides a valuable perspective into destination and community development and management, which at this stage of my career has been a blast. In retrospect, everything I have done in my life has added up to make me a better tourism professional. I am a sum of many parts.*

What was the first STS event you attended? *Spring Symposium 2016 in Baton Rouge. I was invited to join the board the next year.*

You traveled to D.C. in July, for the STS Congressional Summit on Travel and Tourism. With regards to Advocacy, what is important to you and your region?

Arkansas is no different than our sister southern states. We need investment to keep our national parks vibrant and vital, we need modern infrastructure to bring visitors safely to our area, and we need business friendly policies that encourage investment in local tourism assets. In short, we need to make it easy and attractive to visit Arkansas, from the U.S. or from abroad. Advocacy is communicating consistently with leaders and gaining trust and respect, national or local level.

You have also sent staff to STS Marketing College. What benefits have you seen for them, in addition to your organization, via their attendance?

Visit Rogers is fortunate to have a talented, dynamic young staff. While there are valuable professional development opportunities at some tradeshow and conventions, Marketing College allows us to make one investment in their professional development that is broad based in tourism and hospitality best practices that they can apply immediately. I already see a bigger picture perspective from Kelly and Luke (Sports and Group Sales Manager Kelly Parker and Meetings & Conventions Sales Manager Luke Wiggins) from Marketing College. They are better Visit Rogers team members and better tourism professionals for attending.

Do you have a favorite vacation spot within the Southeast? *We love going back to Louisiana to visit family. And we have vacationed on the Gulf Coast, the Smokies, Virginia, Kentucky, we've been just about everywhere. Sounds like a Johnny Cash song! I do have to say that discovering destination gems in Arkansas has been a blast!*

When you're not at the office, where would we find you spending your free time? *At home we are in the garden a lot, and I've taken up painting as a hobby this year, so that's been very interesting, especially since I failed Arts & Crafts in elementary school. And we are on the road more recently. We are empty nesters for the first time EVER, so we're not letting the grass grow under our feet. Rogers is very good to us, and we are involved in many local activities, so life is great in Northwest Arkansas!*