

## **STS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: NOVEMBER 2018**

**Name:** Halle Czechowski

**Occupation:** Strategic Communications & Advocacy Consultant

**City/State:** Washington, DC

### **What is your role with regards to Advocacy and Southeast Tourism Society?**

My role is to amplify the voice of frontline tourism leaders at the federal, state, and local levels. Officially, I am STS's public affairs advisor, which means I coordinate with the Advocacy Pillar Committee to develop policy priorities and advocacy strategies, organize the Congressional Summit on Travel and Tourism, and create the messages and tools to promote public policies that advance a positive environment for travel and tourism in the Southeast.

### **You have a lot of experience working with various departments in Washington, D.C. – what additional leadership roles have you had in and around Capitol Hill?**

I spent 10 years on Capitol Hill, including 3 years as the Executive Director of the Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus. It was in that position that I wrote legislation and then led a grassroots campaign to create a White House Conference on Travel & Tourism.

I also served for two years as the Vice President of Communications and Advocacy for Voices for America's Children, a national network of state and local children's advocacy organizations. That job gave me great insights into what state and local leaders need to be effective advocates.

### **What was the first STS event you attended?**

My first STS event was the 1993 Fall Forum in Mississippi. I was the Executive Director of the Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus at the time and Bill Hardman, who served on the caucus advisory board, wanted me to meet STS's members and talk with them about the importance of being engaged with elected officials. It was the start of a great relationship!

### **What legislation, in relation to the Southeast, is currently on your radar?**

With just a few weeks left in the current congressional session, I am focused on getting Congress to approve legislation to provide sustained funding to address the National Park Service deferred maintenance backlog. Currently, the maintenance backlog is estimated to be \$11.6 billion and growing. It has a significant impact on Southeast communities as it threatens access to the parks and the ability to deliver exceptional travel experiences.

I am also focused on legislation that would expand Ocmulgee National Monument in Macon, Georgia into a National Historical Park. The Ocmulgee Mounds have an incredible history and, while this may seem like a narrowly focused issue, it has given us the opportunity to strengthen ties to several national organizations, including National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. This campaign has been a great opportunity to demonstrate how powerful the voice of frontline tourism leaders is with elected officials.

### **For someone in the travel/tourism industry, that has not yet experienced STS Congressional Summit or is tentative about getting more involved in Advocacy, what are three action items they could do to better familiarize themselves?**

1. Read our [policy goals](#) and [talking points](#). That will familiarize new advocates with the issues we are talking about. And if they think we've overlooked something let me know. It is important to me that our advocacy work represents the concerns of grassroots tourism.
2. Attend the advocacy issues discussion at STS Connections. It's a great opportunity to learn about the priority issues, connect with national issue advocates, and meet other STS advocates.
3. Pick an issue from the [Advocacy Resource Center](#) and send an email to your elected officials. I work hard to make advocacy simple and by taking a small step, new advocates will learn that elected officials want to hear from their constituents and the issues that are of importance to them.

**Do you have a favorite vacation spot within the Southeast?**

This is like asking me to pick a favorite book! I can't pick just one. I have had some amazing travel experiences in the Southeast and am always open to invitations to visit new destinations. Bribery is not beneath me!

**When you're not at the office, where would we find you spending your free time?**

Gardening, reading or trying out a new recipe.