



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**Monica Smith
President & CEO
Southeast Tourism Society**

Have you always worked within Tourism? What is the path that got you to your current role?

I've worked in the hospitality and tourism industry all of my career. My first job was bussing tables at a country club in Cleveland. After high school, I pursued a degree in hotel administration with a concentration in financial management. Originally, I wanted to become a hotel controller, but after a year of working full-time in an accounting office, I realized that I wanted a job with more positive interaction with customers—hotel guests are usually only calling the accounting department when there is a problem. At the recommendation of a mentor, I decided to pursue new job opportunities in sales and sales became my passion. I've been blessed to have experience working in restaurants, hotels, convention centers, and CVBs. I think that's helped me to see the big picture of the impact of tourism in communities, and how to best communicate that message to government, community, and industry leaders as well as the small business owners that our tourism efforts support.

Prior to joining the staff of STS, what was the first STS event you attended as a member? The 2010 STS Fall Conference in Destin, FL. The two people that made the most impact on me at that conference were Steve Chandler and Bennish Brown.

Being you've served on the boards of other associations, what would you say makes STS unique from other organizations?

The southern hospitality, longevity of peer-to-peer relationships, and national advocacy focus.

Knowing you've split your time between the Midwest, East Coast, West Coast, and the Southeast, what has been a significant change or highlight for you since making the Peach State your home?

Easier access to sweet tea and peach cobbler. I prefer not to dine in southern places where sweet tea is not a drink option. Deliveries to the STS office are welcome and appreciated 😊

What is your favorite season in the Southeast?

The Fall. College football, uncrowded beaches, and fall foliage.

Do you have a favorite vacation spot within the Southeast? What about outside our region?

There's no place like home, so Jacksonville (Florida) has often been the vacation destination for my family. However, any beach will do...Hilton Head Island, Myrtle Beach, Ft. Myers, Ft. Walton Beach, Daytona Beach, the Golden Isles, Tybee Island, Virginia Beach and others have been checked off my list. I look forward to visiting AL, MS, and NC beaches in the future. Then on to the lakes and mountains in our region.