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DAVID GILBERT RECEIVES CITY NATION PLACE LEADERSHIP AWARD

Destination Cleveland's Illuminate CLE also recognized as finalist at global awards event

CLEVELAND (Nov. 10, 2025) – David Gilbert, president and CEO of Destination Cleveland, the destination marketing and management organization for Cuyahoga County, received the [Leadership Award](#) at the City Nation Place Global conference on November 6 in London. Selected by a jury of his peers, the international award recognizes how Gilbert's bold community-first approach has delivered a measurable impact on civic pride that is at the heart of changing national and global perceptions of the city.

Now in its second year, the City Nation Place Leadership Award recognizes a place brand leader who has demonstrated leadership, passion and innovation in their destination. Gilbert was chosen based on a nomination submitted by his leadership team that emphasized how his early adoption of place branding, innovative resident-focused philosophy and collaborative approach have created a powerful legion of brand ambassadors since launching the Cleveland brand in 2014. As of 2024, resident recommendation of Cleveland as a visitor destination registers at 92%, up from 34% in 2012.

"I truly believe Destination Cleveland is led by the best CEO in the industry. David's authentic leadership style, mission to make his community better and his bold vision are driving our region forward," said Jon Pinney, chair of Destination Cleveland's Board of Directors. "To be selected for this award from a global pool of talented industry leaders underscores how David's relentless energy and strategic thinking have elevated Cleveland's reputation as a place to visit, live and work. The results of his leadership will continue to transform Cleveland for the generations ahead."

"Great place brand leaders have to develop a broad spectrum of talents – creativity, bravery, patience, diplomacy, determination... this list goes on. In his 14 years as president & CEO of Destination Cleveland, David has been pivotal in delivering a measurable impact on civic pride on Clevelanders across the city, demonstrating the value of a community-first approach to place branding. We've enjoyed watching Cleveland's progress over the past few years and we're excited to see how the city continues to grow and thrive under David's leadership," said Clare Dewhirst, Director, City Nation Place.

Destination Cleveland was also represented at the City Nation Place Awards as a [finalist](#) in the "Best Placemaking Initiative" category for its Illuminate CLE project. The bold lighting initiative debuted on Public Square in April, combining animated and synchronized light with custom music for hourly shows. Destination Cleveland's entry was the only finalist from the United States in its category.

The City Nation Place award recognition is the latest honor for the organization. Earlier in the year, the Cleveland brand was named a 2025 inductee into the American Advertising Federation's Cleveland Advertising Hall of Fame, while the organization's marketing efforts were recognized by the AAF with six 2025 ADDY Award wins. The team's "[The Land of Creativity](#)" online series was awarded a 2025 Great Lakes Emmy and earned a RUBY Award from the Ohio Travel Association. In August, the "[Have Your Day in The Land](#)" campaign was recognized with a U.S. Travel Association "Marketing Momentum" Award at the association's annual ESTO Conference.

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: *Destination Cleveland is Cleveland's destination marketing and management organization. The private, non-profit organization's mission is to stimulate economic growth by attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland's diversity, creativity and contagious passion. In 2024, visitation increased for the fourth straight year to 18.6 million visits, with visitor spending infusing a record-high \$6.9 billion into the local economy. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com*

About City Nation Place: *City Nation Place's mission is to help cities, regions and nations grow their place economies and improve the quality of life for their communities. With events located around the world, City Nation Place brings together leading place brand and marketing practitioners to connect, collaborate and share best practices that build stronger, more resilient futures for places. The City Nation Place Awards have become the definitive recognition of excellence for cities, regions and nations, and City Nation Place continues to serve as a trusted source for research, insights and thought leadership in place branding. Learn more at citynationplace.com*