



## From So. Cal to So. MO

Dan Lennon, Director,  
Missouri Division of Tourism



### How did you come to Missouri?



I came from a large family in Venice, located in Southern California. Four of my sisters became “The Lennon Sisters”, famous for their 13 years on The Lawrence Welk Show. We are all involved in music in some capacity – whether it be musical performance or promotion.

In 1992 Lawrence Welk, Jr. was looking to promote the legacy of his father and came upon Branson, MO., where Andy Williams had built his theater. My sister, Kathy, was approached about possibly reviving the show and was asked if she would like to host it for a few weeks. After scouting the location, she and the rest of the family fell in love with the area and experienced what I call “The Ozarks Conversion.” So in 1994, 30 of us Lennons decided to move; we sold our businesses and homes and planted roots in Branson.

I learned about Missouri tourism selling the resort and then selling the destination. For 10 years I was director of marketing for Welk Resorts; in 2003 I became director of marketing for Branson/Lakes Area CVB. The state tapped me in 2013 as deputy director of marketing and last year I became director.

Branson is truly different in that it is small community that does big things. When we moved here in 1994 the population was 5,700; now it has more than 10,000 hosting millions of visitors. While small, the city has been afforded a unique opportunity to present its product to millions of travelers.

### This is Travel South’s first foray into Missouri. How important is this to Missouri?

We were delighted to be approached to consider joining the TSUSA geographic footprint. It is a fitting relationship – there are numerous similarities in terms of arts, culture, history, food and geography. We have a lot in common but we also offer something new. At this early juncture, we are excited to have all Travel South

delegates see what the new neighbor has to offer. From a Missouri POV, it is very important as it exposes our destinations to new relationships and more operators. We invite all to check out Missouri but particularly those who have not been here before: we ask you to come experience our version of Southern hospitality.

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### What will Travel South Domestic Showcase attendees to Branson be surprised about?

It is in the middle of the Ozarks – the oldest and most rounded mountains in North America. These hills are green and everything is wooded and surrounded by water. Fifteen minutes from downtown, you are in wilderness amid quiet solitude. Everyone knows about the live shows but not everyone knows about our “Authentic Ozarks Hospitality,” three pristine lakes and incredible beauty.

### What would you say to those operators or suppliers that have already visited Branson?

Branson changes all the time. If you haven't been in five years – it is time for a visit. Historic Downtown Branson is going through a complete renovation: a \$300 million investment is underway, much of it directed to tourism! It is a different Branson than your grandfather's Branson in many ways – new shows, restaurants and dining opportunities - yet the change has been incremental. The hospitality, culture and wholesomeness is still there – only with more options. The number of things to do in Branson is staggering – 75 different shows going on at one time.

Come and enjoy the Ozarks!

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**Editor's Note: Several Fam Trips will tour Missouri and neighboring Arkansas for Travel South Showcase in March 2017.**