



EMBARGOED UNTIL 7:00 AM, Tuesday, May 16th, 2023

Victoria's Hospitality Industry Shines at the 2023 AHA (Vic) State Awards for Excellence: Outstanding Performers Recognised

This news is under embargo until 7:00 am on Tuesday, May 16th, 2023.

The pinnacle event of the Victorian hospitality industry unfolded on Monday, May 15 at Crown Palladium, with a diverse array of venues and influential figures in the sector being honoured in 40 distinct categories during the sold-out gala dinner and awards ceremony.

More than 1200 individuals gathered in full force at Crown Palladium for the highly anticipated 2023 AHA Victoria State Awards for Excellence, where the industry's strength and successes were honoured, bringing an electric energy to the room.

"The AHA (Vic) State Awards for Excellence is a celebration of the accomplishments of Victoria's pubs and hotels, where we come together to recognise outstanding hospitality service and delivery," stated Paddy O'Sullivan, CEO of AHA (Vic).

"We also express gratitude to the dedicated pub and hotel staff for their invaluable contributions to ensure the success of our industry."

Our marquee event partner, TABCORP, was once again a key contributor to the success of the evening. "We appreciate TABCORP's ongoing support, and the significant value of each and every AHA (Vic) partner that contributes to the success of this unique gala event." noted AHA (Vic) Executive General Manager, Mike Barouche.

The '**Nikakis Benchmark Award**,' named after the late Nick Nikakis, is the most prestigious award of the night which recognises an individual or organisation who by their sustained performance and commitment, serve as an inspiration to all in the industry.

In 2023, **Brian Kearney** was honoured with this title. Brian's tenure as Director of Liquor Licensing and CEO of AHA (Vic) made a significant, positive impact on the licensed hospitality landscape in Victoria. His career contributions to the Victorian hospitality scene have seen positive change in liquor, gaming, wagering, smoking and planning.

The highly anticipated '**Overall Hotel of the Year- Metropolitan**' was presented by Carlton & United Breweries. Contenders for 2023 included The Bay Hotel Mornington, The Camden Hotel (Caulfield South), The Grand Hotel Warrandyte, London Tavern Hotel (Richmond) and the title was won by the esteemed **Terminus Hotel Fitzroy North**.

The regional counterpart included finalists such as the American Hotel Echuca, The Middle Hotel Korumburra and Torquay Hotel to name a few, and it was the **Grovedale Hotel** that took home the prize of '**Ian Larkin Overall Hotel of the Year - Regional**.'

The prestigious '**Chef of The Year**' award was taken away by **Jake Furst from Kickon Group** for displaying fantastic food innovation at the **Terminus Hotel, Fitzroy North**.

The '**Local Legends**' award acknowledges outstanding community service and achievement within the hospitality industry by certain individuals. This year, **Ben Fisher from The Middle Hotel Korumburra** was honoured with the title of **Local Legend of the Year**.

This year saw the introduction of a new award category- '**All Abilities Hotel**,' presented by Get Skilled Access, which recognises venues that offer inclusive experiences to people of all abilities, including those with physical disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, and mental health conditions. We are thrilled to announce that **The Drouin Family Hotel** have won this award for their exceptional accessible dining and social practices in their pubs and hotels. Their commitment to creating an inclusive environment for everyone is truly inspiring, and we are proud to recognise their efforts.

The **Parma of the Year** category received a record-breaking number of nominations in 2023, and the results were strongly contested. To celebrate and recognise the high-quality Parmas served by members, we revealed not just one but the **top 10 Victorian Parmas of the Year!** **Crown Hotel Traralgon, Dargo Hotel, Racecourse Hotel Malvern East, St Andrews Hotel Fitzroy, The Birmingham Hotel Fitzroy, The Bridge Inn Hotel Mernda, The Drouin Family Hotel, The Heritage Balnarring, The Oxford Scholar Melbourne and The Royal Hotel Drouin** were announced as winners on the night.

Over 76 pubs contested for the coveted 'People's Choice Award' presented by Treasury Premium Brands and voted by the general public, was **The Star Hotel Sale**, emerging as the fan-favourite among their community.

The highly regarded '**Best Hotel Group Operator**' award at the event acknowledges the most prominent players in the hotel industry, and this year, **JBS Hospitality Group** were announced as the winners in recognition of their exceptional performance in managing a range of highly regarded venues throughout Melbourne, including Dick Whittington Tavern, Grosvenor Hotel, Hotel Brighton, Melbourne Central Lion, The Bank on Collins, The King Hotel, The Nixon Hotel and True South.

[Click here](#) for the full list of 2023 AHA (Vic) State Awards for Excellence winners and finalists, and [here](#) for the suite of winners' images.

About AHA (Vic)

For 180 years, AHA (Vic) has provided industry leadership, lobbied on members' behalf and promoted best practice in hotel management. Within the diverse Victorian hospitality industry, our membership incorporates CBD, metropolitan, regional and rural hotels and pubs, accommodation hotels and resorts.

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