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Champaign-Urbana. Brilliant.

At our annual Toast to Tourism event on May 17, we celebrated our 40th anniversary as an organization. Over the course of those 40 years, we've been known as several things—the Champaign-Urbana Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Champaign County Convention & Visitors Bureau, and Visit Champaign County.

During the event, we launched our new brand identity—**Experience Champaign-Urbana**.

How did we get here?

Over the past 40 years of our organization's existence, we've not only changed our identity, we've adapted our services to better meet the needs of our community. "Heads in beds" has long been a strategic goal for our organization as well as our counterparts across the country. Bringing business to the area for sports events, meetings and conferences, group and leisure travel has always been a part of our work. Yet as time goes on and our community needs change, we adapt our strategic goals and tactics to go well beyond filling hotel rooms. As you'll see in this report, our team serves our residents and grows our economy by creating new experiences, attracting diverse events, hosting filmmakers, recruiting talent, and welcoming new residents and visitors.

Through these many new initiatives, we have grown our presence in the marketplace and have become a leader in the state in generating economic impact, supporting jobs that support travel and tourism, and bringing much-needed tax dollars back into the community to be re-invested in our infrastructure. It was clear that it was time to take our marketing to the next level so we could bring our community to the forefront of the many who have yet to discover our offerings.

For the past year, we have conducted market research, held focus groups, tested various advertising campaigns, and conducted surveys that led us to embrace the Champaign-Urbana name that is widely known to hundreds of thousands outside of our community, thanks to the brand recognition of the University of Illinois.

Our marketing tactics primarily target audiences 50 miles and out from our area, so going to market with a recognizable name is critical to capturing

someone's attention as studies show we have less than 3 seconds to make an impression. Testing headlines and copy in digital advertising over the past year, we saw click through rates double when Champaign or Champaign-Urbana was used in place of Champaign County. This brings twice as many people to our website, where they can then discover the brilliant community awaiting them.

Through this name change, we will be able to engage with more people and shine a light on the entire Champaign-Urbana area, from as far north as Paxton, west to Monticello, and south to Sullivan.

We will continue the work we have always done. Telling stories about the brilliant people, places, and events to explore through engaging content on our website, our social media channels, our videos, advertising, and much more.

Rebranding is never an easy process, and it will take some time to make the change. You can visit our website today to see the impactful change with many more changes coming in the next few weeks—experiencecu.org.

Several digital campaigns have launched with the new brand, targeting our top markets in Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, and the Quad Cities. We're looking forward to seeing the positive impact this brings, driving more foot traffic to our local business and raising awareness of the brilliant amenities we have to offer.

For the past 40 years we have had the honor of sharing the story of our community. Needs evolve and sales and marketing strategies change, but through it all we will continue to share the stories of the people, places, and events that make the Champaign-Urbana area **BRILLIANT**.



From Our CEO



Springfield on April 26-27.

We were thrilled to help the Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend Committee announce the return of the full marathon in 2024 (new route going into Savoy) on April 12 before hosting a very successful 2023 Race Weekend on April 28-29.



Thank you to ECU Board Chair Bryan Snodgrass for your stellar leadership the last 2 years, to incoming ECU Board Chair Annie Easterday for the journey ahead, to ECU Foundation Board Chair Lynne Barnes for guiding our efforts another year, and to ECU Board Past Chair Laura Bleill for serving as the liaison to the ECU Foundation Board the past 2 years.



Toast to Tourism

Our annual Toast to Tourism event brought together over 200 people to celebrate the impact of travel and tourism to our community and to honor our Tourism Impact Award winners. Held May 17 at Carmon's, the program featured a summary of this past year's efforts with highlights in sports, conferences, talent attraction, and various marketing efforts. Additionally, Champaign County African American Heritage Trail co-chairs Barbara Suggs-Mason and Angela Rivers were presented with honorary bricks that will be part of the Skelton Park renovation. Our new branding and community video were also launched during the program. The highlight of the event is the honoring of our brilliant Tourism Impact Award winners: B-52 Hangar MX, Neil St. Blues, Michaels' Catering, Triptych Brewing, and the Japan House. Hear their stories on our [YouTube channel](#).



A very special day for our team included an outing to Paxton, our newest regional partner on May 11. Thank you to Donna Pepper, Exec Director MainStreet Paxton in providing an extensive community tour, which our Boards plan to replicate in late September for our annual Board FAM Tour.

A shout out to Fire Doll Studio for hosting our April board meeting, to Venue at 600 in Thomasboro for hosting our May board meeting, and to United Way of Champaign County for hosting our year-end combined ECU and ECU Foundation Board meeting in June.

Grateful for our board leadership, our partners and our work force who support a community-based mission to promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents. Everything starts from that point.

Jayne DeLuce

CEO Summit

Jayne was grateful to participate in the Destinations International CEO Summit on April 5-8 in Greater Victoria. Education centered around regenerative tourism, sustainability, leadership, global travel, and mental wellness. Added bonus traveling with Galena CEO Rose Noble, who has recently relocated to serve as CEO of Visit Spokane and missed here in Illinois.



I-Engage Program

In 2022, the University of Illinois developed the I-Engage program, designed to get junior faculty into the community to learn from various sectors from public health to education to agriculture and how they can get involved in solving issues and connect their students with our community. In 2023, Terri participated in the arts & culture panel, held April 28 at the IMC, alongside Kelly White, 40 North; Lisa Costello, Giertz Gallery at Parkland College; and Miriam Larson, IMC; moderated by Kevin Hamilton, Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts. Over 50 faculty members from various departments and disciplines attended. Terri shared information on our overall arts & culture scene and specific projects like the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail.



Foundation Update

The ECU Foundation generates resources that support the destination experience of people who visit, work, and live in the greater Champaign-Urbana area. Current initiatives include supporting the Champaign County African American Heritage trail, the Chambana Welcome Crew program, the Champaign County Regional Film Office, and bids for recruiting and retaining major events to the community. This past quarter, the ECU Foundation hosted Toast to Tourism on May 17, the D1 Nation Football Tournament at Rantoul Sports Complex on June 30-July 2, implemented the “Be a Trailblazer” fundraiser brick program for the heritage trail, and kicked off the construction of Skelton Park into a tribute to African American musicians from the area.



Champaign County African American Heritage Trail

Following our first installation earlier this year, we have since installed three more signs to learn about the history of the Bethel A.M.E. Church (401 E. Park St., Champaign), Homer Park (2573 Homer Lake Rd., Homer), and Student Demonstrations for Equal Rights (SW Corner of Green & Wright St., Champaign). We are tremendously thankful to the sponsors who made these signs possible—the family of Eugene & Hester Suggs, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, and the U of I Community Credit Union. Look for at least two more signs installed in the next quarter.

The Heritage Trail committee also made several important decisions about goals through 2024. In conjunction with 40 North, the committee is exploring the installation of five murals in Champaign and Urbana. Additionally, the committee and ECU are exploring the development of an app to facilitate self-guided tours, ongoing development of guided bus tours, educational materials, and more.



ICCVB Day at the Capitol

On April 26-27, Jayne joined ICCVB (IL Council of CVB's) colleagues in Springfield to discuss state legislative priorities, including full tourism funding, supplemental recovery funds, creating Tourism Improvement Districts, and supporting destination development projects including the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail.



Champaign County First to DC

On April 16-19, a group of community leaders descended upon Capitol Hill to advocate for infrastructure projects, such as Curtis Road, passenger rail, high speed rail, safe streets, mapping Mahomet Aquifer, hydrogen buses, and the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. Most meaningful experience was dinner served by Chef Darrell Gaston at Kitchen Savages, who is leading efforts to support local businesses in the heart of DC Ward 8.

RoleCall Talent Attraction Summit

Terri attended the inaugural RoleCall Talent Attraction Summit in Flint, MI, June 11-13, alongside Carly McCrory-McKay, Champaign County EDC. RoleCall is our talent attraction consultant that helped us execute the Community Job Application. Bringing together their clients and other communities working in the talent attraction space, this summit provided valuable conversations and educational topics surrounding issues that impact our communities including childcare, affordable housing, and quality of life. Terri and Carly presented on “How to Build a Recruiters Network,” which received top marks from attendees as most valuable session.



Sales & Marketing Efforts



Illinois Race Weekend Recap

We hosted the 4th and 14th Mile Celebrations as a part of the 2023 Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend, April 28–29, welcoming 10,000 participants. The Tom Grassman Band and 90s Daughter entertained crowds, with Riggs Beer tapping three of its beers for eligible participants. Meijer, the title sponsor for the street fest, activated with its popular inflatable chair, cornhole, as well as product giveaways. Christie Clinic, Race Weekend title sponsor, offered free stretching. Food vendors included Flour and Fire Pizza, La Paloma, Dave’s Dogs, Juanita’s Tacos, Jimmy John’s, Kona Ice, and Sidney Dairy Barn. Our team also hosted a booth at the Health & Fitness Expo, giving away the much-anticipated wooden nickels. 32 businesses participated offering discounts for Race Weekend and the full week beyond the event. Hopscotch Bakery saw the highest redemption of nickels, followed by TCBY, Industrial Donut, Triptych, and Hamilton Walker’s. An anticipated 15,000 participants are expected in 2024 with the return of the full Marathon.

D1 Nation Tournament

The inaugural D1 Nation Annual Spring National Championships, a premier football event, moved its Spring Championships from Indianapolis to the Rantoul Family Sports Complex, June 30–July 2, creating an estimated \$2.2 million in economic impact. This tournament brought together 47 top teams ages 5–14 from across the country, including Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, Ontario, Boston, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Evansville, Charlotte, Alexandria (VA), Muskegon (MI), and Toledo. Experience Champaign-Urbana provided a sponsorship. The winners received an automatic Bid for D1 Nationals, scheduled to take place December 15–18 in Atlanta, Georgia.

African American Travel Conference

Caitlyn attended the African American Travel Conference, April 3–5 in Cleveland, OH. She met with over 40 Black tour operators, sharing info on our destination as well as the progress on the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. This is the third year we have attended to showcase our area to connections new and old.

Occupancy Rate

Reporting March–May 2023

Champaign County	61.1%
Bloomington	57.2%
Peoria	53.5%
Springfield/Decatur	58.0%

Average Daily Rate

Reporting March–May 2023

Champaign County	\$115.14
Bloomington	\$107.27
Peoria	\$112.74
Springfield/Decatur	\$103.08

This data is collected and reported by STR®.

SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

4	2	2
leads	tentative	definite

5,750

estimated room nights

CONFERENCES

8	4	4
leads	tentative	definite

915

estimated room nights

GROUP TOUR

9	0	9
leads	tentative	definite

LEAD: Potential business distributed to hotels
TENTATIVE LEAD: Potential business, no commitment yet
DEFINITE LEAD: Business secured



Meetings & Conferences Wrap-Up

Numerous conferences occurred this quarter with a recurring theme of economic development. The Illinois Economic Development Association (IEDA) hosted their 2023 Summit, featuring panels from economic development leaders across the state. Additionally, the Illinois Entrepreneurship & Small Business Growth Association (IESBGA) was back for their annual conference with great success. This conference offers professional development opportunities for business advisers and EDC executives. June saw an influx of International conference visitors with the 76th International Symposium on Molecular Spectroscopy (ISMS) conference hosted by the Department of Chemistry at the University of Illinois and the Transient & Variable Universe Conference that was hosted by NCSA. Each of these conferences brought in over 100 attendees from across the globe with a heavy emphasis on research topics in the fields of science and technology. We were also excited to welcome other conferences such as BASF Corporation, Illinois Fire Service Institute (FSI), Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network (ICAHN), and the 19th annual International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, to name a few.

Tourism Academy

Caitlyn attended the Tourism Academy hosted by our CRM company, Tempest, May 2-4 in Mesa, AZ. The conference offered three days of education and development in our industry as well as updates and best practices for our software. Mesa was awarded the first Autism Certified City in the United States and is working towards making themselves the most accessible city in the country. Caitlyn learned from their team and other thought leaders on this topic as we continue our work here to be a welcoming and inclusive community.



Community Job Application

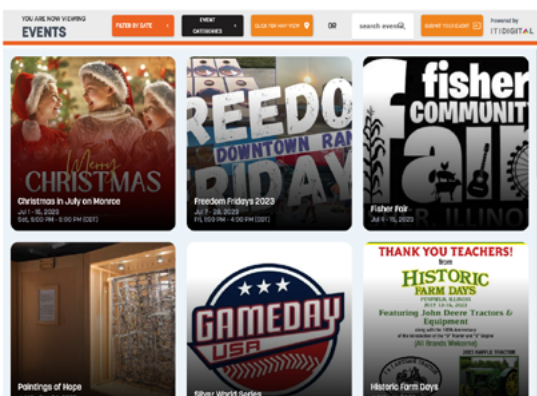
As part of our talent attraction efforts, we launched an integral program to attract and retain people to our community. In collaboration with the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation, we introduced the Champaign-Urbana Community Job Application on April 12 at yourewelcomecu.com/makeit. This revolutionary new tool offers an easy path for new and potential residents, alongside current residents, to connect with employers and the community. With three short forms, users can indicate their timeline to come to our community, their familiarity with Champaign-Urbana, their desired job industry and type, their resume, and their community interests. Data received is distributed weekly to our Champaign County Recruiters Network of over 200 HR and talent attraction professionals to immediately start recruiting these individuals to available jobs. They are also connected to members of the Champaign Welcome Crew to answer community questions. Following submission of information, a comprehensive email campaign launches, sending periodic emails to candidates based on their desired job industry and community interests. With little marketing to date, over 40 individuals from Illinois, Iowa, California, Indiana, Florida, Nevada, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, New York, and Missouri are currently being served. A robust marketing campaign will launch in early fall 2024. Similar programs have been deployed in less than a handful of communities across the country, so we are thrilled to be a leader in the Midwest as we continue to share our brilliant story.





CU in Asia Food Trail

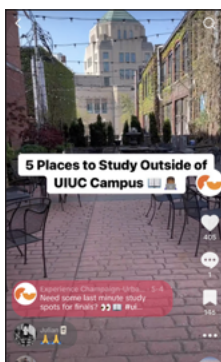
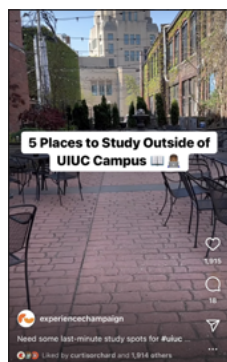
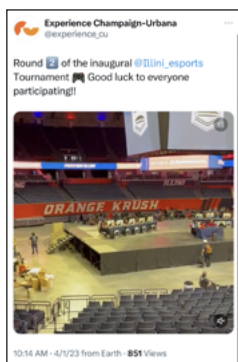
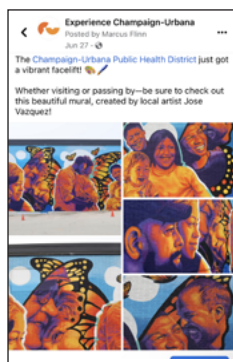
This summer, we launched a new experience pass promoting the Asian culinary scene in the greater Champaign-Urbana area. The pass—CU in Asia—features several dozen restaurants spanning the continent, highlighting the range of flavors and cuisine originating from China, Korea, Japan, Cambodia, Vietnam, India, the Philippines, Thailand, and Laos. Residents and visitors can sign up for the pass and earn points each time they check in at one of the listed restaurants. Once a user has visited ten locations, they're eligible to win \$100 in gift cards to participating restaurants and their choice of a Champaign-Urbana Proud T-shirt. Up to three winners will be selected in September, December, March, and June. This sector was selected for our first pass to highlight a truly unique aspect of our community. While we see many communities offer coffee, taco, and beer trails, in Champaign-Urbana, diversity is one of the hallmarks of our community and what better way to experience it than through food. Over 200 users have downloaded the pass in less than one week since launch. We will be able to track visits to area restaurants and attribute it directly to this promotion. Future passes will be available soon, with a public art passport up next later this year.



New Calendar System

The Calendar of Events on our website has long been the most visited page. Keeping the calendar current takes our entire team as we scour the internet and keep our eyes and ears open for everything that is taking place. While we've managed to create a robust calendar with that infrastructure, we knew we were continually missing events that would be relevant to website users. We enlisted a new vendor, ITI Digital, to help us create a new calendar that scrapes the internet using provided zip codes and Facebook pages. The new tool catches upwards of 25% more events that we were previously sharing. It also allows us to easily export events in PDF for specific timeframes to provide to conference or sports attendees, recruits, and many others with that need.

Social Media & Web Stats



Facebook
CUPHD Mural
22,783 reach
767 reactions
28 shares

10,653
Followers



Twitter
Illini Esports
Invitational
849 views
26 engagements

6,248
Followers



Instagram
5 Places to Study
33,470 views
1,915 likes
838 shares

7,817
Followers



TikTok
5 Places to Study
9,326 views
405 likes
52 shares

1,698
Followers

WEBSITE REPORT

75,644 Sessions
139,174 Views
61,979 New Visits
2.21 Views per User

TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events
Hot Spots to Get Your Art & Music Fix
Top Spots to Enjoy Spring Flavors
Top Events for Spring & Summer
Top Spots for Enjoying the Outdoors

81.7%

of website traffic is from outside the greater Champaign County area

46.3%

is from outside of Illinois
Top States: Texas, Missouri, Indiana



OUR MISSION

We promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents.

Partners

DESTINATION FOUNDER

Illinois Office of Tourism // City of Champaign
University of Illinois // Rotary Club of Champaign
Champaign County // City of Urbana

DESTINATION LEADER

Busey // Carle

DESTINATION BUILDER

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Village of Savoy // Spherion // Ameren
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois
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Jane Hays & Dave Downey // John & Bonnie Dauer

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Parkland College // Habeeb Habeeb // Champaign-Urbana
Public Health District // William Shiner // Homer Historical
Society // Copper Creek Church // Urbana Park District
Champaign Asphalt // Village of Mahomet // City of Tuscola
Hilton Garden Inn // Family of Eugene & Hester Suggs
Fairfield Suites // Courtyard by Marriott // Janet & Doug
Nelson // Home2 Suites // Village of St. Joseph // Homewood
Suites // Lynne & Dick Barnes // Curt & Jo Anderson
Max & Betsy Mitchell // Barbara Suggs Mason // Robeson
Family Benefit Fund // Steve Horve // News-Gazette

REGIONAL PARTNERS

Amish Country of Illinois
Monticello Chamber of Commerce
City of Paxton

For information on our Destination Management Partner
Program and how you can support our mission visit:
experiencecu.org/partners



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Experience Champaign-Urbana Team

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Estella Samii, Visitor Experience Coordinator
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2022-2023

Experience Champaign-Urbana
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