

UPLIFTING THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA REGION

# BRILLIANT

FY24  
ANNUAL  
REPORT

EXPERIENCE  
CHAMPAIGN  
URBANA





# from the *chair*

**ANNIE EASTERDAY, PEAR TREE ESTATE**  
Chair, Board of Directors, 2023-2024

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This past year marked my first term as Chair for Experience Champaign-Urbana, and what a year it was. This was a year of growth, progress, and hitting significant milestones.

Driven by a passion for the community, the team and the Board of Directors mapped out a new strategic plan, Destination 2027, that strengthens this organization and sets attainable goals to further our mission. Through a brainstorming session during the strategic planning session, the ECU team expertly identified their core values:

#### **WE BELIEVE IN:**

**Brilliance**—We bring joy and an innovative mindset to all our work.

**Spark**—We are tenacious and spirited in our pursuit of impact.

**Illumination**—We shine an optimistic light on all facets of our community.

These values are reflected in every task the organization takes on. Whether it's an Instagram Reel or a site visit with a potential meeting planner, the Experience Guide or the event services provided to make visitors feel welcome, Experience Champaign-Urbana lives by these values through all of their efforts.

#### **Highlights for fiscal year 2024 include:**

- Collaboration with the University of Illinois and other community stakeholders to raise funds and build awareness on the critical need for new carriers and routes to Willard Airport.
- Nearing the completion of Phase One of the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail with sign installations throughout the county, significant murals by national artists reflecting themes of the trail, and the transformation of Skelton Park.
- Creating a new Film Workshop series that involves residents, artists, and local businesses in the many opportunities available to work with the film industry.
- Recognition of the talent attraction efforts as a “Catalyst for Community Vitality” featured in a study by Destinations International.
- Securing grant funding for incentives to aid in securing meetings, conferences, and sports events that are critical for growing our visitor economy.

These developments alongside the daily interactions with residents, business owners, visitors, and event planners, continue to showcase the Champaign-Urbana area as a **BRILLIANT** destination.

# mission

# vision

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

Experience Champaign-Urbana will be a connected and collaborative leader in promoting the region as an extraordinary destination to visit, work, and live.



## 2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Annie Easterday**, Chair, Pear Tree Estate  
**Nathan Escue**, Vice Chair, Hamilton Walker's  
**Caleb Miller**, Treasurer, Carle  
**Jayne DeLuce**, Secretary (ex-officio), Experience Champaign-Urbana  
**Bryan Snodgrass**, Past Chair, Busey  
**Laura Bleill**, University of Illinois Research Park  
**Bridget Broihahn**, City of Urbana  
**Bob Flider**, University of Illinois  
**Jennifer Locke**, Champaign County Board  
**Shayla Maatuka**, Matuuka Al-Heeti Emkes, LLC  
**Michael McDonald**, Wood N' Hog Barbecue  
**Vanna Pianfetti**, Champaign City Council  
**Sam Santhanam**, I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center  
**Charles Smith**, Village of Rantoul  
**Joan Walls**, City of Champaign  
**Christopher Walton**, Village of Savoy

## EXPERIENCE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA TEAM



- Jayne DeLuce**, President & CEO  
**Terri Reifsteck**, Vice President of Destination Branding & Development  
**Gina Scarpetta**, Director of Sales & Development  
**Robert White**, Director of Group Sales & Partnerships  
**Mark Brown**, Director of Event Services & Film  
**Jan Troutt**, Director of Administration  
**Marcus Flinn**, Digital Content Manager  
**Estella Samii**, Destination Experience Manager  
**Leslie Lundy**, Finance Manager

## DESTINATION PARTNERS

### DESTINATION FOUNDER

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

### DESTINATION LEADER

Busey // Carle // City of Urbana

### DESTINATION BUILDER

Village of Savoy // OSF Healthcare // Village of Rantoul // Spherion // Ameren  
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois  
University of Illinois Community Credit Union  
Jane Hays & Dave Downey // John & Bonnie Dauer

### DESTINATION BACKER

Illinois American Water // John Blackburn  
D&V Farms // First State Bank // Gies College of Business // I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center  
Parkland College // Habeeb Habeeb  
Homer Historical Society // Champaign-Urbana Public Health District // Urbana Park District  
Family of Eugene & Hester Suggs // Champaign County Forest Preserve District // Copper Creek Church // Champaign Asphalt // Village of Mahomet // City of Tuscola // Hilton Garden Inn  
Bethel AME Church // Fairfield Suites // Courtyard by Marriott // Village of St. Joseph // Janet & Doug Nelson // Del Elaine Owens // Annie Easterday  
Chambana Moms // Lynne & Dick Barnes  
Robeson Family Benefit Fund // Home2 Suites  
Homewood Suites // Curt & Jo Anderson  
Max & Betsy Mitchell // Barbara Suggs Mason  
News-Gazette

### REGIONAL PARTNERS

Amish Country of Illinois  
Make It Monticello  
City of Paxton

For information on our Destination Partner Program and how you can support our mission visit: [experiencecu.org/partners](https://experiencecu.org/partners)

# destination 2027

## OUR PURPOSE

We uplift the Champaign-Urbana region by igniting economic impact through visitation, advocacy, and fostering community pride.

## CORE VALUES

We believe in:

**Brilliance**—We bring joy and an innovative mindset to all our work.

**Spark**—We are tenacious and spirited in our pursuit of impact.

**Illumination**—We shine an optimistic light on all facets of our community.

## POSITION

Experience Champaign-Urbana tells the story of the area like no one else can, and nurtures our community through:

- Inspiring marketing that speaks to multi-faceted audiences both at home and afar
- Generating excitement for the community through unwavering support and pursuit of events, conferences, sports, and filmmaking
- Collaborating with like-minded partners who are seeking bright tomorrows for current and future residents, students, and visitors
- Nurturing connections that ensure everyone is welcome to the area

## OBJECTIVES

Enhance Our Destination

Foster and Expand Our Partnerships

Amplify Our Stories

Strengthen Our Organization and Team

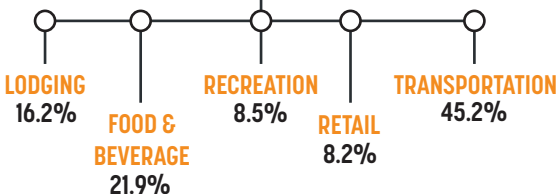
## our IMPACT

Domestic Travel to Champaign, Douglas, Moultrie, Piatt, and Ford Counties in 2023

Travel & Tourism generated

**\$666.9**

million in visitor spending



Directly supporting

**5,033**

**JOB**s in our communities

Generating

**\$172.7**

million in **PAYROLL**

Investing

**\$19.3**

million in local taxes

**BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY**



## SPORTS & EVENTS MAKING AN IMPACT

Facilities such as the Rantoul Sports Complex, State Farm Center, Leonhard Recreation Center, and many more allow us to host sports tournaments of various sizes in diverse groups. These are a few of the events that were significant contributors to our local economy in FY24.

- **D1 Nation Football**—Hosted 60 teams (1,800 athletes) in Rantoul
- **Beep Baseball Tournament**—Hosted three visually-impaired teams from across the Midwest in Savoy
- **NSA Softball Tournament**—Hosted 14 senior adult softball teams in Rantoul
- **Rank-Up Football**—Hosted 55 teams (1,300 athletes) in Rantoul
- **US Quadball Qualifier**—18 teams from around the Midwest competed. The Illini club team won!
- **IHSA Boys State Basketball Tournament**—16 of Illinois' top teams competed in front of 37,000 attendees
- **IHSA State Individual Wrestling Tournament**—650+ wrestlers competed across three days in front of over 30,000 attendees
- **Middle School Basketball Championships**—This annual event grew to 178 teams across facilities throughout Champaign County
- **Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend**—12,000 participants took to the streets during the first full marathon since 2019.

## MEETINGS & GROUPS BRING MID-WEEK BUSINESS

When meetings, conferences, and group travel take place Monday–Thursday, our hotels stay full, our restaurants see increased foot traffic, and our economy continues to grow. These events and groups contributed to increased visitor spending in FY24.

- **Sunshine Motorcoach Tours**—Visited Amish Country in August, generating 35 overnight stays mid-week.
- **Farm Progress Show 2023**—While in Boone, Iowa, many visit the Champaign County area, bringing over 2,000 room nights from late August to September.
- **University of Illinois Library iPres International 2023**—Brought attendees from all around the world, generating 500 room nights in September.
- **Deloitte & Touche LLP, December 2023 Meeting**—One of the many corporate events brought to our community in December, bringing room nights during a slower period.
- **Illinois Association of Public Procurement Officials 2024**—Held during Illinois' spring break, this conference generated 150 room nights during a critical period.
- **Illinois Entrepreneurship & Small Business Growth Association 2024 Conference**—Over 200 attendees discovered our communities during their immersive conference in May.



## DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Zartico—a robust visitor behavior and movement data tool—allows us to make better marketing decisions. Additionally, data has been instrumental to our stakeholders and local businesses for economic development and business growth. In FY24, the following trends helped shape travel and tourism in our communities.

Visitors accounted for **13.8%** of all spend in our region.

Average visitor spend was **\$177** per person per day.

**42.4%** of all visitors were from out-of-state.

Chicago had the highest percentage of visitor spend at **35.8%** with an average spend of **\$253**. St. Louis followed with **5.1%** of all spend at **\$185** per person per day.

**47%** of spenders are aged 25–54; **24%** have a household income of \$100K+; and **48%** have children in their household.

The University of Illinois campus saw **39.3%** of all visitors, followed by Champaign at **25.1%** and Urbana at **12.3%**.

## VISITOR IMPACTS ON INDUSTRY SECTORS

(% of all spend in the sector :: average spend per visitor)

### RESTAURANTS

**26%** :: **\$105**

### RETAIL

**14%** :: **\$154**

### ACCOMMODATIONS

**85%** :: **\$343**

### ATTRACTIONS

**27%** :: **\$67**



**12,088**



**8,898**



**1,874**

**80.8%** of website visitors are outside of the greater Champaign-Urbana area

### WEB STATS

466,622 page views :: 181,339 total users :: 2.57 pages/visit

### TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events :: Restaurant Week :: Our Stories



## ACCESSIBLE CU

To help develop an authentic look at accessibility in our community, we partnered with Community Choices, and the College of Education at the University of Illinois to evaluate the accessibility of local businesses. Through conversations with disabled community members, they spent over a year developing the “Accessible Champaign Checklist.” The checklist outlines the physical, sensory, cognitive, and accommodation-ready characteristics of businesses. [The website](#) launched in early August 2023 with nearly 80 businesses listed. Users can search businesses by category—i.e. food & drink, shopping, arts & culture, etc.—and they can filter search results using metrics that were incorporated in the evaluation of businesses. These filters include whether a business has easy-to-open doors, a crowded layout, multi-stall bathrooms, wide stall doors, Braille signage, and nearly 30 more attributes relating to physical and cognitive needs. Stay tuned for additions as students continue to make evaluations.



The Champaign County African American Heritage Trail made significant progress in FY24. With the assistance of Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Tourism Attractions & Festivals Grant Program, we, alongside our co-chairs and sponsors, accomplished:

- Installation of over 20 interpretive signs in Champaign, Urbana, Savoy, Homer, Rantoul, and on the University of Illinois campus.
- The development of a mobile app for self-guided tours (launching in fall 2024.)
- The completion of the first of sixteen videos focusing on various themes. The first video focuses on Frederick Douglass' visit to Champaign.
- The development of group tours, with numerous tours held for groups since spring 2024.
- 144 bricks installed at Skelton Park, donated by individuals and local businesses.
- The transformation of Skelton Park with a sculpture honoring African American musicians by Preston Jackson, and new play equipment with a focus on music.
- A nationwide call for muralists that received 93 submissions from 32 states, resulting in four tremendous murals installed across Champaign-Urbana.

Look for updates at [ccafricanamericanheritage.org](http://ccafricanamericanheritage.org).



## 2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, generates resources that support the destination experiences of people who visit, work, and live in the greater Champaign-Urbana area.

- Lynne Barnes**, Chair, University of Illinois College of Applied Health Sciences
- Rachel Coventry**, Vice Chair, Curtis Orchard & Pumpkin Patch
- Jesse Hines**, Treasurer, Hilton Garden Inn
- Jayne DeLuce**, Secretary, Experience Champaign-Urbana
- Curt Anderson**, Busey
- Laura Bleill**, University of Illinois Research Park
- John Hammond**, Community
- Jeff Kurtz**, Gies College of Business
- Katie Miller**, Community
- Max Mitchell**, ReMax
- Susan Muirhead**, University of Illinois Brand Hub
- Lowa Mwilambwe**, University of Illinois Student Affairs
- Jon Salvani**, University of Illinois, College of Fine & Applied Arts
- Bryan Snodgrass**, Busey, ECU Board Liason



## GROWING FILM PRODUCTIONS

The Champaign County Film Office worked hard this year to attract and assist filmmakers to our region. In October, location scouts in the Chicago area visited to tour sites across the region. A location database was developed, and outreach efforts to local businesses, artists, vendors, and community members took place through a series of workshops. Finally, a statewide grant will allow Flyover Film Studios to develop a soundstage in Rantoul on the former base that will be the largest outside of Chicago. The future of film in our community is bright!

# *building* **BIGGER TABLES**

Our mission is to promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents. More simply put—to foster a place where people feel a shared sense of belonging.

The more partners and community members we can bring to the table and get behind this mission, the more cohesive and impactful our efforts will be. Therefore, we should all strive to build bigger tables with the goal of creating a space of inclusivity. Every day, we create or build on relationships that make doing business in this community better and where people can more easily see themselves as being a part of what we do. And we are making great strides!

Our plan for building bigger tables in FY25 focuses on our collaborative partnerships with community stakeholders. We will:

- 1 Reflect a shared community vision in implementing our Destination 2027 strategic plan.
- 2 Actively recruit and listen to diverse voices who choose to visit, work, and live here.
- 3 Advocate for enhanced transportation assets and accessibility around the community.
- 4 Utilize data-driven insight to maximize marketing performance in destination impact.
- 5 Invite residents and visitors to experience our rich African American history.
- 6 Recruit large conferences to the University of Illinois campus.
- 7 Expand efforts to support independent filmmakers.
- 8 Build partnerships with others that share common goals.

We can settle for being a nice community with small tables. Or we can strive to be a brilliant community with bigger tables. When we come together to create **more** inclusive and **welcoming** spaces, we all win!



*Jayne DeLuca, President & CEO*

Engage in our efforts to support  
and promote the community at:

**experiencecu.org**

