



Photo: Iowa Heartlanders

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR - 2021 was certainly a year of challenges as the hospitality and tourism industry in Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty continues to rebound from the effects of the pandemic. But that does not mean we lacked in success. Demand for overnight lodging increased an average of 38% per month over 2020, and just 4% per month less than our record year of 2019. Visitor spending for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021 was \$423 million topping the \$380 million in 2019. These dollars substantially add to the quality of life we all enjoy while also providing significant tax relief to local residents.

Events are making a return and the Xstream Arena and GreenState Family Fieldhouse have proven a tremendous asset in this area. These facilities have hosted thousands of participants in wrestling, basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics events that bring visitors to the area nearly every weekend of the year. Events like the historic IWCOA Girls State Wrestling Tournament get the headlines, but it is the youth tournaments in the GreenState Fieldhouse each weekend that are the true drivers of economic activity in the area. It has also been great to welcome ECHL professional hockey to the area with the Iowa Heartlanders. The sport continues to grow locally and 'Landers fandom is growing with it.

Think Iowa City staff have played a tremendous role in Project Better Together and the Better Together 2030 initiative. The visioning process will help our area thrive coming out of the pandemic to make this an even better place to live, work, and play.

I encourage you to take the time to review this report and connect with me, Josh, or his team to learn more. It is an impactful organization that makes our community the great place it is.



*Laura Soride
FY21 Board Chair*



AWARDS & ACCOLADES



Iowa City was named in the 2021
Top 100 Best Places to Live
in America by Livability



LGBTQ TRAVEL

Iowa City has been nominated for the 2021
Destination City of the Year by GayTravel.
Others nominated: Chicago, New York, Atlanta,
Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Miami

Iowa City was also chosen as a destination city
for Pride Journey's Summer Road Trip



BICYCLE FRIENDLY

Iowa City, Coralville, and University Heights
received Bicycle Friendly Community Awards
from the League of American Bicyclists



THE GAZETTE BUSINESS AWARDS

Economic Support for
Project Better Together



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Project Better Together was awarded with the
2020-21 Volunteer of the Year Award
from United Way

SPORTING & SPECIAL EVENTS

\$6,272,988

**DIRECT SPENDING
OF SUPPORTED SPORTING EVENTS**

17

**TOURNAMENTS
AND EVENTS SERVICED**

25,621

**TOTAL ATTENDANCE
AT SERVICED SPORTING EVENTS**



FY21 RSAD GRANT RECIPIENTS

Armbruster Open
Block Party 7s Rugby
Clash on the Courts
Clippers Baseball Tournament
EYAS New Year's Invitational
GranGable
HWC Showdown
Hurricane Golf Tournament
IGHSAU 1A Girls State Tennis

IWCOA Iowa Girls State Wrestling
Midwest Mat of Dreams
NWCA Div. III Nationals
Sugar Cubed Marathon
USA Gymnastics Level 9 Western Nationals
USA Wrestling High School Recruiting Showcase
USA Wrestling US OPEN/UWW Junior Nationals
USA Wrestling Women's Captains Cup
USAW Senior Nationals
Varsity Dance Competition

SPECIAL EVENT ATTENDANCE

7,000
FRYFEST

7,000
JINGLE CROSS

[\$980,000]

**ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT
OF CVB-PRODUCED SPECIAL EVENTS**

FY21 COMMUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS

5th Street Social - Coralville
Bourbon and Blue Festival at Cedar Ridge
Coralville 4th Fest
Free Shakespeare in the Park by Riverside Theatre
Global Community Dinner
ICE CREAM: Iowa City Expo for Comics & Real Eclectic Alternative Media
International Russian Guitar Festival
Iowa City Area Juneteenth
Iowa City Book Festival and One Book Two Book
Iowa City Latino Festival
Mic Check Poetry Festival
Mission Creek Festival
North Liberty's Beat the Bitter
Pride in Our Past: A Week-long Celebration of Iowa's LGBTQ History
Summer of the Arts
Witching Hour

SALES & SERVICING

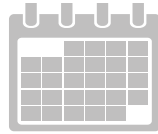


2,712

ROOM NIGHTS

\$2.8 MIL

FUTURE BOOKINGS



6,099

MEETINGS
ATTENDANCE

[\$1.8 MILLION]

ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT
OF CVB GENERATED LEADS

39,108

TOTAL GROUP ATTENDANCE#

60

GROUPS SERVICED#



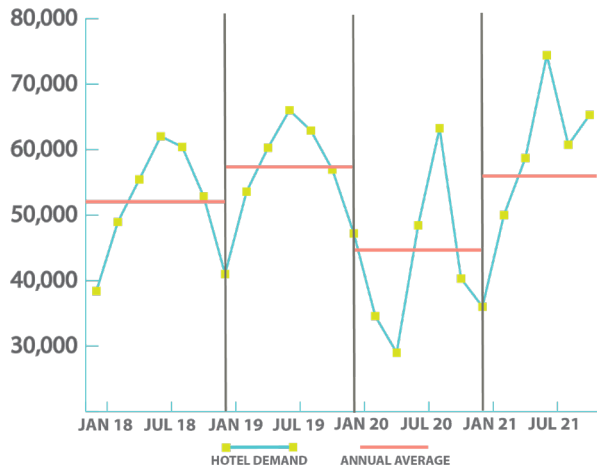
\$11.94 MIL

TOTAL DIRECT
SPENDING#

\$1.08 MIL

INCURRED BY HIGHEST
REVENUE-GENERATING GROUP#

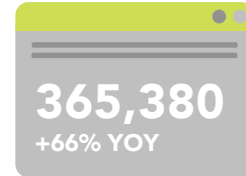
HOTEL DEMAND



MARKETING

UNIQUE WEB
VISITORS#

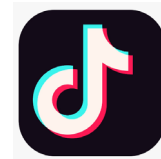
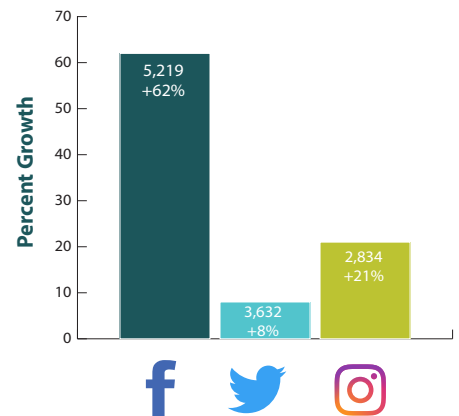
198,319
+64% YOY



TOTAL
PAGEVIEWS#

365,380
+66% YOY

SOCIAL FOLLOWERS#



Created a TikTok profile to broaden
and expand our social reach.
Started posted in September 2021

VISITOR SPENDING & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Johnson County	Tourism & Hospitality Employment	Share of State	Labor Income (Millions)	State Taxes (Millions)	Local Taxes (Millions)	Spending (Millions)
Total	3,877	6.4%	\$113.29	\$34.94	\$42.64	\$423.37

Visitor Spending 2020 (Millions)	Lodging	F&B	Recreation	Retail	Transport	Total	Growth Rate (2020/2019)	Share of State
Johnson County	\$45.76	\$67.37	\$35.68	\$53.32	\$62.48	\$264.61	-30.3%	5.8%
Iowa	\$740.23	\$1,084.12	\$722.81	\$875.78	\$1,142.24	\$4,565.20	-29.2%	100.0%

Visitor Spending (Millions)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Johnson County	\$333.08	\$341.19	\$365.70	\$379.91	\$264.61
Iowa	\$5,664.63	\$5,828.53	\$6,250.53	\$6,449.11	\$4,565.20

3,877

LOCAL TOURISM
EMPLOYMENT *

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Peter Matthes, Board Chair
UI Strategic Communications

Laura Soride, Past Chair
RE/MAX Affiliates

Shanti Roundtree, Vice Chair
Pearson

Kelly Murphy, Treasurer
Courtyard By Marriott University Heights

John Lundell, Secretary
Mayor-City of Coralville

Dale Arens
UI Athletics Hall of Fame

Jeff Capps
Iowa Children's Museum

Dave Davis
Radisson & Hampton Inn

Brian Flynn
30hop, Joe's Place, Tin Roost

Chriss Hoffman
City Council-North Liberty

Jake Moore
GreenState Credit Union

Royceann Porter, Ex-Officio
Johnson County Board of Supervisor

Josh Schamberger, Ex-Officio
Iowa City/Coralville Area CVB

Bruce Teague
Mayor-City of Iowa City

Amanda Tumer
Kineth Hospitality

STAFF

Luke Eustice
Manager of Sports Development

Stacy Houseman
*Executive Assistant
& Special Projects Manager*

Donna Jondle
Visitor Services Assistant

Nick Kaeding
*Senior Vice President of
Finance & Administration*

Quentin Mendlik
Manager of Video & Digital Marketing

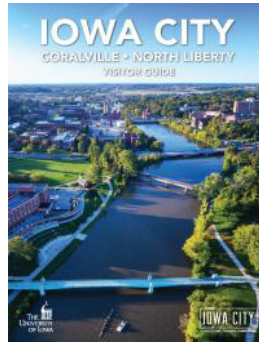
Monica Nieves
Vice President of Conference Sales

Nick Pfeiffer
*Vice President of
Marketing & Communications*

Josh Schamberger
President

Kylee Walker
Sports Development Intern

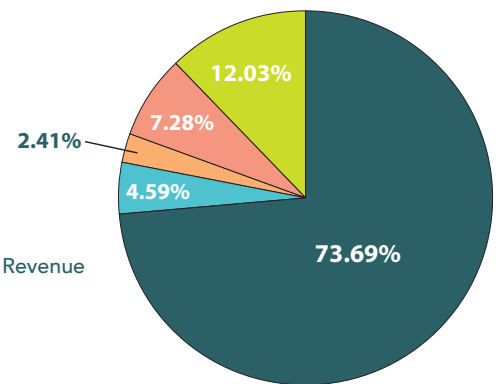
VISITOR SERVICES



VISITOR INQUIRIES FROM[#]

49 STATES **23** COUNTRIES

FUNDING & GROWTH*



Thanks to MidWestOne Bank
for a generous sponsorship of the
2021 Annual Report



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS...2021 IN REVIEW

While overall spending and economic activity have not completely rebounded from the start of the pandemic, 2021 showed that people are willing to travel to unique destinations when they can do so safely with confidence. Hotel room demand in 2021 averaged just over 56,000-room nights per month. This is up from the 45,147 average room nights experienced in 2020, but still short of the record high 57,326 average from 2019. Hotel room demand in July was the second highest demand per month since we've been tracking the statistic.

What do we make of this? First and foremost, consumers feel the Iowa City area is an intriguing but safe place to visit. The accommodations we offer vary to suit the needs of a diverse public. The amenities, attractions, and dining options in the area spark satisfied visitors and influence their overall spending.



Our media measurements have also seen a continued uptick, with web traffic to ThinkIowaCity.com up 64% from the previous year. Locals and visitors see value in following Think Iowa City on social media with Facebook followers growing by 62% and Instagram followers up 21%. We have conducted a soft launch of a new TikTok channel this year, which has seen some early success.

In 2021 we worked with 8 travel writers, bloggers, and social media influencers in various ways throughout the year informing and encouraging them to explore the area. The measured earned media has amounted to an estimated value of \$45,000 with impressions north of 300,000.



Lastly, we are very proud of the accolades we've received, or assisted in receiving, in 2021. Our work with Project Better Together and the ongoing Better Together 2030 initiative has been informative for the community and strengthens the brand for all economic activity in the area. Our continued efforts with the Bike Iowa City brand has paid dividends with Iowa City, Coralville, and University Heights earning Bicycle Friendly Community status from the League of American Bicyclists. Finally, our work in promoting Iowa City as a destination to the LGBTQ community earned us recognition as a Gay Travel Approved

community by GayTravel.com and a nomination as the US Destination of the Year in which Iowa City competed against Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and San Francisco. Certainly good company to be in.

In June, Quentin Mendlik was added to staff as Digital Marketing Manager, overseeing social media and video production. Nick Pfeiffer continues to serve as Vice President of Marketing and Communications. Pfeiffer also serves the travel industry in Iowa as the Legislative Chair of the Eastern Iowa Travel Association and on the Legislative Committee of iTIP (Iowa Travel Industry Partners). In this capacity, Pfeiffer is in direct communication with State and local leaders regarding tourism and hospitality related issues and funding.

- Nick Pfeiffer, Vice President of Marketing & Communications

SPECIAL EVENTS...2021 IN REVIEW

Just like many industries, 2021 was a challenge for the events world. Although we were excited to be able to hold events again there were constant questions: would our attendance return to pre-pandemic numbers? What safety requirements would we have for our attendees? Are we doing too much? Too little? Although events have returned, they have not returned to the attendance levels we were seeing before the pandemic.

At the start of 2021 we held our annual Foodie February events on social media and Restaurant Week. Because our restaurant community was one of the hardest struck by COVID-19 it was incredibly important to support them at this time. Through our partnership with local delivery provider, Chomp, we were able to successfully host Restaurant Week both in-person in restaurants and also through their delivery service. We partnered with Iowa City Downtown District to introduce the Spicy Food Challenge and were able to collaborate with a dozen new and unique restaurants through that effort. Foodie February continued to grow and we had over 25 restaurants participate in the programming.



We were able to safely execute granGABLE in May 2021, hosting over 500 cyclists throughout our community. The event was made possible by our presenting sponsor, SCHEELS. We again partnered with restaurants to host our aid stations, our local bike shops to provide support, and collaborated with Johnson County public safety entities to ensure rider safety. This year's ride was made more memorable by the high winds and heat in early May. Going forward, the granGABLE is planned to be held in each Summer Olympic year, and will return again in 2024.

Our signature event, FRYfest, returned after being paused in 2020 by COVID-19. Attendance in 2021 fell from our pre-pandemic numbers to 8,000. The theme for the 13th annual event was "Honoring the Legends" as we were finally able to celebrate the lives of Coach Hayden Fry and AD Bump Elliott. We also honored Christine Grant. The classic programming of FRYfest also returned: a panel featuring the newest Hall of Fame class, the World's Largest Hawkeye Tradeshaw, and finally a concert with a firework finale, kicking off the football season in Iowa City. FRYfest continues to be a catalyst for visitors to the community. We expect that numbers will return to close to pre-pandemic levels in 2022.



Finally, we welcomed the world to Johnson County at UCI Cyclocross World Cup/Jingle Cross. The Johnson County fairgrounds were full of visitors from across the country and world to take in the world class event. Although the weekend

was the same as the University of Iowa's Homecoming, loyal cyclist fans celebrated with bells on as the world watched in Iowa City.

Although the events industry will continue to make pivots and adjustments for COVID-19, we expect that 2022 will bring a stronger return to events. Attendance numbers can be expected to increase as people become more comfortable living with COVID-19. There is an overwhelming sense in our community that people are eager to fill their weekends with events and activities and we will be there to answer the call. We will continue to support community events like Summer of the Arts, North Liberty's Beat the Bitter and Blues and BBQ, and efforts made by Iowa City Downtown District. If COVID-19 taught us anything, it's that our partnerships in this community are vital to our success and it will be important to continue to strengthen them going forward.

SALES AND EVENT EXPERIENCE...2021 IN REVIEW

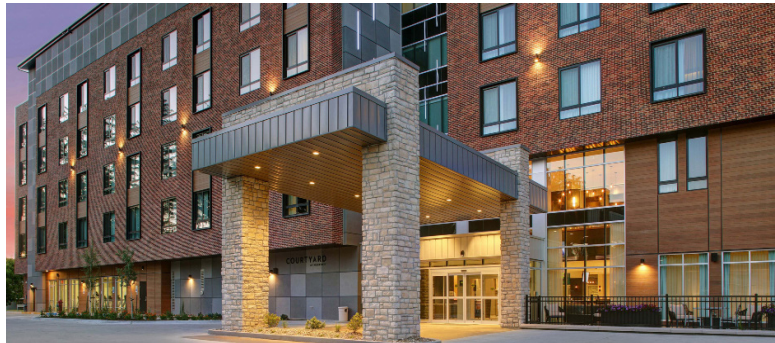
Convention and group sales were one of the hardest-hit segments of our industry and are also one of the slowest to return.

2021 gave us time to make a conscious overhaul in how we approach our servicing of groups to the area. We don't simply provide service to our guests...we provide an experience. Event experience coordination has transitioned into how Think Iowa City will service incoming groups, meetings, and sporting events in the future. When trying to distinguish ourselves from other communities we really want to focus on the overall experience a group is having while being hosted in the Iowa City area. What can we offer as an organization to make a group choosing our area to host their event making it the best and most memorable it can be? Encouraging thinking outside the traditional welcome bags and registration table attendees and making relationship building with planners a top priority.



The Iowa Association of Business and Industry held their annual conference in Coralville in June, we worked with the planner on a regular basis developing a close repertoire. We curated interesting, out of the box alternative activities for their 1,200 conference attendees with 300 room nights. Coralville hosted the Iowa League of Cities Annual Meeting in September and Think Iowa City acted as their housing bureau and created individual welcome gifts developed from their conference campsite theme. With that extra-added attention to detail, we expect both groups to return to our community soon. The event experience for sporting events continues to grow at an even faster rate. A drenching program was created, providing signs and window clings for local businesses and hotels to welcome athletes and spectators. We are pushing the envelope to make sporting event spectators and participants feel as VIP as possible while here.

We will continue to develop out our event experience program in 2022 in partnership with our local hospitality industry. Ensuring that the groups to choose the Iowa City area with return in the years to come.



This fall we also hosted a familiarization tour for four conference planners and two sports planners. Over the course of three days, we had the opportunity to show off several of our recently opened hotels, unique meeting spaces like Hancher Auditorium, and off-site opportunities in the community. We are looking forward to working with the Iowa Bankers Association, who will be hosting their annual meeting in Coralville this summer.

As COVID-19 continues to change the way that groups and businesses travel, we are working closely with the area director of sales and general managers on how we can best support their sales teams and efforts to bring conferences and groups to our area. We continue to see an uptick in conferences returning to the market, especially in associations and state or regional meetings. Although it's a slow return, we are hopeful for the future and know that working closely with our hotel sales teams is the best way to have a successful 2022.

- Monica Nieves, Vice President of Sales and Events

SPECIAL PROJECTS...2021 IN REVIEW

Think Iowa City operated a successful community gift card/certificate program in previous years so several community members and leaders tasked the organization to look at restarting a similar initiative. We knew right away any gift card program we introduced would be designed to support locally owned businesses. As our world continues to shift towards all things digital, we partnered with a company that specializes in developing digital community gift cards. We wanted to make sure we developed a brand for the gift card that encapsulated our entire community easily, hence “Shop JoCo!” Shop JoCo is inclusive to any locally owned business in Johnson County. Consumers can easily purchase Shop JoCo digital gift cards on shopjoco.org, they are easily redeemed from a mobile phone at any participating merchant in store or online. The program runs on the MasterCard network, so there are no extra operational costs for the businesses to participate. MidWestOne Bank joined as the premier sponsor covering gift card fees and a Buy-One-Get-One element for the holidays.



Shop JoCo provides a way for participating businesses to take advantage of additional consumer discretionary spending while encouraging people to get out and about to support businesses that see a sharp drop in sales post-holiday season. It fosters a collaborative environment for locally owned businesses and encourages consumers to always try and support the local business economy when making spending choices.

A strong marketing plan with print, digital, and ad buys was developed prior to launch. Since the program kicked off in early November 2021 150 locally owned businesses signed up as participating merchants. Sales for the program topped \$41,000 since launch. There was success with private sector companies using the program for employee holiday gifting. It offers a seamless process to buy employee rewards in bulk that give the recipient versatility in redemption along with showing dedication to support the local business economy. The wide of range of participating merchants across all industries give flexibility in its use. Buy theatre tickets, eat dinner afterwards, and stay at a local Hotel all with Shop JoCo!

Creating Shop JoCo checks several boxes for Think Iowa City’s mission. It serves as an additional way for the organization to provide direct community engagement along with an avenue to continue to build the Think Iowa City brand and awareness of what the organization does. As Johnson County continues to grow this is another layer in the foundation of connecting all of our wonderful communities together. Shop JoCo is the beginning of buildable branding our organization and others can use in the future as a way to encapsulate our entire community. We look forward to late summer when it will become a higher level of focus again prior to the start of the 2022 holiday season.



Think Iowa City was excited to announce the development of an online store platform in 2021. Residents and visitors alike have expressed interest in an outlet to purchase merchandise representing the Iowa City area. When brainstorming how to fill this niche, shopthinkiowacity.com was born! The site was launched in November of 2021, sales for the holiday season were low for the first year, but we expect sales and buzz to build in the future as a go to spot for local merchandise. Marketing will be a focus in 2022 along with adding the store to our social media accounts. Inventory and selection started out small, there will be an expansion of retail offerings before the 2022 holiday season. With this platform now built, we have plans to broaden its versatility in relocation gifts, event retail, and hosting merchandise for partner brands like Bike Iowa City and FRYfest. We look forward to the many possibilities this site can do for the organization and the community

- Stacey Housman, Special Projects Manager

IOWA CITY AREA SPORTS COMMISSION...2021 IN REVIEW

2021 was a challenging year for everyone in the sports industry. In coordination with Johnson County Public Health, UI Rec Services, Xstream Arena, and other key community leaders we were able to react quickly to various opportunities and help produce several national and international sporting events in gymnastics, wrestling, cycling, and swimming with the necessary safety precautions. These events brought visitors and participants to town, but were also successful largely due to the foundation and relationships that had been built over the last decade. The people in the Iowa City Area have a reputation of rolling out the red carpet for its visitors.



The sporting events we were able to host included the IWCOA Iowa Girls State Wrestling Tournament. We brought that to the big stage for the first time, moving it from a high school gymnasium to an arena. Over 400 girls participated and showcased that girls wrestling is here to stay in the state of Iowa. Due to COVID, the NCAA cancelled the Division III National Wrestling Championships and we were able to provide a substitute for those schools and athletes with the NWCA Division III Nationals at Xstream Arena. USA Wrestling brought four large events to town with the High School Recruiting Showcase, US Open and UWW Junior Nationals, the Women's Captains Cup, and the Senior Nationals. In December, we hosted our own tournament with the debut of the Dan Gable Donnybrook High School Wrestling Tournament, which featured 33 teams from across the Midwest. This tournament will grow to 42 boys teams and 32 girls team in 2022.

Even though we claim the title of #WrestlingTownUSA, we hosted more than just wrestling events. The GranGable bike ride brought over 500 cyclists to town in May. The USA Gymnastics Level 9 Western Nationals filled Xstream Arena and GreenState Family Fieldhouse for a weekend of competitions. The IGHSAU held the 1A Girls State Tennis Championship at the University of Iowa and the IHSAA held the 3A and 4A State Baseball Tournament at Duane Banks Field. The UCI Cyclocross World Cup and Jingle Cross Festival headlined the Fall bringing 800 riders and thousands of spectators to the Johnson County Fairgrounds.



Finally, in December the IGHSAU announced that Xstream Arena will be the host of the Girls State Volleyball Tournament for the next five years. When the arena was planned and built, this tournament was always at the forefront of our mind. The arena, fieldhouse, and the Iowa River Landing make this a perfect location for this tournament and the affects will reverberate around the entire Iowa City/Coralville community.

The effect of COVID 19 was felt not only in the sports event/tourism industry but as one would expect, it also had a large impact on the hospitality industry as a whole. The events we were able to hold in our community were not at the same economic impact level of pre-COVID events. However, despite the lower number of participants and spectators in our community, we felt our hospitality industry were able to recover at a faster pace due to the attraction of these national and international events and emerge in the best position possible going forward.

As we look to 2022 and beyond, as hard as the previous years have been, the hard work of everyone in our community has positioned us for explosive growth potential in the sports sector for years to come. The relationships we have strengthened and made throughout the pandemic will continue to play a key role in the opportunities for larger events in our area going forward.

- Luke Eustice, Director of the Iowa City Area Sports Commission

