



The Iowa City Area Sports Commission is a proud partner of UI Women's Athletics. We were especially proud to partner this past year producing the historic Crossover at Kinnick game on October 15, 2023.

— THINK —  
**IOWA CITY**





## PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# \$1,511,804

GRANTS REFERRED TO LOCAL  
PARTNERS AND MUNICIPALITIES

# 20

GRANTS REFERRED TO LOCAL  
PARTNERS AND MUNICIPALITIES

# \$900,000

ASSISTED IN SECURING  
COMMUNITY ATTRACTION & TOURISM  
(CAT) GRANT FROM THE IOWA  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AUTHORITY FOR NORTH LIBERTY'S  
CENTENNIAL PARK NEXT STAGE

# \$66,804

AWARDED 6 PROGRAMS 50%  
MATCHING DOLLARS FOR TOURISM  
EVENTS FROM THE IOWA CITY  
TOURISM GRANT PROGRAM

RENEWED IOWA CITY,

CORALVILLE,  
NORTH LIBERTY AS AN  
"IOWA GREAT PLACE"  
WITH THE IOWA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
AND IEDA



## SPORTING & SPECIAL EVENTS

# [\$15 MILLION]

ECONOMIC IMPACT

OF PRODUCED & SUPPORTED SPORTING/SPECIAL EVENTS

# 98,649

TOTAL ATTENDANCE  
OF PRODUCED & SERVICED EVENTS

## FY23 REGIONAL SPORTS AUTHORITY DISTRICT GRANT RECIPIENTS

IGHSAU Girl's State Wrestling Championships  
IHSAA Boy's State Wrestling Dual Team Tournament  
Missouri Valley Conference Swim & Dive Championships  
Iowa Swimming Short Course Championships  
Special Olympics Mid-Winter Tournament  
Sweet Sugar Bottom Open #12  
Clippers Baseball Tournament  
Clash on the Courts Basketball Tournament  
Armbruster Open Swim Meet  
Girl's on the Run 5k  
IHSAA Boy's State Tennis Meet  
IGHSAU Girl's State Tennis Meet  
Block Party 7's Rugby Tournament  
Varsity UDA/UCA High School Cheer & Dance Competition  
Altmaier Farm Classic #3  
IHSAA 3A/4A State Baseball Tournament  
2023 IASI Long Course Swimming Championship  
Vicious Circle Disc Golf Challenge #11  
Fall College Prep Series  
IGHSAU Girl's Volleyball State Championship  
A3 Midwest Swim Challenge

## FY23 COMMUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS

Summer of the Arts Marketing  
Coralville 4thFest  
North Liberty Blues & BBQ  
Mission Creek Festival  
Iowa City Book Festival  
Latino Fest Iowa City  
Free Shakespeare  
Iowa City Pride  
North Liberty's Beat the Bitter  
Mic Check Poetry Fest 2022  
ReFocus Film Festival  
2nd Annual South District Diversity Market  
5TH St Social  
Big Dreams Fashion Festival  
Vice Presents, Kick-it Iowa City 2022  
Local Foods Festival  
Why IF (Intellectual Freedom) Matters  
Iowa City Expo for Comics and Real Eclectic Alternative Media (ICE CREAM)  
Global Community Dinner  
Feed Me Weird Festival  
IARGUS Fall Festival: Ukrainian Music  
The Art in Action Project  
KidLit Pizzazz Festival  
Prompt for the Planet Showcase  
Open Gardens Weekend 2022

## SALES & SERVICING

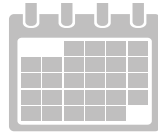


18,396

ROOM NIGHTS

\$18.6M

FUTURE BOOKINGS  
ECONOMIC IMPACT



9,155

MEETINGS  
ATTENDANCE

[\$6.0 MILLION]

ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT  
OF CVB GENERATED LEADS

24  
GROUPS SERVICED

9,155  
TOTAL GROUP ATTENDANCE

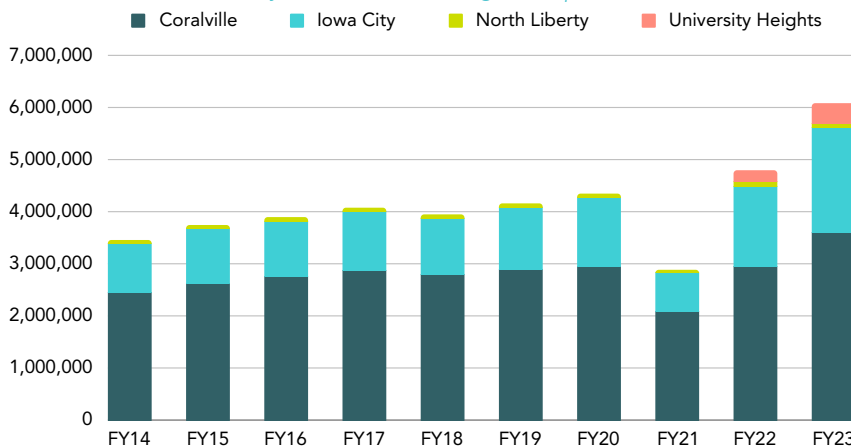


\$19.5 MILLION

TOTAL DIRECT  
SPENDING

## JOHNSON COUNTY HOTEL/MOTEL TAX REVENUE

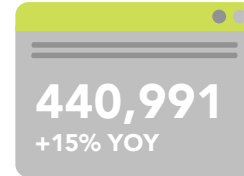
*\*only includes contributing municipalities*



## MARKETING

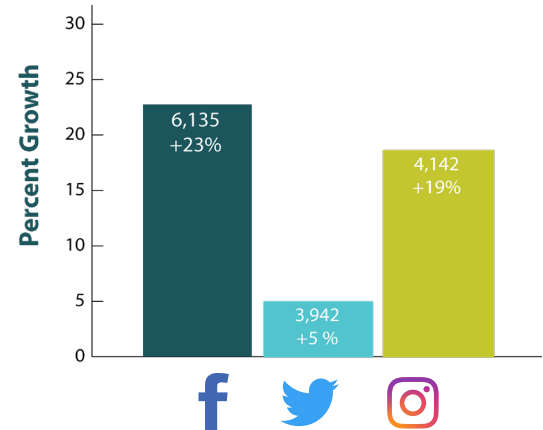
UNIQUE WEB  
VISITORS

197,613  
+21% YOY



TOTAL  
PAGEVIEWS

## SOCIAL FOLLOWERS



81%  
YOY Growth  
737 overall followers

## VISITOR SPENDING & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Johnson County	Tourism & Hospitality Employment	Share of State	Labor Income (Millions)	State Taxes (Millions)	Local Taxes (Millions)	Spending (Millions)
Total	4,685	6.8%	\$145.72	\$46.17	\$49.98	\$653.70

Visitor Spending 2022 (Millions)	Lodging	F&B	Recreation	Retail	Transport	Total	Growth Rate (2022/2021)	Share of State
Johnson County	\$90.52	\$105.31	\$57.12	\$75.12	\$105.84	\$433.92	19.1%	6.3%
Iowa	\$1,337.21	\$1,529.66	\$113.54	\$1,123.76	\$1,834.50	\$6,938.67	12.9%	100.0%

Visitor Spending (Millions)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Johnson County	\$333.08	\$341.19	\$365.70	\$379.91	\$264.61	\$364.26
Iowa	\$5,664.63	\$5,828.53	\$6,250.53	\$6,449.11	\$4,565.20	\$6,147.53

## FROM THE BOARD CHAIR, KELLY MURPHY

2023 proved to be another year of record-breaking growth for the team at Think Iowa City but also historic lodging tax growth for the entire community. As the economy continued to recover from COVID-19 pandemic, our Conference & Sales team saw future bookings of more than 18,000 room nights, a significant increase over 2022. These efforts yielded an overall direct spending impact of more than 19 million dollars, highlighting our hotel partners' commitment to working collaboratively when large groups consider our community.



Once again, our sports sales efforts saw equal growth. In 2023, we hosted the first ever sanctioned IGHS AU Girl's State Wrestling Tournament at Xstream Arena which resulted in standing-room-only crowds. This event is a testament to our team's longstanding commitment to investing in and supporting girls and women's sports. Particularly, the sport of women's wrestling here in Wrestling Town, USA. Our great partnership with IGHS AU also afforded the opportunity to host their girls' State Tennis championships. In addition to hosting history-making women's sports, our team has equally strong relationships with the IHSSA state tournaments as well. We were proud to welcome back state baseball, boys state wrestling duals, state tennis and last weekend's state swimming championships. We will continue in our efforts to exceed any/all expectations from these great partners to bring even more regional and state championships to the Iowa City/Coralville Area.

Thanks to our strong working relationships with our public sector partners, we were able to secure (and reinvest) an important ARPA Iowa City Tourism Grant, our annual CVB Community Grant, Destination Marketing Fund, Regional Sports Authority District (RSAD) Grant, and more. Our team played an important role in garnering support through an IEDA Community Attraction & Tourism grant for North Liberty's Next Stage Centennial Park efforts. This funding along with several other efforts provided over \$1.5 in grants to our local partners and municipalities. In 2024, we will continue to explore these opportunities that are designed to create immediate and future betterment by encouraging economic activities around education, literature, the arts, and the all-important Iowa river that joins our foodways, parks, and the recreational centers where we gather. Think Iowa City continues to be a strategic partner alongside Greater Iowa City, Inc., Iowa City Downtown District, and the South of Six Business District in continuing the most important work of Better Together 2030.

On behalf of the entire board of directors I want to thank you for your continued support of this critically important economic & community development organization. We hope you are as proud of their continued growth as we all are. Please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us when/where we might be of more service.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## STAFF



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Kylee Stock  
*Director of Events*

Donna Jondle  
*Visitor Services  
Assistant*

Nick Pfeiffer  
*Vice President of  
Public Affairs*

Kylee Walker  
*Sports Development  
Manager, Iowa City  
Area Sports  
Commission*

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS - 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



Nick Pfeiffer, Vice President of Public Affairs, provides oversight into grant funding, destination planning, and government relations. In the realm of government relations, he works with all the local municipalities on placemaking initiatives and coordination as well as the state government on tourism advocacy. He also serves on the Board of Directors and Advocacy Committee of Iowa Travel Industry Partners (iTIP) and as Vice President of the iTIP Foundation. Additionally, he joined the Advocacy Committee for Destinations International.

In 2023, the State maintained the influx of dollars for tourism activities that had grown in 2022. \$30.5 million in funding appropriations related to tourism was funded. This included a \$4.3 million budget for the Iowa Tourism office for marketing outside of the state, \$10 million for Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grant funds, \$5 million for state park improvements, and \$60,000 for Regional Sports Authority Districts. Additionally, enthused by the applications of the federal Destination Iowa grant program in 2022, the governor established a new state funded Destination Iowa program with \$7 million to bolster the quality of life in Iowa's communities and attract visitors and new residents to the state. The state funded \$1 million for the Meet in Iowa program to stimulate business, meeting, conference, festival, group, and sports travel overnight stays. Finally, the state continued the Sports Tourism Marketing grant program of \$1.5 million to provide assistance in promoting amateur level sporting events in Iowa.

Think Iowa City and the Iowa City Area Sports Commission have taken advantage of these programs to assist community attraction activities. These funds provide direct economic impact multipliers to the hotels, restaurants, retailers, and residents of Johnson County.

As part of the Better Together 2030 Vision, making the Iowa River a signature attraction for residents and visitors was established as one of the 11 primary priorities. A key step in achieving this goal is the establishment of a comprehensive plan involving Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty, Hills, Tiffin, Johnson County, the University of Iowa, and a variety of engaged user groups along the river. Pfeiffer is leading this plan, which started with an application for a grant from Destination Iowa. This complex grant application included improvements for canoe drops, park space, trail expansions, skate park improvements, amphitheater buildouts and more. Dubbed the Pedal Paddle Destination of the Midwest, this project will provide improved access to the Iowa River for paddle activities such as kayaking, canoeing, and paddle boarding plus align the nearby trails for cycling and hiking. While the grant did not receive funding, it provided the structure for an evolving Iowa River plan. Enthusiasm for improvements around the Iowa River have heightened as it has long been a sleeping giant for recreational activity and placemaking in the community.

In the first half of 2023, Pfeiffer led the reapplication process to keep Iowa City/Coralville/North Liberty in the Iowa Great Places program. Iowa Great Places is a creative placemaking grant program that seeks to cultivate the local character and authentic qualities of Iowa neighborhoods, districts, communities, and regions. The program can help build upon local creative and cultural assets to establish a more livable community with vibrant public spaces. Originally established in 2008, this renewal application consisted of a series of storytelling, photographs, annual report, and site tours.

In 2023, Pfeiffer also joined a committee formed by the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) to identify and promote unique destinations in the region. This ongoing committee collaborates in the 8 county region.



## SPECIAL EVENTS - 2023 IN REVIEW



In March of 2023, Kylee Stock transitioned from Special Events Manager to Director of Events, in efforts to grow the operations of the Iowa City Area Sports Commission as well as Think Iowa City. While maintaining Foodie February, FRYfest, and other community events, she helped coordinate the IGHSAU State Volleyball Tournament, the inaugural Iowa City Area Sports Commission Golf Extravaganza, the Dan Gable Donnybrook, and wrapped up the year with the Soldier Salute. She, and Ashley Smith, also served on the Executive Committee for RAGBRAI's overnight in Coralville in July.

In the beginning of 2023, Think Iowa City hosted the annual Foodie February, a month-long celebration of the culinary scene in Johnson County. 30 locally owned restaurants created a special menu item for Restaurant Week, which brought hundreds of community members out to support local during the cold month of February. New to Foodie February in 2023 was the Foodie Fillanthropy, a month-

long Food Drive to support our local food pantries. The outreach successfully donated over 50 pounds of food.



More than 30,000 bicycle riders arrived in Coralville on July 28, culminating more than seven months of planning and preparation for RAGBRAI's 50th anniversary ride. Despite a 112 degree heat index and a sudden storm that forced the cancellation of the headliner band, BUSH, Coralville RAGBRAI received high praise from riders and the RAGBRAI organization alike. No one serves up hospitality like the Hub of Hospitality...Coralville, Iowa.

In September, the annual FRYfest kicked off the Iowa Hawkeye athletic season once again. This year, the event celebrated Herky the Hawk's 75th Birthday. Mascots from all over Iowa came to Coralville for a Hawkeye themed birthday party. The Iowa Women's Basketball team, Iowa Women's Wrestling team, and the Iowa Men's Baseball team joined us at FRYfest for autograph sessions. Other programming included: a panel from the 2023 Hall of Fame class, the World's Largest Hawkeye Tradeshow, a bags tournament, and a concert by PopROCKS. FRYfest is a great tradition that brings visitors and our community together. FRYfest will celebrate 15 years of all that is Hawkeye on August 30, 2024. You don't want to miss it!



Alongside the events that Think Iowa City curates, we are grateful to play a supporting role in events that our community partners orchestrate. North Liberty's Beat the Bitter and Blues & BBQ, Iowa City Downtown District's Block Party and Taste of Iowa City, Summer of the Arts Iowa City Jazz Festival, Iowa Arts Festival and Friday Night concert series, are all just a few of the successful events that gather our community together to engage in the adventurous spirit of Johnson County. Our organizations look forward to growing our special events and continuing our efforts to attract visitors into our curious community.



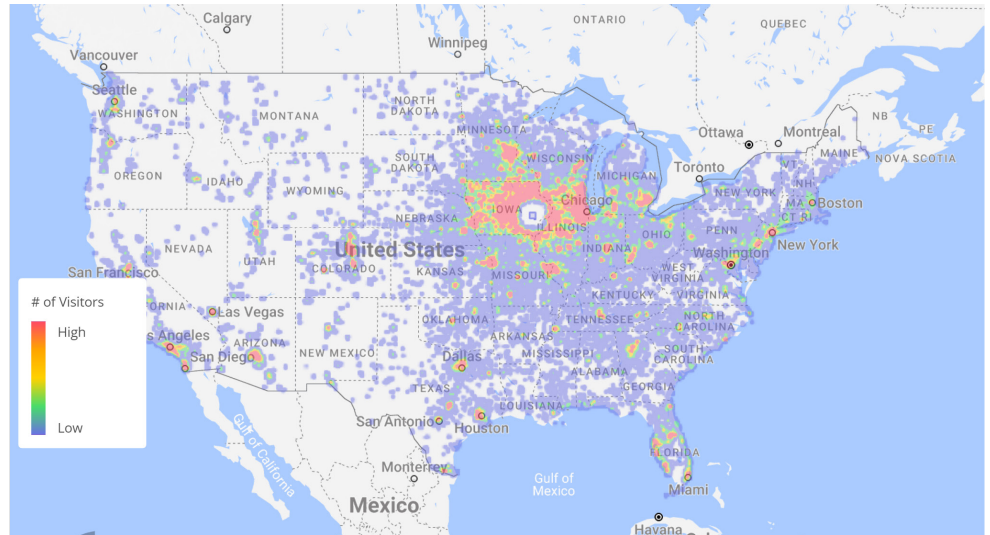
## MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS - 2023 IN REVIEW



Monica Nieves, Vice President of Marketing & Communications, oversees strategic communication initiatives of the organization, social media, leisure travel marketing, and visitor economic impact. In 2023 the organization's marketing focus was largely to continue to increase our presence on social media and paid digital marketing efforts. In partnership with marketing agency, Meld, Think Iowa City has witnessed year-over-year growth in both followers and engagement, including a 44.1% increase in our engagements on social media, across all networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, Instagram).

Traveler numbers have continued to improve and have returned to pace experienced pre-COVID. Visitor spending in Johnson County from lodging alone was \$90.52 million, the third highest in Iowa behind Polk County and Scott County. The demand for lodging continued to be the strongest in July when we saw 75,387 rooms. While the number is not quite as high as experienced in 2022, Johnson County continues to see stronger numbers compared to the rest of the state.

Placer continues to be a strong source of data of our leisure travelers. Placer is a data software that assists in tracking of visitor information. This data has helped our marketing strategy, from where to place ads to what the messaging is in those locations. In 2023, Johnson County had over 17 million visits from 3.1 unique visitors who traveled a distance greater than 50 miles. Minneapolis/St. Paul, Denver, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Chicago are among the top ten locations these visitors come from. In 2024, the strategy will include more targeted marketing in these areas by leveraging video assets for our sales and sports departments specifically.



Johnson County, IA / Coralville, Iowa, United States | Based on Home Location, by Visitors | Min. Visits: 1 | Jan 1st 2023 to Dec 31st 2023 | Home locations are obfuscated for privacy and randomly placed within a census block. They do not represent actual home addresses. Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. ([www.placer.ai](http://www.placer.ai))

As always, the Iowa City/Coralville area continues to make many lists as one of the best places to live, work, and play in the country. In 2023 our area was named: Top 9 Lesser-Known U.S. Destination to Add to Your 2024 Itinerates by Thrillist; Top 100 Best Places to Live in the U.S. By Livability; The Best College Town in the Midwest by Conde Nast Traveler; Top 20 Best Small Town to Retire by HGTV; and SBA Small Business Community of the Year by the US Small Business Administration, Iowa Office.

In 2023 the organization hired our first full-time staff photographer, Joseph Cress. His photos have brought over 600,000 views to our SmugMug galleries and have been featured in The Des Moines Register, Sports Illustrated High School, Iowa City Press-Citizen, KGAN, KCRG, University of Iowa's Iowa Magazine, and Cedar Rapids Gazette. Joseph's attention to detail and ability to make beautiful, thoughtful photos will continue to enhance our marketing strategy and ability to share the story of our unique communities in the year ahead. Monica Nieves, VP of Marketing and Communications



## CONFERENCE SALES & EVENT EXPERIENCE - 2023 IN REVIEW



Stacey Housman, Vice President of Sales, oversees conference sales, servicing & event experiences. A dedicated Iowa City native and Coralville resident, Stacey takes pride in her efforts to highlight the unique offerings of the Iowa City/Coralville area when prospecting programs and events that drive substantial economic impact to the community.

2023 marked an incredibly successful year for conference sales at Think Iowa City. It presented the opportunity to bid and successfully secure several large citywide programs for upcoming years. Our ongoing emphasis on booking citywide programs - events that span multiple hotel properties - has proven to be successful in yielding high economic impact results as our communities' amenities grow. We were pleased to announce the booking of the largest convention in our communities' history along with securing two programs for multiple years that will not only utilize Xstream Arena, but will bring overnight guests to hotels throughout the Iowa City/Coralville area. These bookings would not have happened without the collaborative efforts between community leaders offering letters of support and our dedicated hotel sales teams.

Meeting planner and supplier sales tradeshow season kicked off immediately in 2023 with a stop in Peoria for Connect Midwest, followed by Connect Marketplace and Small Market Meetings Conference in the fall. These events serve as a crucial platform for Think Iowa City sales and our hotels to engage with new meeting planners and strengthen relationships. The Think Iowa City brand for group sales continues to expand, reaching more planners every year. These shows allow the opportunity to showcase our communities' amenities, accolades, and accessibility as the primer Midwest meeting space destination. The impact from this year's season of tradeshow has encouraged an even larger investment 2024 with a record six shows scheduled to attend.



Our membership and involvement in industry organizations such as ISAE (Iowa Society of Association Executives) and MPI (Meeting Planners International) Heartland Chapter continues to grow. This contributes to an increased awareness of the Think Iowa City brand and fosters industry relationships throughout the Midwest. It also led to Houseman being awarded the 2023 Supplier of the Year by the MPI Heartland Chapter.

The latter part of the year brought an elevated investment in servicing and amenity programs, a trend expected to continue in 2024. Ashley Smith, Operations Manager, now manages sales and sports servicing. This is a significant enhancement to ensuring the energy and detail required for the success of this crucial aspect of group retention. Think Iowa City will implement tiers of group servicing after analyzing the market in collaboration with hotel partners to drive success. Creating a heightened atmosphere of service is symbiotic in distinguishing our community from others, showcasing our dedication to provide a VIP experience for all event attendees. Big things to come!

As we look to 2024, with several plans for new initiatives and programs in the works to encourage bookings, Iowa City/Coralville group sales look bright. The tourism sales and efforts of Think Iowa City continue to play a crucial role in driving economic growth and assisting in promoting the Iowa City metro region as a premier destination. We will continue to work collaboratively with our hospitality stakeholders and community economic partners to guide us in our work to bring economic impact from groups, meetings, conferences, and conventions.





## IOWA CITY AREA SPORTS COMMISSION - 2023 IN REVIEW



The Iowa City Area Sports Commission is led by Director of Sports Development, Luke Eustice and Sports Development Manager, Kylee Walker. Kylee Stock, Director of Events, assists with event operations. The ICASC is a 501(c)3 that works in tandem with Think Iowa City.



2023 will go down as a banner year for sporting events in Johnson County, especially high school championships. The Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU) and Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) brought 8 different State Championships to Iowa City/Coralville in 2023, starting with the historic first-ever sanctioned Iowa Girls State Wrestling Championship at Xstream Arena. The sold-out first session welcomed over 4,500 fans. The following night, Katie Biscoglia of Racoon River-Northwest, was crowned the first ever IGHSAU individual state champion and Waverly-Shell Rock earned the first ever team title. Immediately following the girls' championships, the IHSAA State Wrestling Duals took to the Xstream Arena mats for the first time ever. Waverly-Shell Rock, Osage, and Don Bosco all took home titles.

There is no rest for the weary, as one week later our community welcomed back IHSAA to the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center (CRWC) on the University of Iowa campus for the Boys' Swimming State Championships. In May, the Hawkeye Tennis & Recreation Complex was home to the IHSAA 1A State Individual and 2A Boys State Team Tennis Championships, and the IGHSAU 2A Girls State Individual Tennis Championships. July heated up with the 3A & 4A IHSAA State Baseball Tournament returning to Duane Banks Field. The momentum carried our team into the Fall with Xstream Arena hosting the IGHSAU Girls State Volleyball Tournament, and its 30,000 fans.

The ICASC-operated wrestling tournaments continue to show growth. The organization operates two wrestling tournaments in the month of December. The Dan Gable Donnybrook and Soldier Salute were created to contribute positive economic impact in an otherwise slower time for visitors to our community. In 2023, the Donnybrook welcomed 38 boys and 42 girls high school wrestling teams from seven states, which was a 15 team increase from 2022. The event included 1,200 participants, 475 coaches and just shy of 3,500 fans in Xstream Arena over the 3 days of competition. 52,000 viewers looked into Coralville via live streams, which resulted in over 4,000 hours of watch time on the Donnybrook YouTube channel. The Soldier Salute, a college wrestling tournament headlined by the University of Iowa men's and women's programs also saw an increase in teams. With the caliber of the additional teams, an increase of fans through the doors resulted. Fireworks on the mat led to an increase in national exposure for the event. Over 4,000 fans showed up for the two days of competition, which included 13 Division 1 men's teams and 9 women's teams with a total of over 600 athletes and coaches. These teams ranged from Oregon, Texas, North Carolina, New York and everywhere in between. Many of the teams that came to the tournament spent four nights in the community with some women's teams spending over seven nights as they stayed for a training camp before heading north to Cedar Falls for the NWCA National Dual tournament the following weekend.

It is truly TEAM effort. Our relationship with the University of Iowa Aquatics Department only gets stronger and is vital to the economic impact of our Iowa City downtown hotels and businesses. With financial support from the ICASC and operational support from the aquatics department, our community hosted the Missouri Valley Conference Swimming and Diving Championships again in 2023. The event consisted of 8 colleges over 4 days in early March. The ICASC, in collaboration with The University of Iowa Women's Swimming and Diving program and the Aquatics Department, hosted the Hawkeye Invite the first weekend in December. The event brought in 8 teams from around the country into Iowa City for the three-day swimming and diving competition, with the goal of becoming a yearly event for our community to rally around. These two events highlight more than 8 events annually in the natatorium at the CRWC that the ICASC and aquatics department work together to bring to our community.

We can't end 2023 without mentioning a few events that we take great pride in supporting; Special Olympics Mid-Winter Tournament, Grizzley's Wheelchair Basketball Tournament, Girls on the Run 5K, the Core4 Cycling Experience, and the First Tech Challenge Robotics Championship are just a few of the events that take place in our community that may not get as much attention, but are the reason why the staff at Think Iowa City and the Iowa City Area Sports Commission work as hard as we do. It is most important to us to make an impact on the athletes, coaches, and fans experience when they visit this great community we call HOME.

