

## Organization structure and Brand Message Platform

The Columbia County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCCVB), DBA *Visit Columbia County*, is the contracted Destination Marketing Organization for Columbia County, Georgia. The organization serves the interests of Columbia County's tourism economy by marketing the communities of Appling, Evans, Grovetown, Harlem and Martinez as visitor destinations.

The CCCVB is an organization committed to driving economic development in Columbia County, Georgia by successfully marketing Columbia County as a preferred tourism, business, and meeting destination. The CCCVB manages market research, planning, advertising, and public relations. We create and distribute paid advertising, printed materials, digital, social media and promotional items to the traveling public, news media, and tourism industry professionals. By promoting travel and tourism, the CVB enhances Columbia County's success, improves quality of life, and helps Columbia County become an even better destination.

### Mission:

Improving quality of life for both visitors and residents of Columbia County. We promote Columbia County through support and awareness, as the superior tourist destination of unique recreational offerings in Georgia.

With this mission at the forefront of our planning process, the 2023-2024 marketing plan defines strategies as outlined in the Board approved Strategic Plan. Marketing to build an expanding tourism economy in Columbia County requires a focused destination marketing effort to drive growth as one of Georgia's 159 counties! Columbia County will be marketed as a unique travel experience by a highly skilled sales and marketing team under the leadership of an engaged and well-informed Board of Directors.

### Vision:

To be known as the most frequented Georgia Destination for sweet pathfinding, exploration, and innovative recreational adventures.

### Core Values:

- **Be a Soul Magnet:** Approachable cool kid's maintain a personality overflowing with warmth and wit. Exude optimism, positivity, and southern charm.
- **Spread the Facts:** The experts on quality of life in Columbia County have a responsibility to harness wisdom and to guide, mentor, and inform both visitors and residents.
- **Trailblaze:** Always be fearless, confident, forward thinking, and on the lookout for new conquests.
- **Rock Authenticity:** Visitors, residents, and colleagues want to feel like they know the real you and the real Columbia County. Be honest and genuine with everyone you encounter.



### Position:

To both permanent and temporary inhabitants of Columbia County, we are your knowledgeable quality of life advocates that provide the manual on your next adventure as well as support for our community's economy so that you can maximize your life's exploration and enjoyment. That's because unlike any other CVB or destination, we are laser-focused on the innovation of invigorating recreation while never imitating another community.

### Results:

Provide unique and extremely memorable opportunities - to communicate with infinite possibilities.  
Build deeper connections with visitors and residents.  
Make a dynamic impact with consistent "top-of-mind" interactions.

## **MARKETING STRATEGY**

The CCCVB staff share responsibility for three primary disciplines. A) Brand Marketing including all visitor outreach external and internal; B) Business & Destination Development involves group and leisure market sales as well as in-county efforts to support our travel industry partners; C) Visitor Engagement starts before the visitor arrives and involves all methods of driving increased visitor engagement and spending while in the County.

### ***Goals***

- Increase the demand for overnight stays, attraction visits, retail sales, restaurant receipts, local transportation and other events and activities that positively affect the economic impact of the local tourism industry. Drive growth by focusing on need periods.
- Gain regional and national media exposure for Columbia County's diverse attractions, natural resources, and outstanding quality of life.
- Support and contribute to the enrichment of Columbia County's multicultural, performing and visual arts, historic, recreation, business and entertainment communities.
- Through strong community outreach and with recognized expertise in the tourism industry, actively participate in and contribute to the overall strategic planning for the growth and sustainability of the visitor industry in Columbia County.

### ***Strategies***

Advertising – Visit Columbia County will use various mediums to promote Columbia County as a travel destination, reaching diverse geographic and demographic markets, with the goal of acquiring new and repeat visitors as well as increasing their length of stay and brand awareness

### ***Methods***

Print and Digital Ads – The Columbia County CVB will place print advertising in a variety of publications and will place online digital ads targeting diverse geographic and demographic markets showing what is unique about Columbia County with an emphasis on shoulder seasons. Success for online digital ads will be measured through click through rates and impressions.

Video Ads – CCCVB will leverage recent video content targeting identified geographic and demographic markets showing what is unique about Columbia County.

Website Marketing, Optimization, Development and Maintenance – Visit Columbia County just launched a state-of-the-art responsive website redesign this year featuring itineraries to help visitors plan their visit in advance and to excite them about the many unique possibilities in Columbia County. We will continue to develop and maintain our site by focusing on:

- Weekly Updates – Our website will be provided with immediate updates to events, attractions, and all other trip planning resources, as well as the social media sites we are using for promotion.
- Search Engine Optimization – Aggressively optimize and modify website source code meta tags to ensure best possible placement on major search engines.
- Search Engine Marketing - Keywords will be purchased in Google to promote our website as an online tourism resource for Columbia County and the Augusta area.

Success will be measured for the websites by visitor and page views; SEM – key word directed visitors to the website; SEO – visitors, search visitors, non-traditional web visitors, organic placement on Google and other search engines. We expect to set a website visitation benchmark for this year.

E-Newsletter: Visit Columbia County will work to grow our subscriber list and continue to distribute a monthly email blast. Success will be measured by subscribers, CTR, and open rate.

Photo/Video Library – Visit Columbia County will work to grow our photo and video library and will use such assets in future promotions.

Social Media – Visit Columbia County will continue to create a social media marketing strategy with a unified voice and message for Facebook, and Instagram. Success will be measured by social media engagement, including followers, likes, shares and web visitation from social media.

## **ASSETS AND RESOURCES**

Columbia County is blessed with vast natural resources that offer visitors and residents alike unique recreation experiences. We have conference and meeting space to accommodate up to 1,000 attendees. We are the gateway to Fort Gordon, home to US Army Cyber Command. We are home to the largest lake in Georgia, Serene18 Paddle Trail, Bombasin Land Trail, the International Disc Golf Center, arts & culture offerings and an outstanding quality of life.

## **KEY CUSTOMERS:**

- **Potential Visitors**
  - Leisure Travelers
  - Business and Corporate Travelers
  - Sports Event Participants and Organizers
  - Niche Travelers seeking activities such as fishing, kayaking, mountain biking
  
- **Tourism Industry Stakeholders**
  - Columbia County, State and National elected officials
  - Hotels, attractions, restaurants, shopping venue and other tourism industry partners
  
- **Travel Influencers**
  - Journalists/writers/bloggers/influencers
  - Meeting planners
  - Sports and special event promoters
  - Film location scouts

## **DESTINATION MARKETING PLAN 2023-2024**

OVERVIEW: This one-year marketing plan has been developed by Visit Columbia County using extensive visitor information data. The plan is based on market research from secondary research sources in the tourism industry and in house research derived from our visitors and tourism industry partners.

## **DESTINATION MARKETING GOALS**

- Communicate our unique brand to grow our destination's awareness, customer loyalty and desire to share their experiences with others.
- Grow the yield of our marketing efforts through increased tourism taxable sales and other customer spending in our community.
- Engage our visitors and build relationships to share their experiences
- Deliver increasing return on our marketing investments
- Influence potential visitors to extend their stay by at least one day
- Attract sustainable visits that can maximize visitor economic impact

## **DESTINATION MARKETING OBJECTIVES**

- Grow Lodging tax revenue by 5%
- Increase traffic to our tourism website by 15%
- Grow requests for printed publications by 10%
- Grow occupancy levels in November, December, January, and February
- Increase e-newsletter subscriber by 10%
- Increase social media audience (across all platforms) by 15%

## **CUSTOMER SEGMENTS LEISURE TRAVELERS:**

### **Activity Targets**

We will seek out visitors that are:

- Seeking nature-based and adventure type activities
- Planning sporting and other special events
- Visiting Fort Gordon
- Planning meetings, weddings and reunions

### **Geographic Target Markets**

1. Atlanta
2. Columbia, SC
3. Savannah
4. Greenville/Spartanburg/Asheville/Anderson
5. Macon
6. Charlotte
7. Jacksonville-Brunswick
8. Charleston, SC
9. Raleigh/Durham
10. Tampa/Saint Petersburg

### **GROUP MEETING PLANNERS & ATTENDEES:**

Attract group meetings and conferences to our meeting hotels and offsite entertainment venues by:

- Continue RFP enhancements to win more groups for our partners
- Supporting site visits and FAM tours for planners to learn about us

### **SPORTS EVENT ATTENDEES AND ORGANIZERS**

Promote our sports event venues to increase hotel room nights from sports events and related meetings during the “need times” that our accommodations are interested in additional occupancy.

- Educate local and national entities on the timetable of new facilities and types of events that will be featured in Columbia County
- Communicate frequently with event organizers/rights holders to keep relationship fresh
- Share post event research tactics and use the results to continually improve performance

### **TRAVEL MEDIA JOURNALISTS**

Pitch stories to and develop relationships with travel industry journalists, special market writers and bloggers to write stories and help us promote our area through the eyes of a third party.

- Identify opportunities with local tourism partners for publicity on new properties, awards, special offers and expansions
- Organize group and individual press trips to our area
- Generate continuous features for monthly e-newsletter
- Coordinate local Hospitality Advocacy Program to keep tourism stakeholders informed
- Oversee quality of creative messaging in all communications
- Manage Crisis Communications protocol

### **COMMUNITY PARTNERS, CITIZENS, ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Continue good community relations through a proactive approach to educate our local media, residents, elected officials and tourism partners on the importance of attracting visitors to our community.

- Interface regularly with all tourism industry partner businesses
- Communicate with our area residents to continually tell our tourism story and visitor benefits to sustain our excellent quality of life
- Meet with and continually educate elected officials at the local, State and Federal level to communicate the importance of tourism to our community. Stress jobs, tax savings, small business support and our CVB's role as the marketing arm for many, many small businesses in our community.

### **DESTINATION MARKETING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS STRATEGIES:**

- Advocate for our Brand
  - Empower our visitors to enjoy their vacation experience with us and extend their stay
  - Instill in our visitors a passion for our destination experiences
- Grow Visitor Spending

- Our brand promise to customers will focus on increasing the yield that our tourism partners generate from our customers
- Continue to support growth in visitor spending in area businesses more than just growing the volume of visitors
- We will drive the demand for travel to our area through targeted destination marketing and promotion resulting in higher rates (yield) for our accommodations
- We will extend the length of stay for our visitors, resulting in incremental spending growth in area businesses
- We will grow repeat visitation to reduce the off-season slowdown in visitation
- Audience Segmentation (Niche Markets) Target the various visitors attracted to our community by communicating to them that we offer the activities they are most interested in:
  - Travel Enthusiasts: Love to travel and are looking for new and unique experiences
  - Experiential Travelers: Seeing active tourism experiences, outdoor recreation, light adventure
  - Nature Explorers: Look for locations that offer outdoor activities, but are interested in sustainability
  - Golf Enthusiasts: Travel specifically to play many different golf courses
  - Weddings: Families and friends traveling to attend a wedding
  - Reunion Gatherers: travel to and plan for reunions or organizations that seek quality, affordable destinations
  - Wellness Gurus: seek out destinations that promote healthy lifestyles, wellness and fitness
- Anticipate Market Changes: Our community is considered a safe destination from numerous negative situations. However, threats and changes in visitor behavior can occur at any time and without warning.
- Integrated Marketing Strategies

We will coordinate all our marketing efforts into one integrated message through paid media, earned and owned media promotions, special events, contests and other activities to educate the customer on all the reasons to select our area for their vacation or group activity.

○ The FY 23/24 media plan will lead with Public Relations and digital and social media. These efforts will build awareness in the media marketplace to improve our efforts to break through the media clutter and get the attention of our target customers.

○ Using a combination of traditional media and the on-line channels enables us to reach several different age and income demographics and strengthen the reach of our brand messaging.

○ Before we develop creative messages, we utilize many research techniques and sources to better understand the needs and wants of our customer:

- Monthly visitor profiles
- Google Analytics for website, digital and social media trends, current user statistics and user trends
- GDEcD Research and Reporting
- Smith Travel Research weekly and monthly statistics on our hotel occupancy and rates
- US Travel Association Research on national travel trends, consumer demand for travel and political issues that threaten our visitation

Tactics Media Exposure: We will use a combination of paid, owned and earned media to deliver our brand message to our target audiences.

- Paid Media will be in the form of broadcast and print advertising, digital banners, e-newsletters; new content in targeted publications and broadcast channels; social media paid posts; search engine optimization using targeted search terms
- Owned Media will be delivered through our tourism website, our Facebook and Instagram; e-mail marketing and our printed and online Visitors Guide and Passports.
- Earned Media will include the exposure we receive from our Public and Media Relations efforts through third party endorsements from travel journalists, bloggers and influencers.

Experiential Videos:

- We will utilize video and story content on social media and digital channels to promote our targeted activities that can attract a variety of travelers.

Content Generation: We will create new content for our website and social and digital platforms to give new and updated reasons for potential or repeat visitors to choose our area. We will ensure representation across all communities and cities within Columbia County.

- Social media posts using recently generated photos and copy points from our visitors.
- Brand message assets such as blog posts, influencer posts, images and videos to our website and social medial channels.
- We will use Video production to promote our area to visitors worldwide, in support of paid media campaigns.

Branded Events: We will promote existing signature events and work with event promoters to create new events to draw new and repeat visitors to our area. We will use social media and sponsorships to support the promotion of these events.

#### **Sports Events:**

- Soccer
- Fishing
- BMX
- Baseball/ Softball
- Basketball

Columbia County CVB Partner Resources: We represent all tourism industry businesses in Columbia County that are involved in any way with attracting, entertaining or housing visitors in Columbia County.

- Free listing in annual Visitor Guide and on our official tourism website
- Free listing of events that are of interest to visitors
- Free photo and video sharing on our website and social media channels
- Access to destination research and other analytics data
- Create special packages for combining events with hotel stays, dining options and other attractions in the area.
- Exposure to travel writers, bloggers and other media contributors to help promote their businesses
- Use photo assets in their advertising and promotional efforts.
- Quarterly gatherings with tourism staff and marketing partner vendors on the latest destination marketing efforts and an opportunity to discuss strategic initiatives that are working in their businesses.

#### **DESTINATION MEDIA STRATEGY**

##### Leisure Marketing

- Integrate video content within all niche media and events
- Increase promotion of unique destination offerings such as the Augusta Canal Heritage Area and Betty's Branch
- Increase promotion of Arts and Culture offerings
- Continue sponsorships of major events
- Continue discussions with media outlets that have existing partnerships
- Utilize opportunities to promote family activities and unique experiences

##### Domestic Marketing

- Increase the use of video ad networks and digital rich media advertising to increase frequency and drive website inquiry
- Widen the target market scope of digital media and optimize regularly to reach new markets
- Take advantage of GDEcd co-op opportunities when appropriate

## **CAMPAIGN SPECIFICS**

### **Serene18- year round**

- Heavy promotion from Jan-April and August-September (ex. Why fall is the best time to paddle campaign)
- August: Paddle Race and Redford and Benny meet and greet
- Build out a micro site
- SEO: Add Written Driving Directions on page, List on Google My Business and optimize
- SEO Keywords: Outdoor Adventure, Kayaking Trips, Kayaking, Paddle Boarding, kayaking trips, Kayaking near me, paddling, paddleboard, fall foliage, fall foliage near me

### **Bombasin Land Trail- year round**

- Heaviest in Jan- Mar and Aug-early Oct.
- Fall leaves
- Best hikes in Georgia
- Best mountain biking trails in Georgia
- SEO: Add Written Driving Directions on page, list on Google My Business and optimize
- SEO Keywords: Outdoor Adventure, outdoor activities, outdoor activities near me, Hiking in Georgia, Hiking Trails, Walking trails near me, trails Near me, fall foliage, fall foliage near me

### **International Disc Golf Center- Spring and summer**

- How to play disc golf
- SEO Keywords: Disc Golf, Frisbee golf, disc golf course, Disc golf Course near me, disk golf, disc golf discs, Frisbee Golf near me, disk golf shop, Disc Golf tournament, PDGA Tournaments, PDGA

## **Event Based Marketing**

### ***Columbia County Cup 2023- July***

- Where to Stay, What to do

### ***Oliver Hardy Fest 2023- September***

- What you need to know about attending the Festival
- Can we get this on any listicles for best festivals in Georgia?
- SEO Key Words: festivals, Oliver hardy, Stan Laurel, laurel and hardy, festivals near me

### ***Banjo B Que 2023- Mid-August – September***

- Where to stay
- Target to people who are fans of the bands in the line up? Is that our job?
- SEO Keywords: Music festivals, Bluegrass music, festivals Music, festivals 2023, bluegrass festival, music events, outdoor event

### ***ANWA 2024-Early March (2 weeks)***

- SEO Keywords: Augusta National Women's Amateur, ANWA, Augusta womens am, ANWA Golf

### ***Masters 2024- June (after the ticket lottery), Jan- Mar (trip planning details)***

- June- You just got tickets to them Masters Tournament. Now what?
- Jan- March- Trip planning details
  - What to Wear
  - Where to eat
  - What to do
  - Unique Experiences off the course

- SEO Keywords: Masters Tournament, Golf, Tiger Woods, Masters Tickets, Masters Tournament 2024, Augusta National

### ***Peach Jam 2024- June***

- SEO Keywords: eybl peach jam, peach jam basketball, Nike peach jam

## **MEDIA PLAN AND BUDGET**

### **DESTINATION BRAND STRATEGY**

Create a strong brand message that continues to widen the appeal to visitors, while building on our strong positioning that has proven so successful for the destination. The plan will:

- Increase brand and destination awareness year-round
- Differentiate our destination from our competition by continuing to build on our brand positioning
- Target audiences looking for a getaway opportunity that lets them escape the day-to-day grind
- Reinforce our destination's value during slower seasons to attract a wider range of visitors

### **DESTINATION BRAND PLATFORM/BRAND VOICE**

To both permanent and temporary inhabitants of Columbia County,

We are your knowledgeable quality of life advocates that provide the manual on your next adventure as well as support for our community's economy so that you can maximize your life's exploration and enjoyment. That's because unlike any other CVB or destination, we are laser-focused on the innovation of invigorating recreation while never imitating another community.

### **DESTINATION CREATIVE STRATEGY**

#### **LEISURE CREATIVE STRATEGIES**

Invite consumers to plan a personalized, one-of-a-kind vacation using the following strategies:

- Create a collection of ads that speak to a variety of interests (i.e., lake, dining, shopping, golf, fishing, paddling, etc.) that can be hyper-targeted to our audiences
- Develop content that can be used across all platforms, including web, social media, and mobile
- Create new photo and video assets that can be utilized in every medium, at every stage of the customer buying decision journey
- Portray our community as the welcoming, inclusive destination by featuring diversity in our photo/video assets.
- Increase our focus on target markets and customers with the greatest potential to grow: Retirees who can plan vacations mid-week, and affluent millennials with incomes of \$100 K+
- Continue to develop and introduce innovative approaches to delivering a creative message at the right time, at the right place and on the right platform to grab the attention of new or repeat visitors to our area.

### **DINING**

- Use activities videos/content videos to highlight the variety of dining options we have available
- Use social media to spotlight new restaurants, innovative dishes, unique drinks, charismatic chefs
- Work with Chamber and Hospitality Council to grow and revamp Restaurant Week

### **OUTDOOR**

- Use activity videos/and content videos to highlight the many outdoor options available
- Use social media to spotlight local guides
- Leverage photo/video assets from local partners to help tell our story

### **ARTS & CULTURE**

- Use activity/content videos to highlight museums, galleries, and theaters available in the county
- Use social media to spotlight local artists, current exhibitions and live theatre productions



## **FISHING**

- Highlight the many fishing opportunities available to both casual and avid fisherman
- Use activity/content videos to show the many different varieties of fish available
- Use social media to spotlight local captains and charter companies

## **FAMILY VACATIONS**

- Continue to promote to families in winter months with a value message
- Highlight the many family-friendly activities
- Use activity/content videos to show family-themed fun throughout the county
- Use newsletter and blogs to target families with kid friendly activities

## **Newsletter Program**

Strategies:

- Continue highly successful e-newsletter program
- Hotels and venues will be featured in the newsletter with links.

Tactics:

- Feature what's new and assign appropriate markets to appropriate months for features. Group hotels and attractions receive free features if they upload their "what's new" information to the portal.

## **Wellness Marketing Strategies:**

- Work to have Columbia County named a Blue Zone community. This would open many opportunities to promote our community with many activities that are healthy alternatives
- Capitalize on our spas, outdoor retreat options, health menus and wellness creativity.
- Share and create packages that can be posted on our website
- We will incorporate this into sponsored events, FAMs, advertising, and other possible opportunities as they present themselves.
- Meetings/organizations - lifestyles, team building fitness activities
- Capitalize on "Healthiest Cities" recognition

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVES/ STRATEGIES/TACTICS**

- Increase destination publicity overall by 10% in the next year
- Create social media elements that may include a dedicated hashtag to support campaign, encourage visiting journalists to use during any social postings
- Host one group travel influencer FAM
- Continue developing positive community relations with residents
  - Respond to and proactively communicate regularly with local media
  - Issue at least 4 news releases or 4 submitted pieces for local publication that show the benefits of tourism
- Ensure quality, accuracy, brand identity for all communications
  - Plan for time needed to oversee the copy editing of the new Visitor Guide and review and edit of the partner listings

## **DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN**

### **TARGET MARKETS**

### **KEY STRATEGIES AND TACTICS**

Strategy: Expand Social Media posts frequency and usage

Tactics:

- Increase the number and frequency of boosting Facebook posts
- Increase brand engagement on all social media channels
- Use and feature more "user generated content"
- Increase diversity in content images
- Continue to grow Instagram to extend reach and drive awareness

Strategy: Engage more of our partners in social media and digital implementations

Tactics:

- Conduct Destination Contest designed to “sell the destination”
- Host more influencers in the destination with large followings

### **MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES**

- Create and launch one (1) social media contest per quarter
- Boost more posts that are organically performing (minimum of one (1) per week)
- Increase social media fans by 1000
- Increase Social Media Impressions
- Minimum of 18,000 Link Clicks to our website

### **SPORTS MARKETING PLAN MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES**

- Promote improvements of parks and plans for additional park facilities
- Add two new water sports events to take place at Wildwood Park or other County waterways
- Promote sponsorship funding model and guidelines to assist in driving more visitation and room nights into Columbia County
- Maintain event impact calculator to assist in capturing critical visitation data from each event.

### **TARGET MARKETS:**

- Sports target markets are based on the design of the facilities that house the events. An organization with an event capable of being hosted in local facilities and hotels is a target entity
- Programming out current facilities with linear field and/or baseball/softball field and soccer events are the ideal market. Targeting watersports events also bodes well for the destination
- The age of sports visitation ranges as it is mainly comprised of families, meaning the youth athlete competes and family members travel along to spectate
- Income is typically in more of an economically moderate category as families are traveling and looking for affordable travel and accommodations. .

Type of Events:

- Primary concentration is on amateur and youth sports events
- Attract events year round, but also during the need times for hotels and attractions
- Field sports such as soccer, lacrosse, flag football, and pickleball are a good fit for our facilities
- Water and lake related sports are also important to attract

### **Overall Strategies**

- Educate local and national entities on the timetable of new parks/ existing park improvement and types of events they will feature
- Explore developing sports specific branding to showcase Columbia County and strategic branding for marketing our sports facilities

Tactics:

- Create ads and social media posts to blend with brand message. Combine sports activities with leisure activities to show the total event experience available here
- Create a survey instrument that can be sent to visitors and to participants digitally to garner feedback about their experience in Columbia County
- Partnering with Advertising agency of record to develop sports specific ads and commercials showcasing the local destination for Columbia County marketing purposes

### **P.R. & Social Media Event Support Strategies**

Develop a set calendar to plan-out all communications and social media posts for upcoming events and during events to maximize the coverage of our events.

Tactics:

- Efforts will be made to collaborate with event organizers to share in their individual organization social media efforts
- Contact event organizers to supply media kits and press release information to the CVB prior to the event. The CVB PR team will circulate the event content to the appropriate channels via social media and the local media when needed
- Press releases will also be created by CVB Communications to spread awareness about local sports events

### **Sports Media Strategies**

- Promote each event local, regionally and nationally to maximize the best awareness of our destination for sports Tactics
- Events that can provide their own press release and media information, will be assisted by our team
- We will develop recommendations on the best way to market the proper message to local and national media outlets in regards to events
- The CVB will task the Advertising agency of record to develop appropriate print and digital media to be available for local partners, national outlets, and trade shows

### **FILM COLUMBIA COUNTY PLAN**

#### **MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES**

- Reel-Scout® Library expansion (possibly including video) @2 new locations per month
- Increase social media posts (scheduled and impromptu) to five per month
- Increase Followers and Likes on social media with more personalized engagement by five percent

#### **Target Markets:**

- New York, Los Angeles,
- Age: Millennials, Baby Boomers
- Activity: still photography-print and web

#### **Strategies:**

- Increase communications with all potential producers, film scouts and independent film producers and ad agencies to attract production to our community
- Participate in Georgia film and production events
- Remain active in all film and entertainment organizations and advocate for the incentives for Georgia

#### **Tactics:**

- Continue the successful promotion of the area for production
- Provide proactive client support services for all film, TV, print, and new media projects
- Direct professional scouting trips for all projects considering Augusta-based locations
- Integrate social media outlets and client engagement
- Maintain strong relationship with the Georgia State Office of Film and Entertainment
- Focus on strategic partnerships with other Georgia film commissions to strengthen political, economic and marketing abilities
- Continuous involvement in Film Georgia
- Social media engagement: Facebook and Instagram
- Listings in all influential on-line industry directories

### **NATURE/ADVENTURE TOURISM PLAN**

Overview: We are blessed with an abundance of unspoiled ecosystems that sustain hundreds of species of birds, flora and fauna and adventures too countless to mention. The benefits for our visitors and to our community are:

- Connecting visitors to our eco systems
- International recognition that Georgia is a major player in this growing activity
- Shows we are much more than a lake and golf destination
- Eco travelers tend to spend more and stay longer than traditional visitors
- Conservancy

There are several levels of nature activities including Active Tourism, Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism. Each has its own special features and followers, but they also share some similarities that satisfy several types of travelers.

**Active Tourism:** This activity involves responsible travel to foreign areas requiring physical and mental participation from the visitor following the guidelines for sustainability, protection of biodiversity and conservation of culture. Elements include recreation, education and is usually conducted under strict supervision.

**Ecotourism:** As defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people”. Ecotourism is primarily defined by the location of the activity and features travel to relatively undisturbed areas to enjoy and appreciate nature, promote conservation, resulting in low visitor impact.

**Action Tourism:** This is a little more intense activity and Includes sport such as biking, cross country rallies, speed boat riding, and extreme sports. It emphasizes excitement and amusement such as amusement and recreation parks, does not require close involvement with nature and attracts a younger audience.

Similarities and Differences in These Activities:

Active and Eco Tourism both share a high respect for Nature and Biodiversity and stress limited impact on the ecosystem. Visits to an area to enjoy these activities should include both education and interpretation. Participants in these activities seek authenticity, uniqueness and immersion in the environment.

The differences between these activities are that Active Tourism is possible almost anywhere, urban or rural. Examples are cultural, cuisine, music, dance, handcrafts and cultural activities. Eco Tourism is more location specific and includes hiking, biking, walking, canoeing, kayaking. This activity follows the aims of responsible travel, conservation of nature and benefits to local citizens. In contrast, Action Tourism involves activity that often includes physical exertion and is more entertainment oriented. All three activities are a good match for the visitor experiences available in Columbia County:

- Ecotourism Activities:
  - Reed Creek Park, Augusta Canal, Savannah River
    - Hiking, biking, walking, canoeing, kayaking
- Active Tourism:
  - Team building activities
- Action Tourism:
  - BMX
  - Boating

We have promoted Ecotourism in Columbia County for many years, and it has been embraced by our visitors. That activity will continue to attract larger numbers of participant’s in the future through ongoing promotion. We also promote Active Tourism activities and we project those activities will attract many more participants in the future as those opportunities expand. Action Tourism is encouraged to appeal to a younger demographic of travelers.

Accomplishments: Ecotourism is a major part of our brand.

Ecotourism Target Market: Ages 35-64 with a Household Income (HHI) of \$150,000 + with interest in history and Heritage. They enjoy attending events, indulge in nature activities and enjoy the arts

Our Nature Tourism Activities:

- Stallings Island
- Canoe & Kayak rentals and tours
- Fishing & Boating rentals and tours
- Birding Photography
- Fishing
- Bird Watching
- Camping/ Glamping

- Cycling
- Hiking
- Boat rentals and tours

#### Strategies:

- Promote eco, active and adventure activities and special events to new and repeat visitors.
- Connect with special activity consumers through channels they use the most to gather information on future travel destinations
- Identify projects to better direct visitors and residents on where and how to access natural based activities
- Identify travel writers, bloggers/influencers that have a keen interest in nature tourism activities
- Create and promote vacation packages to connect several nature activity providers into a multiple day visit to our area.
- Identify broadcast personalities to bring their programs to Columbia County to film one or more episodes on the “best kept secrets” of our area that include our nature based activities.

#### Tactics:

- Create activity specific videos and stories for use on our tourism website and on our Facebook page and Twitter platforms.
- Place digital ads with embedded video on activity specific websites to attract their followers
- Research for activity specific bloggers or influencers with a large following to come to our area and post their stories, videos and photos of their visit.
- Work closely to connect with TV personalities with a large following

## **ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE MARKETING**

#### Strategies & Tactics:

- Arts & Culture section of the CVB website: Includes expanded partner listings, descriptive information, images, hyperlinks and special offers. The Web Page also links to various arts & culture related web videos and articles.
- Arts, Culture & Museum: Encourages these organizations to plan and submit sponsorship applications for special events and promotions that will attract visitors to their facilities to encourage overnight stays in our hotels. The sponsorship guidelines encourage special event advertising and promotion of their events in our visitor feeder markets and to link to our CVB events web pages for destination information. Encourage packages that include hotels with event tickets, dining and shopping discounts to attract out of market visitors

#### **Heritage Marketing**

- Savannah Rapids/ Stallings Island: Promote this location at Savannah Rapids Park to inform visitors of the many activities available in the County.

## **DESTINATION STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS**

- Almost year-round warm climate featuring sunshine, water activities and relaxation
- We are a slower-paced, unique destination offering a peaceful, serene environment
- An up and coming “Foodie” destination with one-of-a-kind restaurants and award winning chefs and cuisine
- Hotels with a variety of price points to fit every traveler’s needs and budget
- Unique boutique shopping opportunities from bargains to designer brands
- A range of arts, culture and performance offerings
- Easy access to I-20
- Strong brand acceptance and recognition in our community, in our leisure feeder markets and with sports event organizers
- Strong working relationship with Chambers, Economic Development and other stakeholder groups in planning for future community growth and infrastructure

- Year-round employment opportunities supported by increasing visitor spending
- Strong community support for new or expanded amateur sports event facilities
- Perceived by our visitors as a safe destination
- Abundant adventure and nature based tourism activities and opportunities
- Largest Lake in Georgia
- Numerous community, neighborhood and regional parks and green spaces
- Close to Atlanta, Columbia, SC for easy day trips
- Destination offers unique off-site venues for small group meeting attendees

#### Our Weaknesses

- Limited entertainment and nightlife hours and options
- Distance from facilities/nighttime activities to hotels
- Limited culturally diverse activities and infrastructure
- The number of our group meeting venues and capacity limited the type of business we can attract

#### Implement Opportunities to Overcome Weaknesses

- New local transportation options like “Uber” offer visitors new ways to access nightlife and their hotels
- New hotel development in community is driving more developer interest
- New social media enhancements will attract more visitors in the slow periods
- Our Community Relations/Advocacy Plan is enabling us to change perceptions of the importance of tourism with our citizens, media and elected officials
- Realigned duties and shared responsibilities will help the CVB staff better serve the demand for services for our visitors, and the media
- Our diverse visitor base will drive new creative approaches to communicate with a wider universe of potential visitors in next year
- Summer rains, droughts and cold snaps all hinder outdoor activities and travel during those situations
- Help regulate non-traditional vacation and accommodation rentals to expand tourist tax revenue

### **MEASURING RESULTS**

In our ongoing effort to measure the effectiveness of our marketing efforts, and to report those results to our many audiences, we carefully monitor and measure our outcomes through the variety of sources:

Smith Travel Research, Inc., AIR DNA, Google Analytics, Georgia Department of Economic Development- Research Department and Arrivist

### **RESULTS TRACKING INITIATIVES**

Our ongoing research initiatives include:

- Online tracking and analysis – Click-through rates of ads, engagement rates, completed video views, unique website visitors, time spent on site, the various other websites a customer views prior to making a buying decision, and when that person arrives in the destination
- Third party research – Whether from the State of Georgia or through paid third parties (such as Smith Travel Research and Southeast Tourism Society, we continually review and analyze data and trends. Additionally, quarterly tourism industry roundtable discussions are held with our destination accommodations and attraction partners to gain current information on trends and changes in customer behavior
- Lodging taxes – The ultimate measures of the effectiveness of our efforts is the tourist tax collected for overnight stays in paid lodging within Columbia County. Additional indicators that show demand for travel to our community include Average Daily Rate (ADR), Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR), in-market visitor spending and other in-market measures of visitation spending and economic impact
- Google Analytics measures website activity, and the effectiveness of advertising campaigns that drive inquirers to our various websites