



# 2023 Annual Report

VisitFortWayne®  
INDIANA

# VISIT FORT WAYNE

## Mission

Visit Fort Wayne promotes the city and county as an exceptional destination, and leads the growth and development of the visitor industry

## Vision

Fort Wayne is recognized nationally as a welcoming visitor destination, offering unique experiences in an inclusive and hospitable community

## Strategic Goals

- Elevate Destination Marketing Sales and Services
- Lead Destination Development
- Advocate Tourism/Visit Fort Wayne Value Contributions
- Gain Destination Resources and Returns

## 2023 Board of Directors | Staff

**Kelly Updike**, Embassy Theatre  
*Board Chair*

**Mark Luttik**, Hilton Fort Wayne at the Grand Wayne Convention Center  
*Treasurer*

**Melissa Schenkel**, SYM Financial Advisors  
*Secretary*

### Board Members

**Susan Baier**, Allen County Public Library

**Tim Beere**, DeBrand Fine Chocolates

**Therese Brown**, Allen County Commissioner

**Melanie Carney**, Memorial Coliseum

**Danette Fitzgerald**, Parkview Health

**Tim Hall**, Fort Wayne Outfitters

**Colleen Huddleson**, Fort Wayne Museum of Art

**Kelley Hartley Hutton**, Purdue Fort Wayne

**Russ Jehl**, Fort Wayne City Council

**Paris McFarthing**, Hop River Brewing Co.

**Mike Mushett**, Turnstone

**Mike Nutter**, Fort Wayne TinCaps

**Mac Parker**, Memorial Coliseum Trustee

**Johnny Perez**, Mercado

**John Perlich**, City of Fort Wayne

**Rick Schuiteman**, Fort Wayne Children's Zoo

**Bart Shaw**, Grand Wayne Convention Center

**Lisa Starks**, Barnes & Thornburg

**Julie Wall**, the HEDGE

**Irene Walters**, Civic Leader

**Don Wyss**, Allen County Council

### Management & Finance

**Jill Boggs**, President/CEO

**Beth Monn**, Operations Manager

**Kendall Likes**, Special Projects Assistant

### Marketing

**Kristen Guthrie**, Vice President of Marketing and Communications

**Jessa Campbell**, Director of Destination Development and Communications

**Tom Boyer**, Digital Marketing Manager

**Erin Okeson**, Digital Content Manager

**Emily Hill**, Marketing Manager

### Group Sales

**Nicolle Campbell**, Director of Sales

**Josie O'Donnell**, Senior Sales Manager

**Jazmin Zavala**, Sports Sales Manager

**Bethany Sutherland**, Group Services Manager

**Alyssa Van Der Weele**, Group Sales Coordinator

### Partner Services/Visitors Center

**Emily Stuck**, Director of Visitor and Partner Services

**Nancy Niemann**, Senior Visitor Services Specialist

**Kaitie Jones**, Visitor Services Specialist

## WHAT WE DO

### Sell Fort Wayne

- Our destination branding positions Fort Wayne as a world-class, family-friendly leisure destination
- Our group sales efforts attract conventions, meetings, and sporting events to Fort Wayne
- Our integrated marketing campaigns drive visitors to Fort Wayne through advertising, PR, and social media

### Destination Development

- We use industry expertise and leadership, with community collaboration, to develop quality of place for residents and visitors, so Fort Wayne / Allen County can benefit from a vibrant and growing tourism economy.

### Welcome and Connect Visitors

- We assist with the execution of more than 70 meetings and events each year
- Our staff runs a friendly, helpful Visitors Center
- We produce maps, guides, and visitor resources to help visitors discover Fort Wayne

# VISITOR AND TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS

## Number of Annual Visitors

Fort Wayne / Allen County Visitors.....8.8 million  
 - Represents a 26% increase over 2021

## Visitor Expenditures

Visitor Expenditures in Allen County.....\$995 million  
 - Represents a 24% increase over 2021

## Total Employment

Direct Jobs (sustained by visitors).....13,626  
 - Represents a 22% increase over 2021

## Wages and Salaries

Direct Wages and Salaries.....\$398 million  
 - Represents a 23% increase over 2021

## Where Visitors Come From

According to VisitFortWayne.com visits, Visitors Center inquiries, and ad responses, visitors come to Fort Wayne from the following states:

Indiana.....	40%
Ohio.....	10%
Illinois.....	9%
Michigan.....	5%
Other.....	36%

## Local Taxes Generated

State and Local Tax.....\$113 million

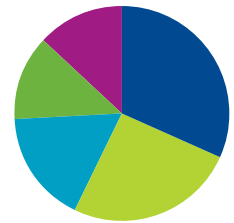
## If Tourism Did Not Exist in Allen County...

If tourism didn't exist, each of the 151,877 households in Allen County would have to pay an additional \$742 per year in taxes to maintain current levels of services.



## Expenditures by Type

Food & Beverage.....	32%
Shopping.....	26%
Transportation.....	17%
Attractions/Entertainment.....	13%
Lodging.....	12%



## Ranking

- Allen County ranks #3 of 92 Indiana counties in tourism spending.
- Tourism is Allen County's 8th largest employer.

Source: Rockport Analytics 2022 Economic Impact of Tourism on Allen County



# GROUP SALES

In 2023, the Sales Team helped book **50 future conventions/tournaments/group tours** (21 of these were NEW business for Fort Wayne). These events will bring in **51,301 visitors**, generating **24,507 room nights** with an estimated economic impact of **\$11.6 million**.

During 2023, Fort Wayne hosted **256** conventions, conferences, meetings, sports tournaments, group tours, and trade shows in **44 different venues**, bringing more than **403,884 visitors** to Fort Wayne. We serviced **82** of these events, providing information, customized information tables, pre-promo newsletters, and more.

## Group Marketing Campaign

In 2023, our marketing team developed a new Group Marketing Campaign providing more exposure to Fort Wayne / Allen County as a meetings, conventions, and sports destination. We rebranded our group marketing materials, ordered new collateral, developed digital marketing ads, and secured new sponsorships at tradeshows. All of these efforts provide the sales team with support and brand recognition for Fort Wayne / Allen County as a meetings and sports destination.

## Enhanced Group Services

This year, we enhanced our group services efforts, providing customized gifts and promotional campaigns to build attendance. For example, Lutheran Basketball Association of America and USA Boccia received customized Fort Wayne gifts for all their athletes. The Great Lakes Association of College and University Housing Officers were provided with a "mini store" complete with local items for attendees to choose a memento to take home and remember their time in

Fort Wayne. These enhanced our group services efforts, and helped make these events (and our destination) memorable.



## Key Achievements in 2023

- Launched a new Group Marketing Campaign
- Attended 11 tradeshow, had 167 appointments, received 37 RFP's
- Increased engagement on LinkedIn
- Hosted Indiana Sports and Tourism Bid Fund Luncheon for Local Sports Venues and Clubs
- Launched a new Post-Event Survey
- Implemented Quarterly Sales & Partner Services Meetings
- Filled Group Sales Coordinator position



# MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The *Visit Fort Wayne* Marketing Department produces marketing and advertising campaigns to invite leisure visitors to enjoy our city's hotels, restaurants, attractions, and entertainment venues throughout Fort Wayne / Allen County.

In 2023, we advertised Fort Wayne getaways in **30 cities** between 50-200 miles from Fort Wayne, to encourage family travel. We produced more than **30 million exposures** using digital, TV, radio, and print advertising.



## VisitFortWayne.com

This year, *Visit Fort Wayne* launched a fully updated website at VisitFortWayne.com!

The website features a fresh design, along with updated features. Visitors can plan their Allen County experiences by "hearting" events and partner listings, and adding them using the **Trip Builder**. This saves the selections to a custom, shareable itinerary page. Additionally, information can be accessed even faster with **Quick View** link which they can tap to slide open a summary window and see key information for an item without leaving the original page of search results.

VisitFortWayne.com is the primary tool used to attract and inform visitors to our community, hosting more than **1.7 million visitors** and **3.8 million pageviews** annually. In addition, it's a popular tool for residents, helping them engage with their community.

## Key Achievements in 2023

- Our Marketing Team creates extensive content to use in the promotion of our community. In 2023, this included a dozen maps and guides, 125 blogs, photography from over 85 events and attractions, 21 long-form videos, and 26 social videos. We also partnered with other voices and content creators, working to share all the stories and images of our diverse community!
- Our **six digital experience passes** continue to gain popularity with our visitors and residents. Currently, people can explore Fort Wayne through our Savings Pass, Allen County Historic Pass, Adventure Pass, Public Art Trail, Outdoor Pass, and Holiday Lights Challenge. These passes have had over 15,000 users and hundreds of redemptions for free prizes!
- Our digital and social media advertising efforts continue to pay off and drive traffic to our community. A few of our 2023 numbers include:
  - **17 million** Google Ad impressions (70% increase from 2022)
  - **369,719 clicks** to VisitFortWayne.com from Google Ads
  - **19,020,702** total social media impressions (29% increase from 2022)
  - **656,432** social media engagements
  - **176,052 visits** to VisitFortWayne.com, from social ads (52% increase from 2022)

## Media Relations

*Visit Fort Wayne* hosted **35 travel journalists** in Fort Wayne in 2023 (as well as 11 virtually), resulting in **58 articles** and more than **30 million media impressions** for our community. Our earned media builds upon Fort Wayne's national profile, and fosters greater regional interest and visitation to Fort Wayne as a family-friendly urban destination.

### A few highlights included:

- *I Went to the Biggest Vera Bradley Sale in the World* – Shondaland.com
- *Find your roots in Fort Wayne: Visit The Genealogy Center on a getaway to Indiana's second-largest city* – Daily Herald (Chicago)
- *Finding Lincoln in Indiana: A Presidents Day weekend guide to Abe's boyhood home* – Chicago Tribune
- *Fort Wayne, Indiana* – John McGivern's Main Streets Half Hour TV Feature
- *Curious about Burmese food? Get a true taste of Myanmar at these 10 Indiana restaurants* – USA Today



# VISITORS CENTER AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS

In 2023, the Visitors Center welcomed more than **5,100 people in person** and assisted more than **15,000 more via phone and email requests**.

We distributed more than **50,000 total print pieces** from the Visitors Center including visitors guides, dining maps, helpful information, and more!

## Shopping the Visitors Center

Inside the Visitors Center (and online at **VisitFortWayne.com/Store**), you can find over **500 unique items** to purchase – many are from local and regional artists/vendors. In 2023, we sold over **9,700 items** and **over 2,710 postcards**.

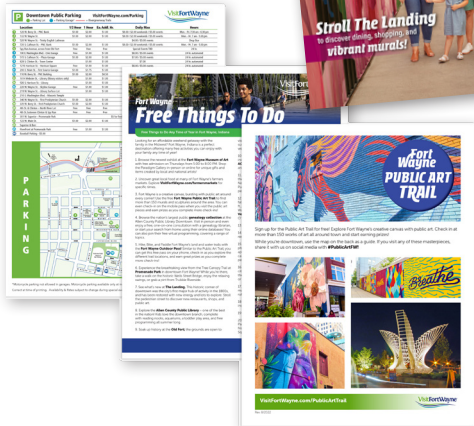
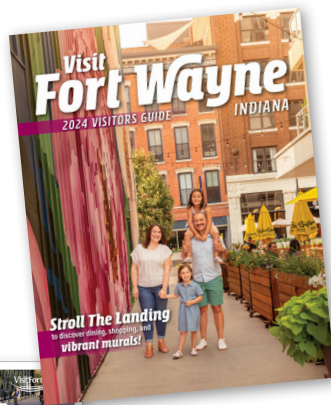
During National Tourism Week in May, the Visitors Center hosted a "Celebrity Takeover" where **Mayor Henry** and local media personalities took a shift answering the phones and greeting visitors. Talk about Hoosier Hospitality!



## Our Publications Promote Fort Wayne

In 2023, we produced and distributed **70,000 copies** of the Visitors Guide to potential visitors and guests to our city. In addition, we produce dozens of maps and brochures to aid visitors – and residents – as they explore our great community.

A few favorites include the Public Art Map, Free Things to Do List, Downtown Parking Map, and more.



## Key Achievements in 2023

- Our 2023 **Connect Sessions** gave partners a chance to network and learn more about **Allen County's Hotel Occupancy Data** and **Telling Fort Wayne's Story**.
- We hosted our two community events with record-breaking numbers: **Savor Fort Wayne** and **Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown**.
- We won **Indiana Tourism Awards** for our 2022 Visitors Guide and our original Fort Wayne Poster Series, sold in the Visitors Center.



# MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE



## Key Achievements in 2023

- Eight staff members achieved their **PDM Designation** from Destinations International. This certification covers the fundamentals of destination marketing, management, and sales. The employees earning this designation include **Tom Boyer**, Digital Marketing Manager; **Nicolle Campbell**, Director of Sales; **Kaitie Jones**, Visitor Services Specialist; **Kendall Likes**, Special Projects Assistant; **Josie O'Donnell**, Senior Sales Manager; **Bethany Sutherland**, Group Services Manager; **Alyssa Van Der Weele**, Group Sales Coordinator; and **Jazmin Zavala**, Sports Sales Manager.
- *Visit Fort Wayne* staff love to be involved in the community! We participated in the **Day of Caring** and staff served on the Boards and Committees for community organizations including the Northeast Indiana Hospitality Association, WBOI, Indiana Tourism Association, Greater Fort Wayne Inc., GFW Hispanic Chamber, Turnstone, Allen County Bicentennial, Team Indiana, Riverfront Advisory Board, and many others.



## DMAP Accreditation

*Visit Fort Wayne* was awarded the **Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP)** official seal in recognition of the organization's rigorous meeting of 118 industry standards of performance and accountability in the travel and tourism accreditation program. The seal denotes the organization's commitment to operational excellence.



This international accreditation program requires a destination organization to successfully comply with a multitude of mandatory and voluntary standards that span a variety of performance areas to gain this momentous achievement. The standards cover nearly all aspects related to the management and marketing of destination organizations including governance, finance, human resources, technology, innovation, policy, planning, sales, communications, ethics, diversity, inclusion, advocacy, research, and destination development.

*Visit Fort Wayne* joins the ranks of only 200 destination organizations worldwide who have obtained the coveted DMAP designation, and one of 100 to earn "accreditation with distinction."

## Tourism Master Plan

In 2023, *Visit Fort Wayne* embarked on a mission to outline a 10-year Tourism Master Plan that provides a roadmap for tourism-based growth and destination development. We've listened to the dreams of our community, partners, stakeholders, and visitors – and identified our collective wants and needs for Fort Wayne and Allen County's tourism transformation. The Tourism Master Plan is *Visit Fort Wayne's* promise to residents and visitors – to be the driving force in creating a rich, diverse, and inclusive destination experience.

To learn more and get involved in 2024, check out [VisitFortWayne.com/TourismMasterPlan](https://www.VisitFortWayne.com/TourismMasterPlan)





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**VisitFortWayne.com**