

# HICKORY

@VisitHickoryMetro

Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau  
Annual Report FY 2021-2022







J&T Pixels Photography

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# LETTER FROM OUR CEO AND CHAIR

To our tourism partners and colleagues,

At the start of Fiscal Year 2021-22, the Hickory Metro Convention Center & Visitors Bureau was hopeful that our industry would begin to improve as our hospitality community continued to face difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite adjusting and establishing new procedures and safety protocols to protect guests and employees new challenges appeared.

Enticing and keeping employees became a significant hurdle for our restaurants, attractions, and hotels, putting at risk the ability to provide the level of service that customers have come to expect when they visit the Hickory Metro area. To combat this, several solutions came to surface from reduced hours of operations at restaurants and attractions to hotels working together and cross training employees to ensure guests had adequate services. The hospitality community rallied together - with the help of the Convention Center, Catawba Valley Community College, and The Chamber of Catawba County to create the CVCC Hospitality Academy. This academy is meant to be the catalyst in bringing in, retaining, and training work force.

The increase in leisure travel we experienced at the beginning of the summer of 2021 gave way to uncertainty with the introduction of a variant. As meetings and conventions began to return, concern did as well when the omicron variant began to spread toward the winter.

Yet, in the face of these challenges, there were still many reasons to be optimistic.

During the year which began July 1, 2021 and ended on June 30, 2022, there were many lessons this challenge taught us, including how valuable in-person connections are and no amount of technology can replicate those experiences. This held true when tourism partners gathered in-person for the first time in more than a year and meetings and events were held in person at the Hickory Metro Convention Center. There were 176 events at the convention center itself, which is a 31 percent increase from FY 2020-21, and occupancy tax increased by 32 percent.

As we embark on FY 2022-23, there are many exciting projects ahead including an expansion and renovation of the Hickory Metro Convention Center, as well as one hotel property will be fully renovated and construction on a new hotel may begin during this year. Restaurants and attractions are busier and getting back to staffing levels prior to the pandemic. Our business is not only returning it is thriving. The future of the Hickory Metro's hospitality community is bright, and we have much to be thankful for.



**Mandy Pitts Hildebrand**  
CEO  
Hickory Metro Convention  
Center and Visitors Bureau

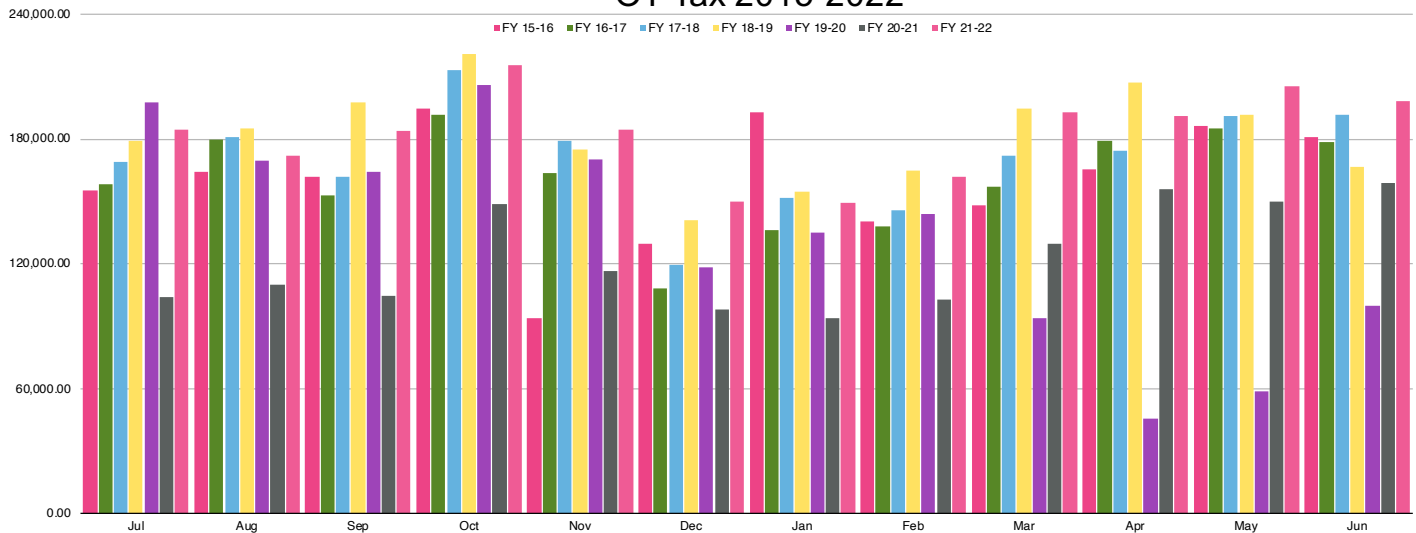


**Bruce Eckard**, Chair  
Hickory-Conover Tourism  
Development Authority

# 2021-2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- The year that began with uncertainty ended up being a record year in occupancy tax collection. FY 2021-2022 brought in a little more than \$2.1 million in occupancy tax which was more than \$10,000 from the previous highest year which was FY 2018-2019. The 6% occupancy tax is paid by visitors who stay overnight at accommodations in Hickory and Conover.
- Domestic and international visitors in North Carolina spent \$29.9 billion in 2021, which reflects a 44.9 percent increase from 2020. Visitors within Catawba County spent \$291.93 million, which is an increase of 32.4 percent from the previous year and not far off from 2019 which was \$302 million.

## OT Tax 2015-2022



| Month | FY 15-16     | FY 16-17     | FY 17-18     | FY 18-19     | FY 19-20     | FY 20-21     | FY 21-22     |
|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Jul   | 155,133.47   | 158,002.02   | 168,944.09   | 178,957.64   | 197,803.84   | 103,706.41   | 184,453.39   |
| Aug   | 164,222.42   | 179,883.27   | 180,866.86   | 185,058.94   | 169,715.57   | 109,995.38   | 171,719.42   |
| Sep   | 161,755.85   | 153,002.86   | 161,936.05   | 197,404.70   | 164,489.83   | 104,710.67   | 184,104.32   |
| Oct   | 194,479.43   | 191,565.47   | 213,056.14   | 220,980.31   | 205,754.25   | 149,002.75   | 215,592.58   |
| Nov   | 93,608.12    | 163,716.25   | 179,252.94   | 174,955.18   | 170,084.33   | 116,315.52   | 184,205.86   |
| Dec   | 129,450.10   | 107,903.44   | 119,390.01   | 140,731.44   | 118,528.78   | 97,764.78    | 150,041.13   |
| Jan   | 192,885.39   | 135,972.30   | 151,831.51   | 154,740.73   | 135,212.14   | 93,858.55    | 149,145.96   |
| Feb   | 140,211.16   | 138,271.95   | 145,781.46   | 164,880.23   | 144,139.23   | 102,527.93   | 161,676.94   |
| Mar   | 148,240.94   | 156,996.55   | 172,011.62   | 194,479.43   | 93,608.12    | 129,450.10   | 192,885.39   |
| Apr   | 165,571.12   | 179,301.66   | 174,367.95   | 207,280.26   | 45,560.89    | 155,938.98   | 191,269.07   |
| May   | 186,267.60   | 184,868.53   | 190,899.70   | 191,859.71   | 58,741.72    | 150,030.81   | 205,517.60   |
| Jun   | 181,075.40   | 178,393.91   | 191,859.54   | 166,628.80   | 100,051.02   | 158,983.11   | 197,990.02   |
| Total | 1,912,901.00 | 1,927,878.21 | 2,050,197.87 | 2,177,957.37 | 1,603,689.72 | 1,472,284.99 | 2,188,601.68 |



## Tourism impact highlights for 2021 in Catawba County

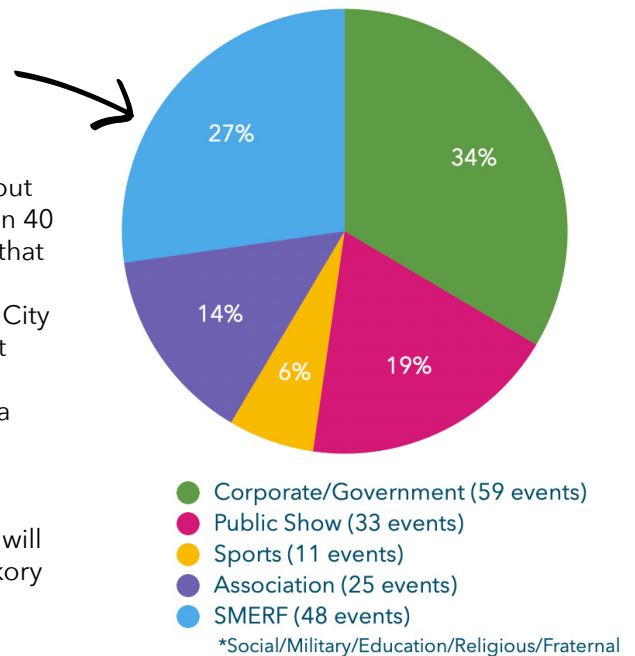
- The travel and tourism industry directly employees more than 2,200 people in Catawba County.
- Total payroll generated by the tourism industry in Catawba County was \$77.8 million.
- State tax revenue generated in Catawba County totaled \$13 million through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes on personal and corporate income. About \$11.3 million in local taxes were generated from sales and property tax revenue from travel-generated and travel-supported businesses.
- Due to the state and local tax created by visitors, there is a savings of \$149.65 in taxes per resident.





# 2021-2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- There were 176 events and/or meetings at the Hickory Metro Convention Center throughout the year which is a 31 percent increase over the previous year. Within the year there were 15 new events and/or meetings.
- The Visit Hickory Metro Team attended 11 conferences with executives, meeting planners and sports rights holders throughout the year marketing the amenities throughout the area. More than 40 connections lead to 6 future tournaments, meetings and events that will be held in the community.
- Partnerships with the Hickory Metro Sports Commission and the City of Hickory led to more than 20 large tournaments which brought overnight rooms.
- More than 70 Tourism Partners within the area work together as a team to welcome guests to our community. After a year of no in-person meetings, the group met three times over the year to reconnect.
- One major hotel was under renovation throughout the year and will be completed in 2022-23 and a new property in Downtown Hickory opened in the spring of 2021.

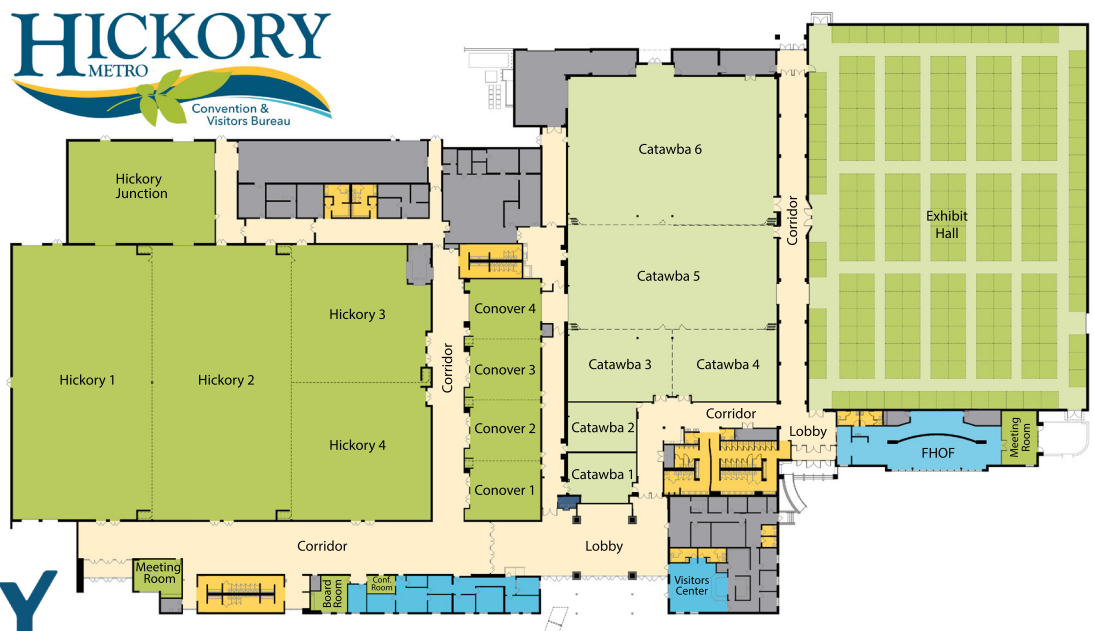


## Convention Center Updates

After more than four years of in-depth discussions, construction drawings of an expansion and renovation of the Hickory Metro Convention Center were approved by the Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA). An additional 46,000 square foot multi-purpose facility will be added resulting in a total of 132,000 square foot of flexible space located on one level.

The addition includes:

- A 35,000 square foot multi-purpose space with 30-foot ceilings which can hold expo space, 8 volleyball courts, 4 basketball courts, and more.
- An elegant space where the story about our heritage of furniture manufacturing will be presented to visitors, which includes a meeting room and separate entrance.
- Renovating more than 30,000 square feet to meet the needs of meetings and conventions as well as upscale banquet space.
- Construction should begin by the end of 2022 with the hopes that the addition and renovation will be complete by the end of 2024.





# MARKETING-ADVERTISEMENTS

## Advertisements Print & Digital

Visit Hickory Metro ads include travel and leisure, sports, and business.

### Publications:

This is just a sample of where ads are placed to promote the area.

- Our State Magazine
- Destination Magazine
- Visit North Carolina
- Foothills Digest
- Sports Planning Guide
- Carolina Traveler
- Association Executives of North Carolina (AENC)
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI)
- Sports Destination Magazine
- Business North Carolina
- Western North Carolina Magazine
- Lady Bass Anglers
- Hickory Crawdads
- Hickory Furniture Mart

**MEET DIFFERENTLY IN HICKORY**

We invite you to meet in spaces that make a difference and create opportunities to join together not just for business but to reconnect and get back to what truly matters - building meaningful relationships.

**HICKORY METRO**  
Convention Center & Visitors Bureau

Sarah Davis Jones, CMP,  
Director of Sales & Marketing  
828.322.1335  
Sarah@hickorymetro.com  
www.visithickorymetro.com

AENC Directory 2022

**FIND A PEACEFUL STILLNESS IN NATURE'S WARM EMBRACE...**

**HICKORY NC**  
@visithickorymetro | www.visithickorymetro.com

Proud Partner of:  
**OUTDOOR NC**  
**Leave No Trace**  
Center for Outdoor Ethics | LNT.org

Our State Magazine  
April Issue 2022

**What's on Your List for the PERFECTLY CRAFTED Weekend?**

- ✓ Places to get fresh air beyond your zip code?
- ✓ Locations to cool down with that someone special?
- ✓ Gal pal road trip with unique shopping destinations?
- ✓ Inspiration for your next home remodel?

**HICKORY NC**  
Convention Center & Visitors Bureau  
Craft your perfect getaway to Hickory today at [www.visithickorymetro.com](http://www.visithickorymetro.com)  
@visithickorymetro

Hickory Furniture Mart  
Buying Guide 2022

**WORTH THE DRIVE**

Think you know Hickory, North Carolina?  
**Think again.**

Hickory's uniquely local vibe of craftsmanship and connectedness is what makes it a welcoming place for residents and visitors alike. In Hickory, the good life isn't just about having a lot to do - it's about how to experience it.

[www.visithickorymetro.com](http://www.visithickorymetro.com)  
@visithickorymetro

**HICKORY NC**  
Convention Center & Visitors Bureau

▲ Mas Amor Cantina  
▲ Riverbend Park  
▲ Lower Food City Park

Business NC Magazine  
March Issue 2022

**HICKORY NC**  
@VisitHickoryMetro



# MARKETING

## Social Media Content

@VisitHickoryMetro

### Facebook

Gained Followers: 800+  
Total Reach (Post, Story, Paid): 400,000+  
Page Views: 3,300+

### Instagram

Gained Followers: 400+  
Total Reach (Post, Story, Reels): 212,000  
Impressions: 119,000+

### Giphy

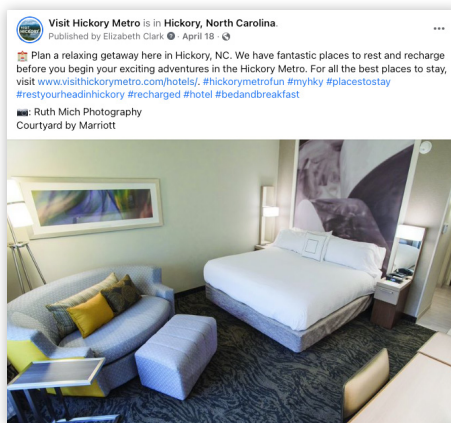
Gif & Sticker Views: 1,430,000+

## Website

Created Blogs: 20  
Newsletter Sign Ups: 779 (Feb.-June 2022)

## Destination Guide

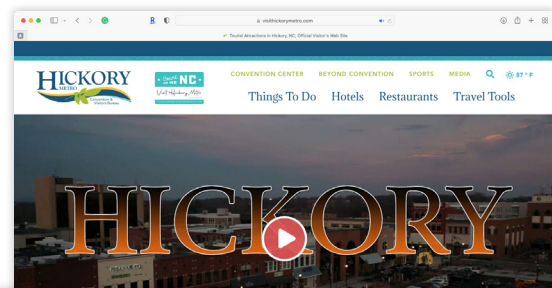
The 2021-2022 Destination Guide has been a huge success and 5,173 copies have been distributed throughout the nation. In the last half of the year Destination Guides were mailed or email to visitors in 41 states across the nation.



Facebook Post

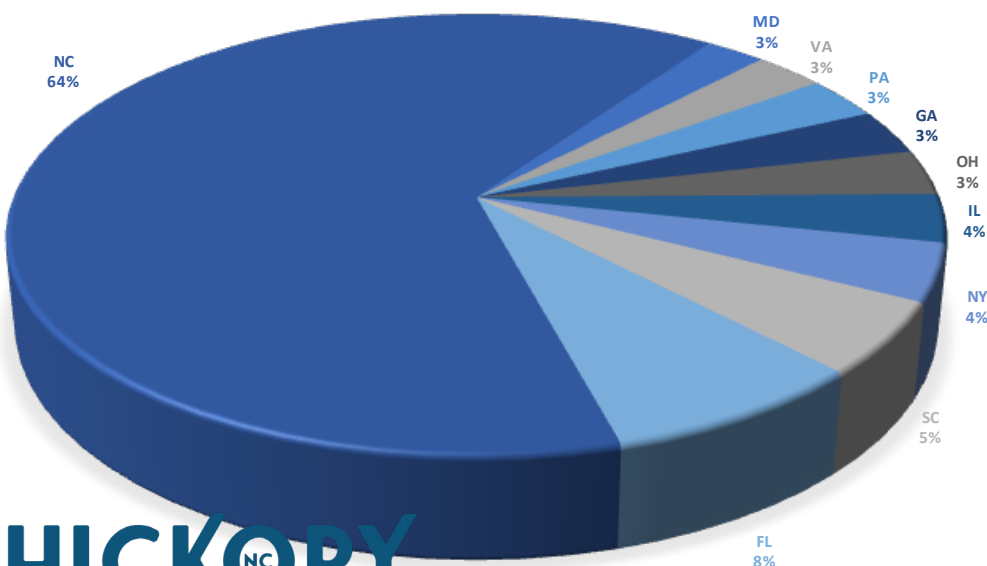


Facebook Post

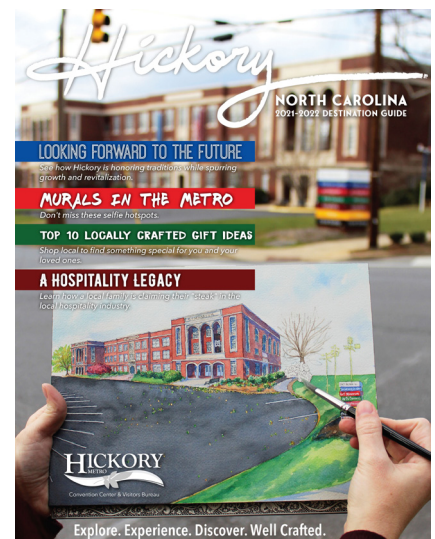


Blog

### TOP 10 STATES REQUESTING DESTINATION INFORMATION FEBRUARY 1 - JUNE 30, 2022



**HICKORY**  
@VisitHickoryMetro



Destination Guide 2021-2022



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF

## Hickory Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)

**Bruce Eckard, Chair**  
Conover City Council

**Renee Keever, Treasurer**  
Piedmont Center Associates, Controller

**Tom Hart**  
Conover City Manager

**Patrica Hatch**  
Sweet Tea Bed and Breakfast Owner

**Lindsay Keisler**  
The Chamber of Catawba County President

**Leroy Lail**  
Piedmont Center Associates, Managing Partner  
Chairman of the Hickory Furniture Mart

**Mark Seaman**  
City of Hickory Parks, Recreation &  
Sports Tourism Director

**Terry Taylor, Counsel**

**Warren Wood**  
Hickory City Manager

**Phil Yount**  
Former Hickory City Council Member



## Convention Center and Visitors Bureau Staff (Visit Hickory Metro)

**Mandy Pitts Hildebrand**  
CEO

**Sarah Davis Jones**  
Director of Sales and Marketing

**Amber Howard**  
Director of Events

**Bob O'Keefe**  
Facilities Manager - Retired July 2022

**Ed Gudat**  
Facilities Manager

**Chrystal T. Dieter**  
Visitor Center Coordinator

**Elizabeth Clark**  
Marketing Coordinator

**Kendyl Warren**  
Sales Assistant

**Steve Pearson**  
Operations/Event Staff

**Dave Hass**  
Operations/Event Staff

**Libby Barger**  
Part Time Staff

**Randy Keeter**  
Part Time Staff

**Ruth Warlick**  
Part Time Staff

### Other:

Financial Services - Western Piedmont Council of  
Governments (WPCOG)

Audio Video/Technical Services -  
Jackson Creative

Hickory Metro Convention Center Exclusive Caterer  
- Liazzo's Catering