

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2023-2024



HICKORY NC

@VisitHickory

Hickory Metro Convention Center
and Visitors Bureau

J&T Pixels Photography



Photo from Hickory Downtown Development Association (Oktoberfest 2023)

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SCAN FOR
www.visithickorymetro.com

To our Tourism Partners and Colleagues,

The paramount word to describe tourism in Fiscal Year 2023-2024 in our community is upbeat. Upbeat is an increase in activity or prosperity, as well as cheerful and optimistic and as you read through this year's annual report you will understand why that's the best word to describe the state of tourism throughout Catawba County.

It was another record-breaking year in the county when it comes to visitor spending as guests spent more than \$348 million in 2023. This growth of economic impact confirms the importance of tourism and the value it adds to our community. We are a destination, whether it be for business travel, meetings and events, furniture shopping or shopping in general, sports, outdoor adventures, arts and cultural experiences, the culinary scene and much, much more.

Tourism partners are vital to our success because when people visit, guests are patrons at their businesses and in public spaces. It's all about collaboration and several partners have woven the word visitor or tourism in updated plans this year - which solidifies the realization that visitors are becoming a larger presence in the community. The importance of tourism is included in the City of Hickory's "Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies Strategic Plan," and Arts Culture Catawba, formally known as the United Arts County of Catawba County, updated its mission and vision statements, and visitor is prominent in both statements.

Positive interruptions continued at the Hickory Metro Convention Center with its addition and renovations. The total project costs north of \$18 million and is about 95 percent complete at the time of the annual report's release. This investment will benefit the entire county, the Hickory Metro and Western North Carolina. Events continued during construction and more details on that are included in the report.

The tourism and hospitality industry continues to blossom in 2024-2025 and it's all due to collectively working together for the greater good of our community.

Cheers to a new year!



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

To Community Leaders and Partners,

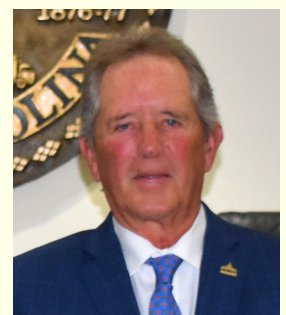
The Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA) was created 38 years ago, and that mustard seed beginning has flourished over the decades, especially in the last couple of years.

It is an honor and privilege to be a part of this organization since day one when I was the Mayor of Conover. Since then, I have continued to be involved as a Conover Council member and have also served on the tourism board off and on throughout the years. For more than a decade I have served in the Chairman role, and it's been the fastest 10 years of growth since our beginning.

This organization's initial vision was to build a convention center to bring visitors to the community, which is a win-win for all, as well as promote our community as a leisure and business destination. The vision in the late 1980s to build a convention center with not much around it, to create a destination, has turned into a bustling area full of hotels, restaurants, national brand stores, as well as local gems.

As you will read in the annual report, tourism and the convention center have transformed, which has a large economic impact on our community.

During the year, long-time HCTDA board member Leroy Lail passed away. Leroy's vision for a convention center and a robust tourism destination came to life. He served on the board several times since it was created in the 1980s. He contributed a great amount of time and invested tremendously in hotels and furniture over the years and brought a wealth of knowledge to the table that supported the growth of tourism. He will be greatly missed.



Bruce Eckard, Chair
Hickory-Conover Tourism
Development Authority

What is the Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)?

The HCTDA is a government entity in the tourism and hospitality world. Both government and tourism and hospitality industries serve others which is a common thread among the two organizations. The HCTDA does business as the Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau.

The organization works to promote Hickory and the metro area, as a place to visit and meet.

In October 2023, the HCTDA implemented a new Strategic Plan. The HCTDA Mission and Vision Statements were updated and are the guiding principles, not only the HCTDA Board, but for employees of the Hickory Metro Convention Center & Visitors Bureau.

Mission Statement

The mission of the HCTDA is to market and enhance the economy of the Hickory Metro by promoting a dynamic destination with sports, conventions, events, and leisure travel.

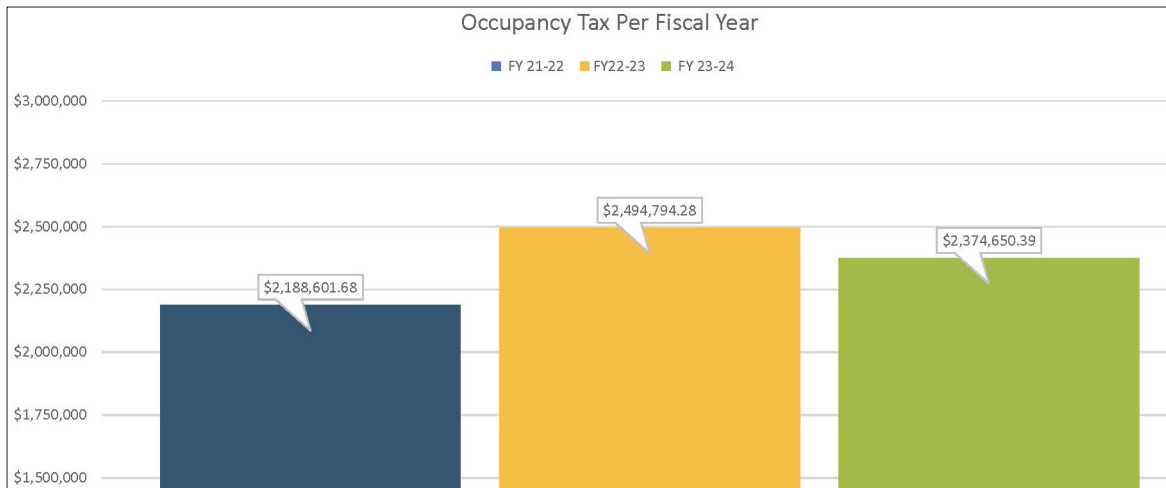
Vision Statement

The Hickory Metro region is recognized as a top-tier meeting, sports, and leisure destination.



Occupancy Tax:

- Occupancy tax collected this year was \$2,374,650.03, which is second highest occupancy tax collected in HCTDA's history.
- The 6% occupancy tax is paid by visitors who stay overnight at all lodging accommodations in Hickory and Conover. There are more than two dozen accommodations, including national brands like Marriott, Hilton, IHG, Choice and more to short term rentals like Airbnb, VRBO and online companies like Priceline.
- Occupancy tax revenue can only be used to pay convention center debt and operations and on marketing efforts that bring visitors to our community.



Visitor Spending in NC/Catawba County 2023:

Domestic and international visitors to and within Catawba County spent \$348.22 million in 2023, an increase of 5.1 percent from 2022. The data comes from an annual study commissioned by VisitNC, a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

Tourism impact highlights for 2023:

- The travel and tourism industry directly employees more than 2,495 in Catawba County.
- Total payroll generated by the tourism industry in Catawba County was \$86.7 million.
- State tax revenue generated in Catawba County totaled \$14 million through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes

on personal and corporate income. About \$12 million in local taxes were generated from sales and property tax revenue from travel-generated and travel-supported businesses.

- Tax savings per resident in Catawba County is \$157.86 annually due to visitor spending.

Hotels Under Renovation & Construction:



There are two new hotels under construction in Hickory. The Home2 Suites by Hilton will have 91 rooms and is walking distance to the convention center. The TownePlace Suites by Marriott will have 108 rooms, and is located about a half mile from the convention center. These rooms are needed as the convention center expands and brings larger and additional events to the area. Both hotels are to be completed by end of 2025.



The Comfort Inn (88 rooms) and Main Stay (24 rooms), which is at one location with two brands located in Conover, completed its total renovation this year. A Peruvian Restaurant opened in 2024. For decades this hotel had a popular restaurant that locals and visitors enjoyed, and the space sat empty for many years and now this new restaurant is bringing life back to that great dining space.



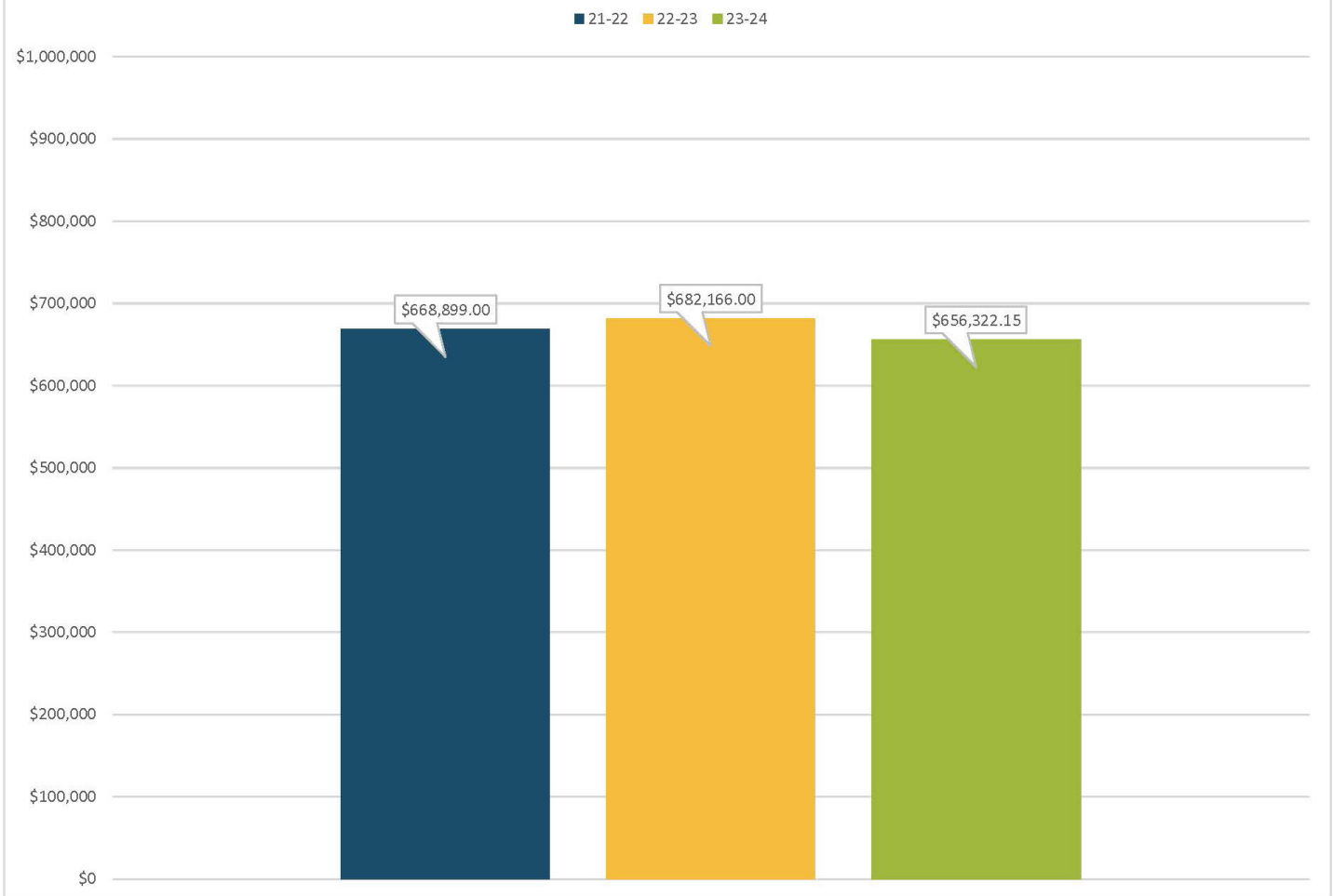
Hampton Inn by Hilton in Hickory is undergoing a complete renovation. The Hampton Inn opened at its current location in 2009. The exterior renovation was completed summer 2024. The public areas and all 121 rooms will be renovated and expected to be complete in 2025.

Hickory Metro Convention Center Events:

- Even with half of the convention center closed for construction during Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the center hosted 179 meetings or events. Event revenue exceeded what was budgeted by more than \$178,000.
- It is estimated that more than **70,000** people attended a meeting or event at the convention center throughout Fiscal Year 2023-2024.
- Total Number of Events at HMCC FY23-24: **179**
- Breakdown of Type of Events at HMCC FY23-24:
 - o Corporate/Government Events - 84
 - o Public Shows - 30
 - o Sports Events - 24
 - o Association Events - 21
 - o SMERF Events - 20



Event Revenue Per Fiscal Year



Convention Center Renovation/Addition:

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Monday, May 1, 2023 at the Hickory Metro Convention Center with community leaders. Hickory Construction is the contractor for the renovation and expansion which added more than 46,000 square feet to the convention center. The Hickory Metro Convention Center is now a total of more than **132,000** usable square feet on one level. As of August 2024 this project is 95% complete.

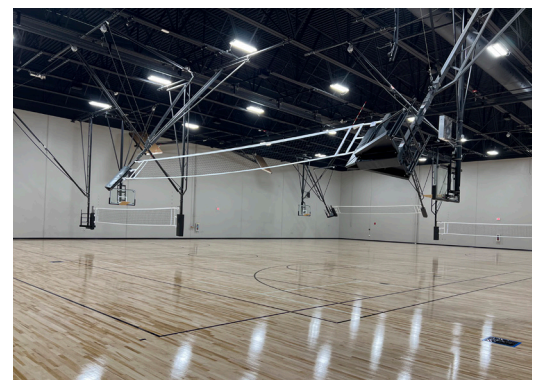
An additional 46,194 square feet added and that includes:

- A 35,000-square-foot exhibit hall with 30-foot ceiling height and wood flooring which is space for an expo, public show or meeting, as well as space for eight volleyball courts, four basketball courts, 12 pickleball courts, cheerleading, gymnastics, wrestling events, and more.
- A multi purpose area that will highlight our community's history is in a 2,500-square-foot space with self-contained restrooms, catering space, outdoor terrace, and video display capability.

Renovations of approximately 30,000 square feet of the original building include:

- Upgraded finishes and lighting in the existing Catawba Rooms (the 2005 addition) and new movable partitions for more efficient operation.
- Renovated and expanded restrooms to provide new finishes and "touchless" operation.
- Extended exterior canopy at the existing Main Entrance, which is seen from I-40.
- New covered walkway connection from existing parking deck to the main entrance.
- Enhanced video signage and wayfinding.
- Additional small meeting rooms.
- New audio visual throughout the convention center.
- Paint and finishes in original (1997) wing of convention center.
- Renovated office space for HMCC staff and EDC.
- Additional Parking.

* The original project, plus additions, is an \$18 million investment.



SCAN FOR
More Construction Details!



Advertisements:

The Visit Hickory team promotes the area for leisure, sports, and meetings in both digital and print.

Publications:

This is just a sample of ad placements promoting the area.

- Our State Magazine
- Destination Magazine
- Visit North Carolina
- Foothills Digest
- Sports Planning Guide
- Sports Event Magazine
- 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 Crowdads
- Hickory Furniture Mart

FEED YOUR SOUL

FOUR

BOCA

MAS AMOR CANTINA

HICKORY

@VisitHickoryMetro

VisitHickoryMetro.com

Our State Magazine
November Issue 2023



Fresh Takes

HICKORY

Historically a stronghold of furniture design and manufacturing, this city in the foothills also showcases the culinary arts, the fine arts and the art of relaxation.

Get the lay of the land on the new Hickory Trail, a nearly 10-mile-long bike and pedestrian route that connects popular destinations throughout town and includes the serene Riverwalk over Lake Hickory along the Catawba River. Burgers, bento boxes, sushi and spirits tempt taste buds at **Coww Saké**, a Japanese-style restaurant with sleek touches. Their Chicken Lettuce Wings are packed with wok-seared meat, mushrooms and water chestnuts. Do amazing grazing with help from **Simply Jam'n Boards**, creators of custom charcuterie boards, boxes and tablescapes for all kinds of snacking scenarios. Get a grab-and-go box or book a group charcuterie workshop.

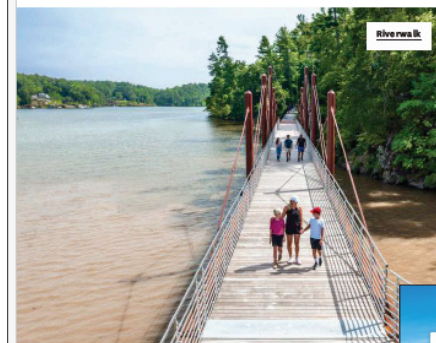
For more than 20 years, community coffeehouse **Taste Fall Beans** has been bringing folks together to express themselves over espresso and smooth things over via smoothies. They're also known for their scratch-made vegan and vegetarian munchies.

Take your best shots — and maybe do a few — at **Dive Bar**, an adult-oriented arcade and billiards spot. Play pool, basketball and pinball while enjoying cold bevies and satisfying bar food.

The Hickory Museum of Art was founded in 1944 with eight works. Today the collection encompasses more than 1,500 art objects, including Hudson River School paintings, Southern contemporary folk art, pottery, studio art glass and photography.

Venture to nearby Newton to sample craft spirits at family-owned-and-operated **Warehouse Distillery**. A behind-the-scenes tour ends with a tasting flight, and the cocktail lounge serves concoctions made with their rye, bourbon and maple whiskey.

ACCESSIBLE - fun for all
Young visitors to the **Hickory Museum of Art** can pick up a sensory backpack that contains noise-cancelling headphones, a weighted lap pad, fidget toys and other calming items.



Visit NC Magazine
2024 Issue

FIND YOURSELF IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED PLACES

MOUNTAIN CREEK PARK

MAS AMOR CANTINA

HICKORY

VisitHickoryMetro.com

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COLLABORATION MEETS INNOVATION

46,194 SQUARE FEET WILL BE ADDED BY SUMMER 2024!

FEATURES TO HELP MAKE YOUR MEETING SPACE PERFECT:

- Versatile audio-visual and electrical capabilities
- Movable wall partitions
- Versatile food and beverage options
- Ease of accessibility - located all on one level
- Loading docks and ground-level access
- Concession stands in each large hall
- Onsite Regional Visitors Center

HICKORY

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AENC Resource Guide
FY 2023-2024

Social Media Content

@VisitHickoryNC

Facebook:

- Organic Reach: 316,814
- Engagement: 78,443
- Page & Profile Visits: 17,217
- Organic Link Clicks: 12,580
- Net Followers: 999



Paid Promotion (Meta: Facebook & Instagram)

- People Reached: 474,246
- Impressions: 899,914
- Link Clicks: 20,643

Instagram:

- Reach: 50,802
- Profile Visits: 4,030
- New Followers: 809

YouTube:

- Views: 6,637
- Watch Time Average: 9.42 Hours
- Subscribers: 25

Pinterest:

- Impressions: 3,018
- Engagements: 125
- Outbound Clicks: 12
- Saves: 23
- Total Audience: 1963
- Engaged Audience: 87

Media Mentions

10 Most Beautiful and Affordable Places to Live in the U.S., Travel + Leisure, March 2023

9 Ways to Celebrate Fall Beyond Foliage in North Carolina, Travel + Leisure, August 2023

Hickory's on the Rise, Charlotte Business Journal, October 2023

Carolina Impact - Hickory's Great Honor, PBS North Carolina, October 2023

Embrace Winter Chill with Creative Craft Beers, Visit North Carolina, November 2023

TAR HEEL TOWNS Your Guide to Hickory, Our State Magazine, April 2024

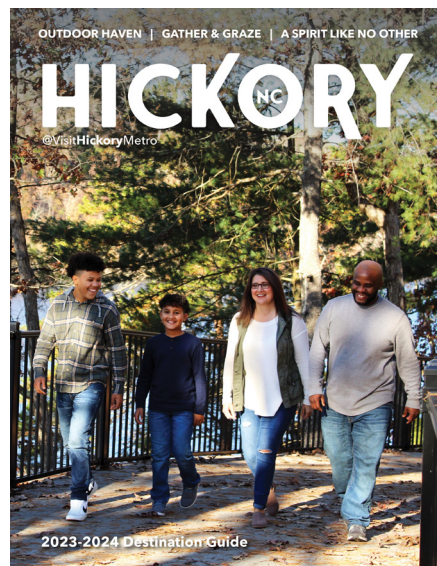
3 NC restaurants ranked among the top 100 sushi spots in the US, according to Yelp, The Charlotte Observer, June 2024

Discover 27 Exciting Things To Do In Hickory, NC: Your Ultimate Weekend Guide, Adventures Abound, June 2024



10 Charming Main Streets Across the US, USA Today, April 2024

"Hickory, North Carolina's Main Avenue is a charming and vibrant destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment. Visitors can enjoy a variety of unique retail shops and restaurants, as well as a park-like setting and outdoor dining. Hickory is also a North Carolina Main Street community, which means it is committed to preserving and revitalizing its historic downtown."



Destination Guide

Total Copies Distributed in FY 23-24: **8,781**

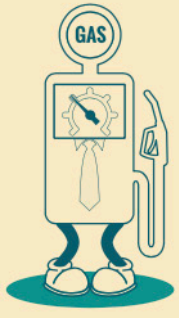
Top States Requesting Destination Guides:

1. North Carolina
2. Florida
3. South Carolina
4. Virginia
5. Georgia

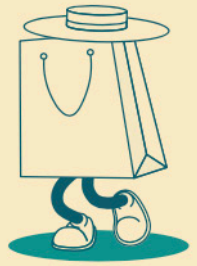


TOURISM DOLLARS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU

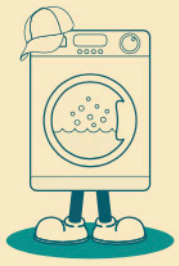
Tourism Puts Money In Your Pocket!



- Hickory Metro area visitors spend money with...
- Hotels and Motels
 - Conventions/Venues
 - Restaurants
 - Tourist Attractions
 - Retail Stores
 - Entertainment Places
 - Service Stations



...Who spend their money with...



- Hardware Stores
- Grocery Stores
- Insurance Agencies
- Real Estate Firms
- Repair/Maintenance Firms
- Drug Stores
- Laundries
- Car Dealers
- Utility Companies
- Doctors and Dentists
- Florists



...Who re-spend tourism dollars in the same circles!

WHAT GOES 'ROUND - COMES 'ROUND!

Hickory Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)

Bruce Eckard, Chair
Conover City Council

Kimberly George
Senior Vice President, Communications and Corporate
Citizenship Alex Lee, Inc.

Renee Keever, Treasurer
Piedmont Center Associates, Controller

Tom Hart
Conover City Manager

Patrica Hatch (Served 2019-2023)
Sweet Tea Bed and Breakfast Owner

Lindsay Keisler
The Chamber of Catawba County President

Brad Lail (Appointed May 2024)
Piedmont Center Associates, Owner

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

Terry Taylor, Counsel

Warren Wood
Hickory City Manager



(The Late) **Leroy Lail**
Piedmont Center Associates, Managing Partner
Chairman of the Hickory Furniture Mart



The Hickory Metro Convention Center's main roadway entrance has a new name honoring a local couple that has pioneered the way for Hickory, Catawba County, and the Metro's hospitality and tourism industry. Lynn Lail and the late Leroy Lail, local trailblazers in this great industry, are now honored with the newly established **Lynn and Leroy Lane**.

Convention Center and Visitors Bureau Staff (Visit Hickory)

Mandy Hildebrand
CEO

Libby Barger
Operations Part Time Staff

Rob Chavis
Operations/Event Staff

Elizabeth Clark
Marketing Coordinator

Anita Davis
Part Time Receptionist

Chrystal Dieter
Office Manager

Ed Gudat
Facilities Manager

Dave Hass
Operations/Event Staff

Amber Howard
Director of Events

Sarah Jones
Director of Sales and Marketing

Randy Keeter
Operations Part Time Staff

Brendon Vinton
Operations Part Time Staff

Ruth Warlick
Operations Part Time Staff

Kendyl Warren
Convention & Event Services Coordinator

Other:
Financial Services - Western Piedmont Council of
Governments (WPCOG)

Marketing Materials - Accent Creative

Audio Video/Technical Services -
Jackson Creative

Hickory Metro Convention Center Exclusive Caterer -
Liazzo's Catering

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