

HICKORY

@VisitHickoryMetro

Hickory Metro Convention Center and Visitors Bureau
Annual Report FY 2022-2023





J&T Pixels Photography

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HCTDA Board Chair

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To our tourism partners and colleagues,

Fiscal Year 2022-2023 was a year of growth, positive interruptions, and accolades and it's due to decades of collaboration with tourism partners and community leaders.

There was significant growth in the numbers with occupancy tax totaling the highest amount in Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority's history at almost \$2.5 million. Even with half of the convention center under renovation for two months, there was an increase in the number of events and meetings held at the convention center when compared to the last four years. More events, 26 of which were new, led to an increase in event revenue. And according to a study done by Visit NC, 200 additional employees joined the travel and tourism industry this year in Catawba County which shows growth.

Positive interruptions lead to future success. On May 1 community leaders came together to break ground for the expansion and renovation of the Hickory Metro Convention Center. More details on the \$14 million project are on page 5 of the annual report. This project provides opportunities to host new and larger events, which yields a positive economic impact. Other community projects like the addition of more outdoor trails, entertainment venues and restaurants, not only delights residents, but it also will help attract more visitors. In addition, the Fairfield Inn & Suites underwent a complete renovation and reopened with 107 overnight rooms.

Accolades for our communities were outstanding throughout the last year. Travel + Leisure Magazine named the Hickory Metro the #1 Most Beautiful and Affordable Places to Live in the U.S. As we know new residents are visitors first and this article put our community in a positive light. Dozens of social media influencers and well-loved publications like Our State Magazine promoted Hickory as one of the best leisure destinations. The Hampton Inn by Hilton received a Hilton Award of Excellence placing them in the top five percent of all Hamptons (there are over 5000 Hamptons) and the Courtyard by Marriott received a Gold Circle Award.

The HCTDA board also suffered a loss of one of its long-time advocates. Phil Yount, a former Hickory City Council member and supporter of tourism, served on the board several times since inception in the 1980s. Phil contributed a great amount of time over the years and brought a wealth of knowledge to the table that supported growth of tourism. He will be greatly missed.

The travel and tourism industry continues to thrive in 2023-2024 and it's all due to collectively working together for the greater good of our community.



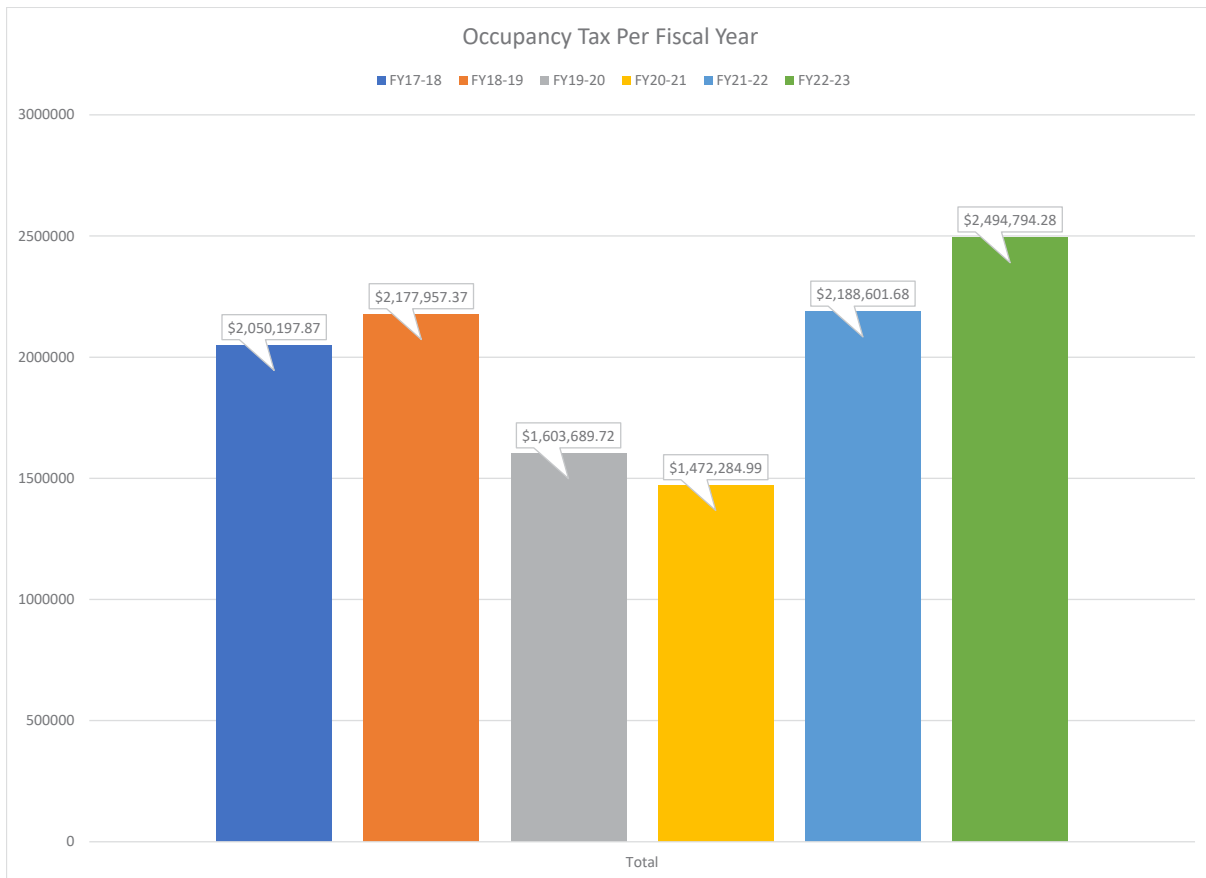
Mandy Pitts Hildebrand
CEO
Hickory Metro Convention
Center and Visitors Bureau



Bruce Eckard, Chair
Hickory-Conover Tourism
Development Authority

Occupancy Tax:

- Occupancy tax collections were the highest on record at almost \$2.5 million. This exceeds the previous year by more than \$300,000.
 - Occupancy tax is the highest in history due to the increase of the average daily rate, business travel returning post pandemic, along with attracting more meetings, events, sports tourism, and leisure travel.
- The 6% occupancy tax collected 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 and more to short term rentals like Airbnb and online companies like Priceline.
- Occupancy tax revenue can only be used to pay convention center debt and operations and on marketing efforts to bring business, leisure, and meeting & communications to the community.



Visitor Spending in NC/Catawba County 2022:

- Domestic and international visitors to and within Catawba County spent \$331.48 million in 2022, an increase of 13.5 percent from 2021. The data was released in August 2023 and comes from an annual study commissioned by Visit North Carolina, a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

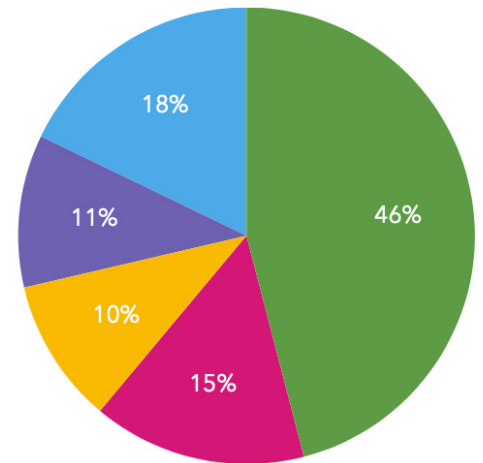
Tourism impact highlights for 2022:

- The travel and tourism industry directly employs more than 2,400 in Catawba County.
- Total payroll generated by the tourism industry in Catawba County was \$85.2 million.
- State tax revenue generated in Catawba County totaled \$13.3 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.
- Tax savings per resident in Catawba County is \$151.57 due to visitor spending.



Hickory Metro Convention Center Events :

- Hickory Metro Convention Center & Visitors Center Team attended six conferences with executives, meeting planners and sports rights holders throughout the year marketing the amenities throughout the area. More than 60 connections lead to at least seven future tournaments, meetings and events that will be held in the community and more are still in negotiation.
- Partnerships within the Hickory Metro Sports Commission and the City of Hickory led to more than ten large tournaments which brought overnight rooms.
- More than 75 Tourism Partners with the area work together as a team to welcome guests to our community. This group held three gatherings last year but stay connected year round.
- The Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott, just steps away from the convention center, was fully renovated and it opened the last week of December 2022.



- Corporate/Government (85 events)
- Public Show (28 events)
- Sports (19 events)
- Association (20 events)
- SMERF (33 events)
- *Social/Military/Education/Religious/Fraternal



Convention Center Renovation/Addition:

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Monday, May 1 at the Hickory Metro Convention Center with community leaders. Hickory Construction is the contractor for the \$14 million renovation and expansion which will add more than 46,000 square feet to the convention center. Once the project is complete, there will be a total of more than 132,000 usable square feet on one level. The project is expected to be complete by the summer of 2024.

An additional 46,194 square feet will be 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 counts, cheerleading, gymnastics, wrestling events, and more.
- A multi purpose area that will highlight our furniture manufacturing history is in a 2,500-square-foot space with self-contained restrooms, catering space, outdoor terrace, and video display capability.
- The remaining space is for hallways and lobbies, and back of the house storage areas.

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

- Upgraded finishes, lighting, and audio visual 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 North Entry, which is the main entrance seen from I-40.
- New covered walkway connection from existing parking deck to the main entrance.
- Additional small meeting room.
- Enhanced video signage and wayfinding.



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



HICKORY^{NC}
WE ARE
BREAKING GROUND

NEW EXPANSION AND RENOVATION COMING TO THE HICKORY METRO CONVENTION CENTER

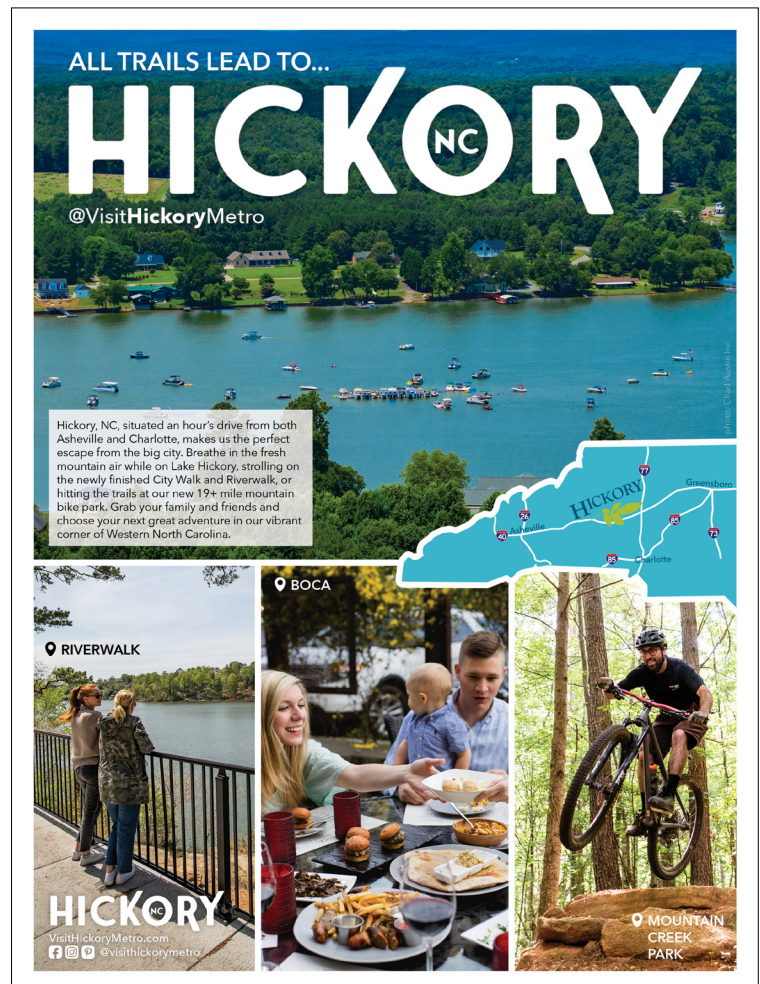
+35,000-sq-ft for meetings, trade shows & sporting events
+Renovated meeting rooms



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Sarah Davis Jones, CMP, TMP
Director of Sales & Marketing
Sarah@hickorymetro.com
828.322.1335
visithickorymetro.com



MPI - Carolina Blitz Magazine
April Issue 2023



ALL TRAILS LEAD TO... HICKORY^{NC}
@VisitHickoryMetro

Hickory, NC, situated an hour's drive from both Asheville and Charlotte, makes us the perfect escape from the big city. Breathe in the fresh mountain air while on Lake Hickory, strolling on the newly finished City Walk and Riverwalk, or hitting the trails at our new 19+ mile mountain bike park. Grab your family and friends and choose your next great adventure in our vibrant corner of Western North Carolina.

RIVERWALK
BOCA
MOUNTAIN CREEK PARK

VisitHickoryMetro.com
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Our State Magazine
January Issue 2023



Mountain Creek Park
Bakers Mountain Park
Riverbend Park

MAKE IT YOUR NATURE
Let us be your guide as you take in new moments in Hickory. Finding those off the beaten path things to do and see are just a car ride away.

HICKORY^{NC}
VisitHickoryMetro.com
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2023 YEAR OF THE TRAIL
Leave No Trace OUTDOOR NC

Foothills Digest
Spring Issue 2023

Social Media Content

@VisitHickoryMetro

Facebook:

- Organic Reach: 153,886
- Page & Profile Visits: 12,693
- New Page Likes: 712
- Engagement: 75,668
- Organic Link Clicks: 437
- Net Followers: 904
- 20.70% Men Vs. 79.30% Women

Paid Promotion

(Meta: Facebook & Instagram)

- People Reached: 635,340
- Impressions: 1,063,658
- Link Clicks: 23,473
- Money Spent: \$4,158.76

Combined Facebook & Paid Promotion:

- People Reached: 789,226
- Link Clicks: 23,910

Instagram:

- Reach: 54,110
- Profile Visits: 5,244
- New Followers: 1,232

Giphy:

- Sticker Views: 875,324

YouTube:

- Views: 2,922
- Watch Time Average: 4.29 Hours
- Subscribers: 18

Pinterest:

- Impressions: 4,050
- Engagements: 130
- Outbound Clicks: 19
- Saves: 18
- Total Audience: 2,652
- Engaged Audience: 76

Website

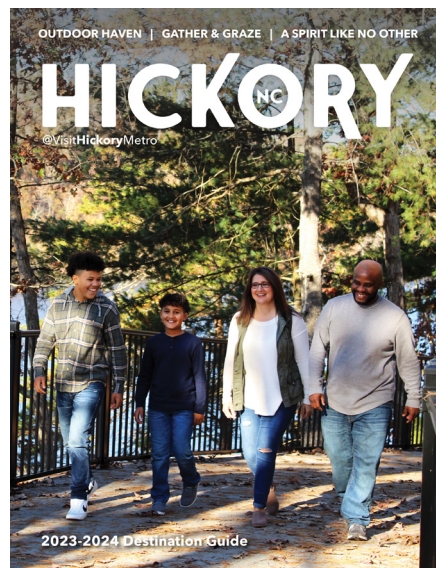
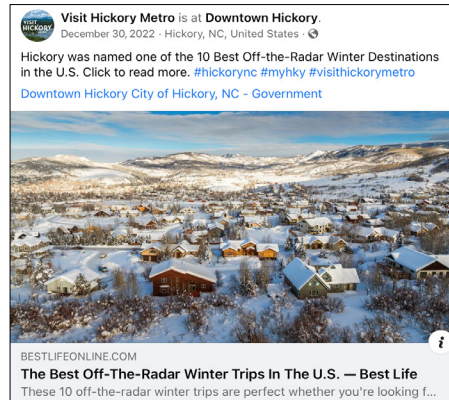
Created Blogs: 20

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

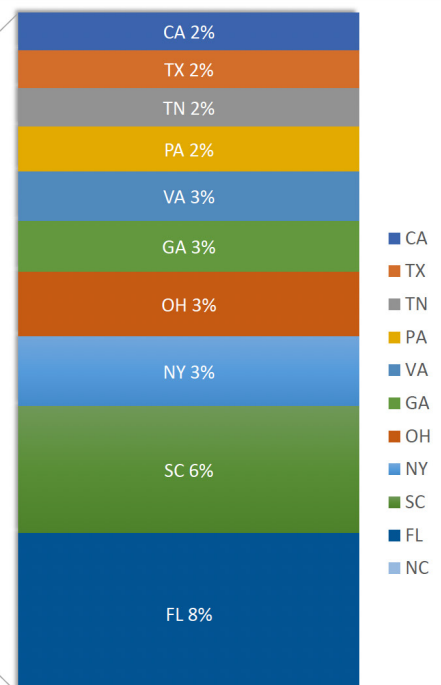
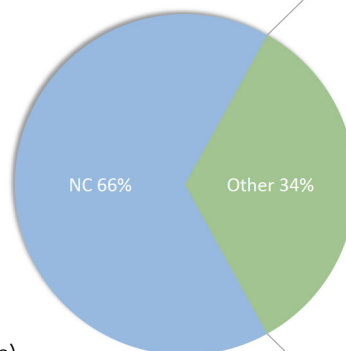
Destination Guide

(physical or digital) that have been sent out in FY 22-23:

- 2,118 - Individual Requests
- 165 BOXES distributed - (9,405 individual copies)
- 11,523 Grand total for destination guide reach.



Top 10 States
Requesting Destination Guides
July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023



Hickory Conover Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA)

Bruce Eckard, Chair
Conover City Council

Kimberly George (Appointed August 2023)
Senior Vice President, Communications and Corporate
Citizenship Alex Lee, Inc.

Renee Kever, 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

(The Late) Phil Yount
Former Hickory City Council Member



Convention Center and Visitors Bureau Staff (Visit Hickory Metro)

Mandy Hildebrand
CEO

Libby Barger
Operations Part Time Staff

Rob Chavis
Operations/Event Staff

Elizabeth Clark
Marketing Coordinator

Chrystal Dieter
Visitor Center Coordinator

Kimberly Flick
Operations/Custodian

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

Chase Martin
Operations Part Time Staff

Steve Pearson (Retired April 2023)
Operations/Event Staff

Brendon Vinton
Operations Part Time Staff

Ruth Warlick
Operations Part Time Staff

Kendyl Warren
Sales Assistant

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

Audio Video/Technical Services -
Jackson Creative

Hickory Metro Convention Center Exclusive Caterer -
Liazzo's Catering



2023 Groundbreaking with HCTDA Board Members & HMCC CEO