



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Discover ! **KALAMAZOO®**

INTRODUCTION

2021 was a remarkable year for travel and tourism in Kalamazoo County. While the beginning of the year was much like pandemic-ravaged 2020, in July and August we recorded all-time highs for room nights sold in Kalamazoo County. By the end of the year, Kalamazoo County achieved the strongest year-on-year growth in room night demand of all twelve of the markets we track in Michigan.

Some inherent advantages of our market contributed to this. Most visitors to Kalamazoo County come here on casual road trips, and these were the type of trips to recover fastest in 2021. Once travel sentiment started to improve, Discover Kalamazoo reinvested in advertising to potential leisure travelers, launching paid social media and display campaigns and contracting with KPS3, a new partner to invigorate our paid search marketing. Just as people were starting to plan trips we began a concerted paid search campaign, making sure that people saw Discover Kalamazoo sponsored listings when they were searching terms like “weekend getaways.” This campaign, running in cities across the Midwest, has since become the #1 source of sponsored traffic to our website.

Our Sports team was also poised to take advantage of the pent-up demand from 2020, and worked with our partners to safely host sporting events as soon as conditions allowed. By the end of the year, Kalamazoo County hosted more than 40 sporting events and booked almost 35,000 room nights, an all-time record. The Meetings market has been slower to recover, but the quarter-on-quarter improvement we saw as the year progressed gave us confidence heading into 2022.

The Discover Kalamazoo team responded to the changing conditions with agility and positivity. We developed a strong strategy which proved robust and appropriately guided our tactical decision-making, and we acquired new data sources which enabled us to refine our execution. We are optimistic that we can translate our 2021 successes into sustainable, long-term growth.

Jane Ghosh
President & CEO

OUR VALUES

WE ARE OUTSTANDING AMBASSADORS

We are passionately proud of our community, and we represent it with operational excellence.

WE EMBRACE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

We commit to equity because we understand that equity is the foundation of diversity and inclusion and we recognize that we can't be outstanding ambassadors without it. We are creating an organization that reflects the diversity of our community and visitors to ensure all are valued and welcomed.

WE EXUDE CONTAGIOUS POSITIVITY

Our cups are always half full. We act with positive intent and assume others do, too.

WE HAVE A GROWTH MINDSET

We are curious and courageous. We empower ourselves and each other to try new things and we are not afraid to fail.

WE ACT WITH INTEGRITY AND EMPATHY

We are honest, transparent, and ethical. We care about our team's wellbeing. We treat people with dignity and respect.



2021 DISCOVER KALAMAZOO STAFF

Jennie Cook

Vice President of Administration & Operations

Jaimie Frake

Sports Event Intern

Jane Ghosh

President & CEO

Madison Kadlec

Marketing Intern

Brian Persky

Director of Sports Event Development

Ashley Peruchietti, CMP

Meeting Services Manager

Kirsten Rock

Director of Meeting Sales

Alyssa Seedorff

Senior Manager of Content Development & Strategy

Madysen Stoneman

Sports Event Development Manager

Craig Vaughan

Finance Manager

Dana Wagner

Director of Marketing & Communications

Amber Whitfield

Partner Engagement Coordinator

Samara Woolfolk

Administration & Operations Coordinator

DESTINATION SERVICES SPECIALISTS

Esther Cetina

Mallory Hernandez

Jennie Ko

Sa'Vjon Tamlin

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dave Beysiegel (Treasurer)

The Moors Golf Club

Craig Davies

Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites

Tracy Hall

Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners

John Liberty

West Michigan Beer Tours

Clarence Lloyd (Vice-Chair)

Southwest Michigan First / The Chamber

Anant (Andy) Patel

Candlewood Suites

Cheryl Pickett (Secretary)

Kalamazoo Marathon/Borgess Run

Vicky Thinnes (Chair)

Millennium Restaurant Group

Troy Thrash

Air Zoo

Joy Underwood

Staybridge Suites

Jane Ghosh

President & CEO

Discover Kalamazoo



2021 ADVISORY COUNCIL

Kristen Chesak

Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo

Shelly Claflin

Bell's Brewery

Ken Fischang, CHME, CMP, CTA

Gilmore Car Museum

Andrew Haan

Kalamazoo Downtown Partnership

Jeanne Hess

Kalamazoo City Commission

Ron Howard

Radiant Church

Mike Klok

Stuffed Brain Studio

Jackie Koney

Vicksburg Mill Project

Vic Ledbetter

Portage City Council

Bill McElhone

Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Kenny Nichols

Henry Ford College

Lisa Panich

Kalamazoo Nature Center

Rob Pennock

Miller Auditorium

Western Michigan University

David Rachowicz

Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo
Center

Brad Schmitz

Holiday Inn & Suites Kalamazoo
West

Matt Schuster

Public Media Network

Becca Shemberger

Kalamazoo Experiential Learning
Center

Carla Sones

Southwest Michigan First

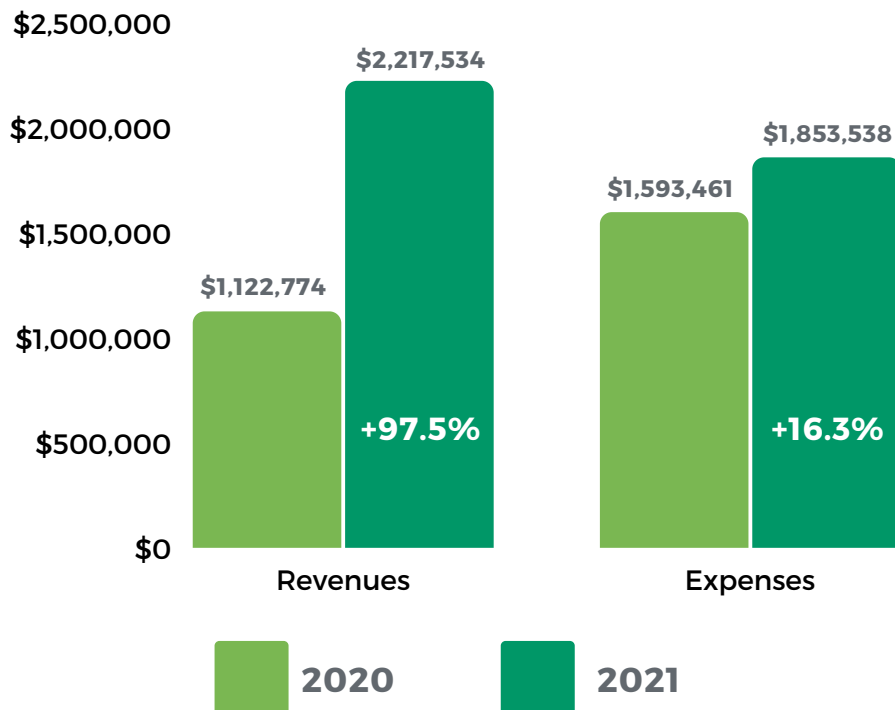
Andy Widner

Spirit of Kalamazoo

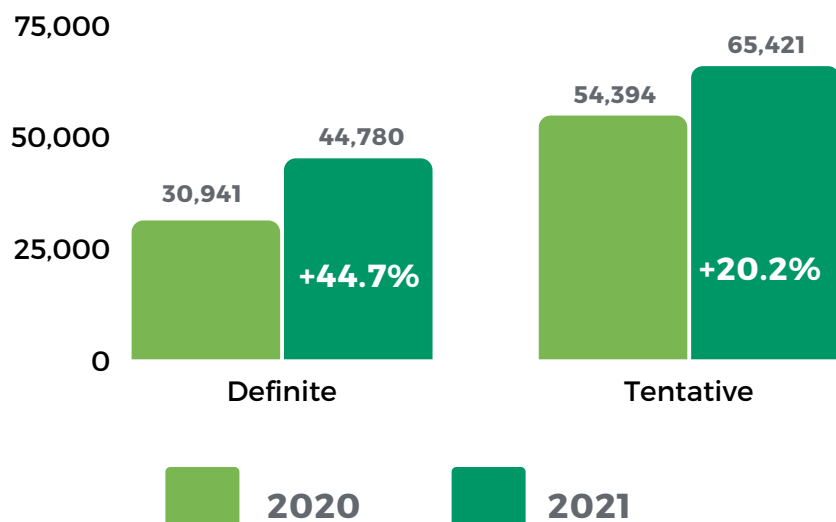
Craig Williams

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek
International Airport

FINANCIALS



ROOM NIGHTS



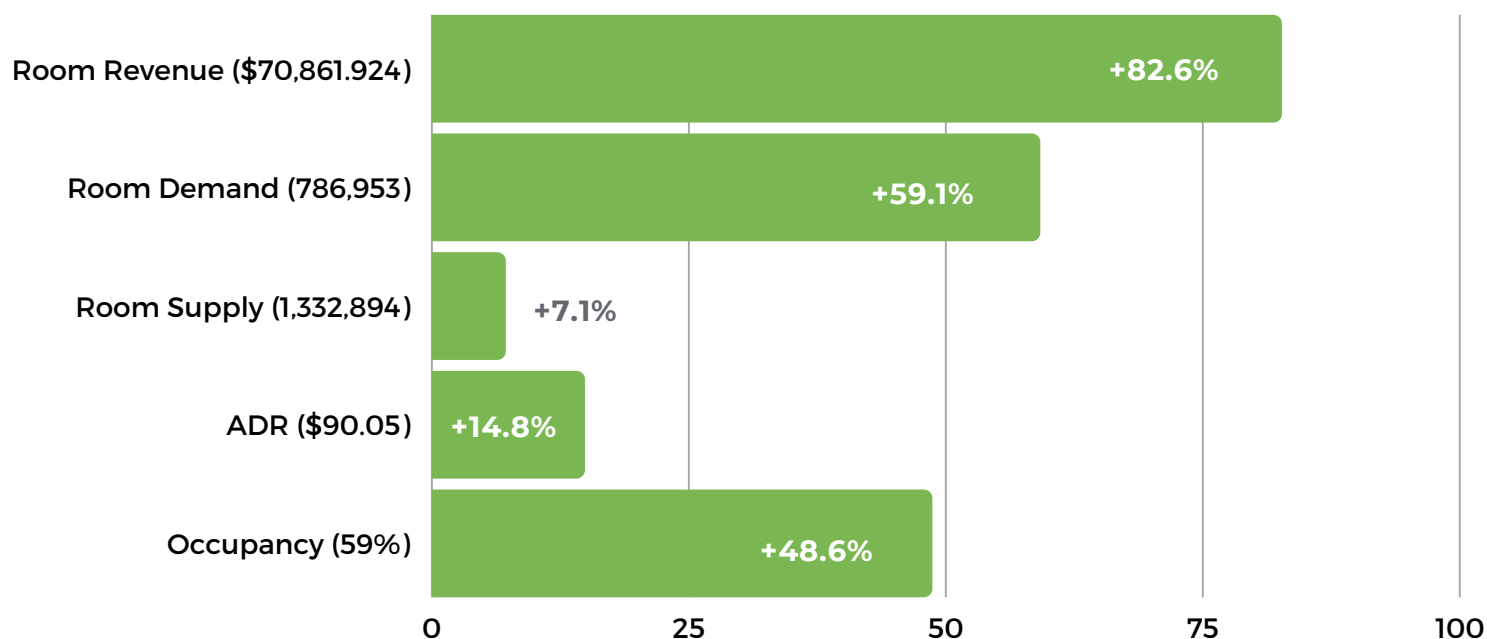
Definite:
Future room nights
confirmed as definite

Tentative:
Future room nights
distributed as tentative
leads

2021 HOTEL TREND REPORT

Growth percentage vs. 2020

Source: STR, Inc.



MARKETING

355,589

**TOTAL
WEBSITE
VISITORS
(+32.8% YOY)**

352,195

**UNIQUE
WEBSITE
VISITORS
(+34.1% YOY)**



68,674 FOLLOWERS

+4,425 FROM 2020



32,419 FOLLOWERS

+5,886 FROM 2020



12,800 FOLLOWERS

-111 FROM 2020

MOST VISITED PAGES ON SITE AND PAGEVIEWS

- **EVENTS** (67,906)
- **PLAY** (18,408)
- **PLAN YOUR TRIP** (12,956)
- **269 COOL THINGS TO DO** (12,120)
- **ADVENTURE & RECREATION** (11,499)
- **MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS** (9,427)
- **SHOPPING** (9,380)
- **HIDDEN GEM RESTAURANTS** (8,712)

TARGET AUDIENCES

Discover Kalamazoo has focused marketing on areas more than 30 miles outside of Kalamazoo. Chicago and Detroit are our top two sources of visitors.

26,127
WEBSITE
VISITORS FROM
CHICAGO
(+105.9% YOY)

19,657
WEBSITE
VISITORS FROM
DETROIT
(+137.4% YOY)

PAID DIGITAL MEDIA

- Paid Search
 - 909,445 impressions
 - 53,855 clicks
 - 5.92% click through rate
- Social Media Ads
 - 18,401,236 impressions
 - 106,798 clicks
 - 0.987% click through rate

BEST PERFORMING SOCIAL POSTS

NSRA Street Rod Nationals North

- 2,889 link clicks
- 45,685 reached
- \$0.10 cost per click



Twine Urban Winery

- 17,667 post engagements
- 2,350 link clicks
- 139,462 reached
- \$0.04 cost per click



Gilmore Car Museum

- 1,664 link clicks
- 43,317 reached
- \$0.18 cost per click



MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

- **The all-new Discover Kalamazoo Travel Guide**
 - Completely redesigned and rewritten, the new guide hit distribution in April and included local interviews and QR codes connecting to more information online.
 - We added several new distribution routes to get the guide out into Ohio, northern Indiana, and the Chicago area, in addition to locations around the state.
 - It was also the first guide that we translated into Spanish.
- **Securing and utilizing the Voyage Dashboard**
 - This dashboard is a new tool we added on this year to get a better understanding of who our visitors are, where they're coming from (down to the zip code level), and where they visit in the county. Never before have we had this much insight.
 - Working with the WE Upjohn Institute for ad testing and utilizing this visitation data allowed us to see our advertising impact for the first time. In one cluster, the treated group had a higher visitation rate post-advertisement; characteristics of that cluster included below median households with children, above median adults with bachelors degrees and below median income
- **Securing a new paid search partner, KPS3**
 - Since starting in August, the campaigns have generated a total of 696,000 impressions and 40,900 clicks.
 - We have been able to also run campaigns around major events in Kalamazoo, like the USTA's and NSRA Street Rod Nationals, to help create incremental visits.
 - Our work with KPS3 also led to the development of the new Plan Your Trip page which has generated even more engagement on our site:
<https://www.discoverkalamazoo.com/play/plan-your-trip/>
- **The search for a new website developer**
 - We went through many sessions and interviews to find the best partner, landing on Simpleview.
 - There will be more ease of use for our partners now that our CRM will be fully connected to the site, and we're looking forward to having robust microsites for meetings and sports which will allow planners to filter and compare venues and see the new 360 degree tours we're working on with Threshold 360.
 - The new site will launch August 2022.

TRAVEL INFLUENCERS AND CONTENT CREATORS

- MI Playground
 - <https://www.enjoymiplayground.com/blogs/news/summer-days-in-kalamazoo>
 - Creating content around the urban/natural environment we have here in Kalamazoo, highlighting our trails, parks, water recreation, and downtown activities. The videos created have been utilized in our YouTube TV ad campaign we started this year for the first time.
- Flo's Favorites
 - <https://flosfavorites.com/kalamazoo-michigan-things-to-do-restaurants/>
 - Chicago based travel blogger who visited Kalamazoo with her husband for a weekend getaway
- Charlotte Betts
 - <https://www.charlotteabetts.com/blog/travel-kalamazoo-mi>
 - Chicago based travel blogger who visited Kalamazoo with her friend and her two daughters for a girls' trip
- Joey Amato
 - Founder of Pride Journeys, visited for a weekend getaway and wrote an article that was syndicated across 8 LGBTQ+ content sites
 - Kalamazoo blog: <https://www.pridejourneys.com/post/pride-journey-kalamazoo-michigan>
 - Kalamazoo video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geOnqpzEyNI>
 - Discover Kalamazoo has also sponsored a featured listing on the Pride Journeys website for the past two years

INDUSTRY PARTNER MARKETING

- West Michigan Tourism Association
 - Submission and coverage of our area events, attractions, happenings
 - Give a Craft listing on their beer map
 - Kalamazoo video shown on new television screens in all 13 Michigan Welcome Centers from July - December



MEETINGS & EVENTS

29

**GROUPS
HOSTED IN
KALAMAZOO**

10,022

ROOM NIGHTS

\$4.74M
**ECONOMIC
IMPACT**

MAJOR RETURNING EVENTS

- NATIONAL STREET ROD ASSOCIATION NATIONALS NORTH
- AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB APPLE BLOSSOM CLUSTER DOG SHOW IN THE SPRING AND HARVEST CLUSTER DOG SHOW IN THE FALL
- UNITED KENNEL CLUB PREMIER NATIONALS DOG SHOW

PARTNER OUTREACH

- Connected and/or promoted our local partners and businesses to visiting groups and conferences at least 57 times throughout the year.
- Hosted Quarterly Lodging Sales Partner Meetings
- Sales team visited hotel properties in August
- Launched Extranet platform with hotel partners to automate lead distribution/bid submission process
- Launched Bandwango Savings Passport, a mobile coupon and discount platform that allows our local businesses more opportunities to encourage visitors and conference and event attendees to discover Kalamazoo and all of our awesome local businesses, restaurants and attractions.

TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Connect Marketplace – Tampa, FL (August 2021)
- IMEX America – Las Vegas, NV (November 2021)
- Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) 2021 Annual Conference – Ypsilanti, MI (August 2021)
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI) 2021 Great Lake Education Summit – Ft. Wayne, IN (November 2021)
- Professional Fraternity Association (PFA) – Irving, TX (September 2021)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

- MSAE 2021 Annual Conference – Ypsilanti, MI
- MPI 2021 Great Lake Education Summit – Ft. Wayne, IN
- Destinations International 2021 Annual Conference (virtual)
- Event Services Professionals Association (ESPA) Annual Conference (virtual)

MEETING SALES ACTIVITY

- Michigan Society of Government Meeting Professionals (MiSGMP) Monthly meetings
- Pure MI Mixology Midwest (OH, IN, KY planners)
- Destination Michigan Lunch n' Learn (Frankenmuth, MI & Kalamazoo, MI)
- Destination Michigan Showcase – Lansing, MI
- MI Meeting Expo – Detroit, MI
- Taste of MI – Grand Rapids, MI
- MSAE 2021 Spring Golf Outing
- Meeting Professionals International MI December Signature Series
- Destination Midwest

NOTABLE EVENTS AND SERVICES

Micro/Mini International World Meet and Downtown Bates Alley Preview event

The Micro/Mini Car World Meet was held in Kalamazoo for the first time in 11 years at the Gilmore Car Museum in June of 2021. Discover Kalamazoo worked with the Kalamazoo Downtown Partnership, Kalamazoo Experiential Learning Center, Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites and their team, Wiser Productions and many more local partners to put on an awesome event downtown. Micro and Mini Cars parked along Bates Alley and in the nearby parking lot to provide a 'preview event' to the public before their show at Gilmore on Saturday. There was live music from the band *Blue* while folks perused the mini cars and enjoyed food and drinks from our wonderful local restaurants and businesses downtown.

National High School Mock Trial Board Visit

Board members of the National High School Mock Trial came from all over the country to plan their upcoming National Championships in Kalamazoo. Once the work was over we were able to have some fun and provide them with a 'taste of Kalamazoo'. The Discover Kalamazoo team took them on a tour of the downtown craft beverage scene hosted by West Michigan Beer Tours and we ended the night by learning to curl with the Kalamazoo Curling Club.

TESTIMONIAL

When I first started looking for a venue for my World meet for the Micro/Mini Cars, the Gilmore Car Museum was on the top of my list. As I started to plan the event, it became evident that we should expand it into a multi-day event since people were coming from all over the country, this is when I contacted Discover Kalamazoo. Working with Ashley Peruchietti, she quickly recognized the opportunity to offer not only our attendees but also the residents of the local community to see and enjoy our special cars. Not only did she have an excellent working relationship with the Gilmore Car Museum, she also worked with a number of hotels in the area to secure us a block of rooms at competitive rates so we had enough rooms for all of our attendees. In hindsight, working with Discover Kalamazoo! and Ashley, made the planning and execution of our World Meet not only easier, but it provided an enhanced experience for all of our attendees. Everyone wants to know when we are going to do it again in Kalamazoo.

- Jim Golomb, Micro/Mini Car World Meet

[CLICK TO PLAY VIDEO:](#)



Discover! KALAMAZOO SPORTS™

40+

EVENTS
HOSTED

20,000+

ATHLETES

\$15.4M

ECONOMIC
IMPACT

43,520

TENTATIVE ROOM NIGHTS
(2ND HIGHEST ON RECORD NEXT TO 2017)

34,758

DEFINITE ROOM NIGHTS
(NEW ALL-TIME RECORD)

MAJOR EVENTS HOSTED

- USTA Boys' 18 & 16 National Championships hosted by Kalamazoo College
 - Nearly 470 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 2,880 hotel room nights realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$1,211,397
- MHSAA Individual Wrestling Finals hosted by the Michigan High School Athletic Association
 - Nearly 1,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 590 hotel room nights realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$704,488
- U.S. Figure Skating's National Solo Dance Finals hosted by the Greater Kalamazoo Skating Association
 - Nearly 300 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 528 room nights realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$513,869
- MHSAA Team Wrestling Finals hosted by the Michigan High School Athletic Association
 - Nearly 900 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 615 hotel room nights realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$458,449

TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Sports ETA Virtual Trade Show (May, 2021)
- Pure Michigan Sports Sales Blitz (June, 2021)
- Pure Michigan Sports Sales Blitz (August, 2021)
- Connect Sports (August, 2021)
- TEAMS Conference & Expo (September, 2021)
- SPORTS – The Relationship Conference (October, 2021)
- Sports ETA Symposium (October, 2021)
- Esports Travel Summit (December, 2021)

DISCOVER KALAMAZOO SPORTS NETWORK

60

ATTENDEES

On National Girls & Women in Sports Day, Discover Kalamazoo Sports hosted “Breaking the Glass Ceiling as a Female, Parent, and Leader In a Male Dominated Industry” featuring Toni Will with the Kalamazoo Wings and Becky Hall, Kalamazoo College Director of Athletics. This event served as Discover Kalamazoo Sports’ most highly participated educational event since the creation of the Network in 2019.

75

ATTENDEES

CommUniverCity
Tailgate

55

ATTENDEES

Emerging from
Covid-19: Becoming a
Part of the Solution.

DISCOVER KALAMAZOO SPORTS GOLF OUTING

HELD ON NOVEMBER 1ST, 2021, AT GULL LAKE VIEW GOLF CLUB & RESORT. THE OUTING SERVED AS A FUNDRAISER AND AWARENESS BUILDER THAT BROUGHT KALAMAZOO’S SPORTS COMMUNITY TOGETHER WHILE HELPING SUPPORT DISCOVER KALAMAZOO’S EFFORTS IN STRENGTHENING THE IMPACT THAT SPORTS EVENT TOURISM HAS ON THE REGION. \$5,000+ IN NET REVENUE WAS GENERATED (\$415 CONTRIBUTION MADE TO KALAMAZOO FRIENDS OF RECREATION).

SPORTS CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

12 new blog posts created in 2021 including:

- [6 Venues to Host Your Next Sports Event](#)
- [7 Ways to Experience Soccer In Kalamazoo](#)
- [10 Sports Events That You Didn't Know Were Hosted In Kalamazoo](#)
- [Your Winter Sports & Activities Bucket List In Kalamazoo](#)
- As well as many more which you can find by [clicking here](#)

TESTIMONIALS

“Our partnership with Discover Kalamazoo began in 2015 when GKSA was selected by US Figure Skating to host the 2016 US Synchronized Skating Championships. DK has been an integral part of our team going forward, with several other events, including the 2019 Midwest and Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships which brought 160 teams with more than 2500 skaters plus their coaches and families to Kalamazoo during the Polar Vortex. Our annual synchro competition, Kick-Off Classic, brings 130 teams with about 1600 skaters from all over the Midwest every November. DK has provided much support to our volunteer-run club – from coordinating with local hotels, to providing valuable visitor information for our event website and social media, and even volunteering at the events. Thank you to the DK team, especially Brian, Madysen, and Ashley, for all of your support over the years.”

-Kristen Crandle, Event Chair, Greater Kalamazoo Skating Association



DESTINATION SERVICES & PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Starting in October 2021

Duties of the Destination Services Specialists:

- Event set-up
- Staff event information tables
- Name badge and registration assistance
- Welcome bag/packet stuffing
- Publication deliveries
- Staffing of downtown visitor's center as needed

4

**PART TIME
DESTINATION
SERVICES
SPECIALISTS HIRED**

210

**HOURS IN SERVICE
OF EVENTS AND
AIRPORT SUPPORT
FROM OCT - DEC
2021**

ENGAGEMENT AT THE AIRPORT

- **UPDATED TAXI AND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES TO HELP VISITORS HAVE ACCESS TO UPDATED INFORMATION.**
- **CREATED A TALLY SYSTEM TO TRACK HOW MANY VISITORS ENGAGE AT THE DESK.**

TEAM VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- MLK DAY OF SERVICE AT AACORN
- KALAMAZOO RIVER VALLEY TRAIL CLEANUP FOR KALAMAZOO BIKE WEEK
- YOUTH DAY AT BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL
- INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY OF SERVICE PACKING FOOD AT THE SOUTH MICHIGAN FOOD BANK
- MI CARES FOR TOURISM PAINTING AND MAINTENANCE AT BINDER PARK ZOO

PLANNING FOR 2022

In 2022, we will continue to face the uncertainty of the pandemic while striving to exceed several all-time performance records from 2021. Assets to Discover Kalamazoo in this endeavor include our reorganized, re-energized fully staffed team of outstanding ambassadors, our track record of delivering top notch services to meeting and event planners, and our relatively affordable destination in an inflationary environment. Challenges include competing for travel dollars with post-pandemic big-ticket "greatest of all trips" adventures and the on-going effects of the pandemic itself, especially on the Meetings market and business travel.

GOAL:

We are confident that we will stay on track to achieve our goal of returning visitor spending in Kalamazoo County to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

\$504M

2019 ANNUAL
VISITOR SPENDING