

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**



Discover! **KALAMAZOO**[®]

INTRODUCTION

Before we dig into 2023, first a word about 2022. As mentioned in previous reports, county-by-county visitor spending data is published significantly in arrears. After publishing our last annual report, we learned that in 2022 visitor spending in Kalamazoo County grew 17% on top of 2021's record number, setting a new all-time high of \$682 million. As in previous years, the #1 category for this spend was Food & Beverage, followed by Lodging, Retail, Transportation and finally Recreation. This visitor spending supports our unique local restaurants, bars, shops, events, and attractions. This in turn creates business opportunities, job opportunities, and most importantly helps sustain a vibrant community where people want to live, work and play.

Every county in Michigan fared differently during the pandemic with regards to tourism. Some counties barely saw a dip in visitor spending in 2020; counties which are particularly reliant on international visitors and big conventions took longer to recover. We are proud to report that of the 28 counties in Michigan with at least \$150 million in visitor spending in 2019, Kalamazoo County grew the fastest in 2022 vs 2019.

We cannot allow our recent record growth to make us complacent, and as you will see in the following pages in 2023 the Discover Kalamazoo team was anything but complacent!

The marketing team has been hard at work developing new positioning and advertising to promote Kalamazoo County and our many valued partners more effectively. From a business development perspective, definite room nights (business contracted for 2023 or future years) were significantly higher than 2021 and 2022, and we ended 2023 with more tentative room nights for business we are bidding on than we have ever had. We hosted and serviced many great events, and conducted an important study to help us understand how we can bring more events to Kalamazoo County in the future.

And all this work was underpinned by our valuable partners, who every day help us fulfill our mission to attract and wow visitors for the economic advancement of our county.

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.

2023 DISCOVER KALAMAZOO STAFF

Reed Benton

Business Development Manager

Jennie Cook

Vice President of Administration & Operations

Madysen Doyle

Senior Manager, Sports Event Development

Jane Ghosh

President & CEO

Mallory Hernandez

Administration & Operations Coordinator

Brian Persky, STS, SDLT

Director of Business Development

Ashley Peruchietti, CMP

Meeting Services Manager

Taya Pettis

Sports Event Coordinator

Alyssa Seedorff

Senior Manager of Content Development & Strategy

Amber Thompson

Partner Engagement Coordinator

Viviana Vidal

Business Development Manager

Dana Wagner

Director of Marketing & Communications

Justin Zeldes

Sports Event Development Manager

DESTINATION SERVICES SPECIALISTS

Chloe Johnson

Jennie Ko

Raina Skeels

Sa'Vjon Tamlin

Monica Tufts

INTERNS

Thomas Cooklin-Levey

Data Analyst



2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dave Beysiegel (Treasurer)

The Moors Golf Club

Jeff Breneman

Western Michigan University

Craig Davies

Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites

Jane Ghosh

Discover Kalamazoo

Clarence Lloyd (Past Chair)

The Chamber at Southwest Michigan First

Amy Luce (Secretary)

The Kalamazoo House Bed & Breakfast

Sterling Riethman

Bell's Brewery

Troy Thrash (Interim Chair)

Air Zoo Aerospace and Science Museum

Joy Underwood (Chair)

Staybridge Suites

Andy Wenzel

Fishbeck

Abigail Wheeler

Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners



2023 ADVISORY COUNCIL

Lisa Brayton

Portage City Council

Deb Droppers

Kalamazoo Experiential Learning
Center

Kimberly Earnshaw

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts

Cherri Emery

Cherri's Chocol'art

Ken Fischang, CHME, CMP, CTA

Gilmore Car Museum

Tracy Hall

Outfront Kalamazoo

Jeanne Hess

Kalamazoo City Commission

Stephanie Hinman

Kalamazoo State Theatre

Kathleen Hoyle

City of Portage

Bill Johnson

Gull Lake View Golf Club & Resort

Jackie Koney

Vicksburg Mill Project

Tracey Lawie

Miller Auditorium

Dani Lewis

Black Arts and Cultural Center

Kristie May

Dabney & Co.- Cocktail Bar & Lounge

Lisa Panich

Kalamazoo Nature Center

David Rachowicz

Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo
Center

Ida Salas

La Familia Cafe

Brad Schmitz

Dora Hotel Company

Carla Sones

Southwest Michigan First

Pierre van der Westhuizen

The Gilmore

Craig Williams

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek
International Airport

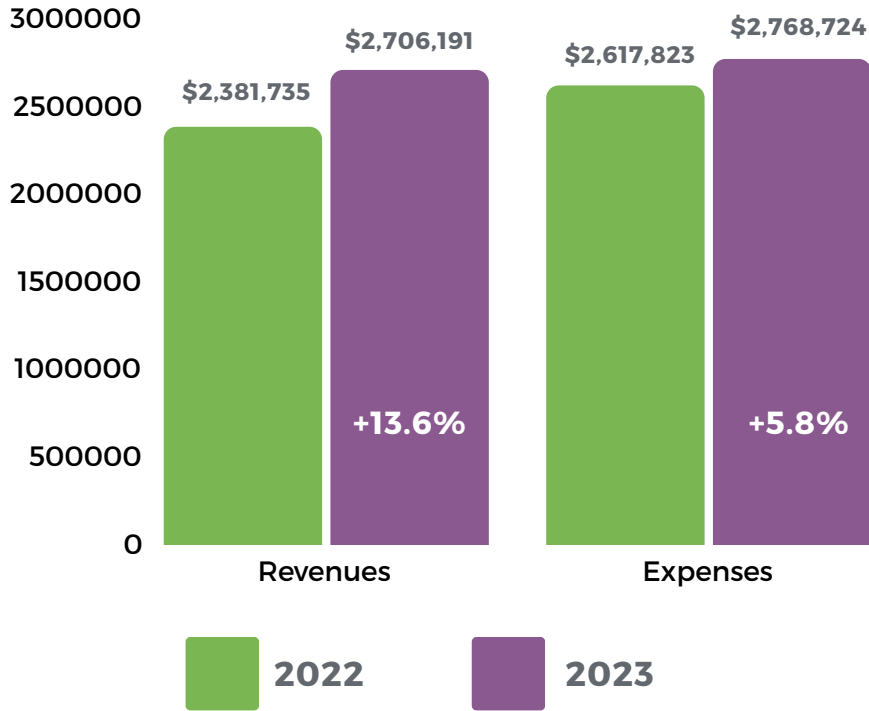
Justin Wendzel

Gull Meadow Farms

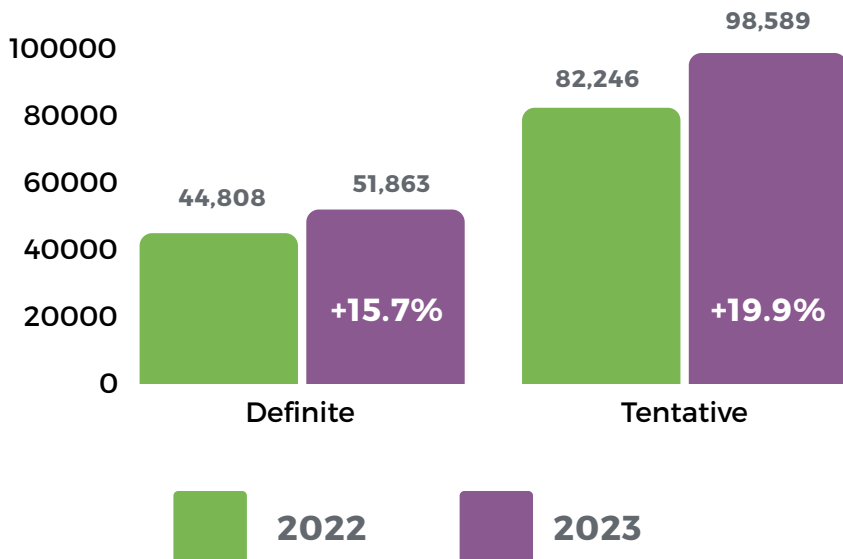
Megan Zielke

Vintage in the Zoo

FINANCIALS



ROOM NIGHTS



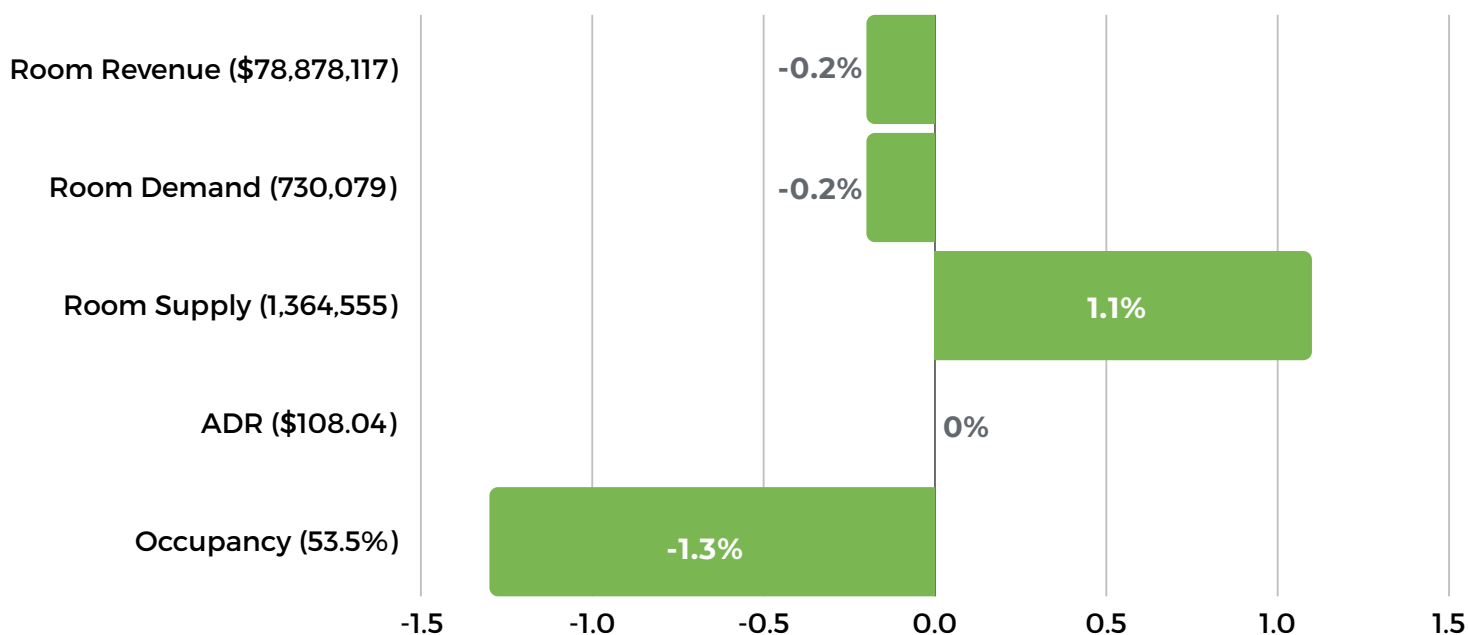
Definite:
Future room nights confirmed as definite

Tentative:
Future room nights distributed as tentative leads

2023 HOTEL TREND REPORT

Growth percentage vs. 2022

Source: STR, Inc.



MARKETING

680,664

TOTAL WEBSITE
SESSIONS
(+0.3% YOY)

555,584

UNIQUE
WEBSITE
VISITORS
(+0.2% YOY)



73,065 FOLLOWERS

+1,815 FROM 2022



34,806 FOLLOWERS

+1,245 FROM 2022



12,257 FOLLOWERS

-270 FROM 2022

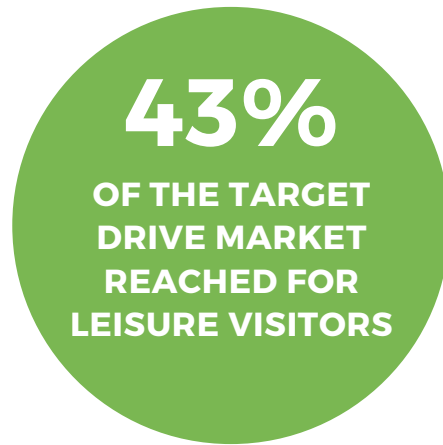
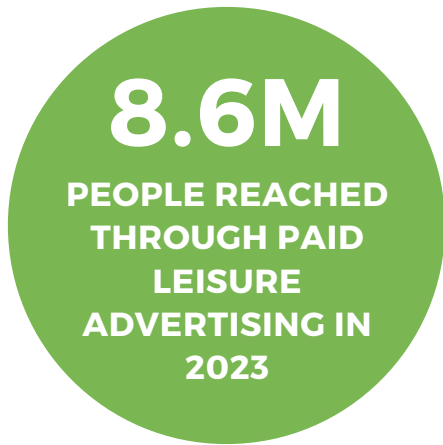


803 FOLLOWERS

+317 FROM 2022

MOST VISITED PAGES ON SITE AND PAGEVIEWS

- **PLAN YOUR TRIP** (212,728)
- **EVENTS** (187,376)
- **CRAFT BEVERAGE WEEK** (68,299)
- **MUSEUMS & ATTRACTIONS** (63,914)
- **FOOD & DRINK** (57,783)
- **ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT** (27,223)
- **HIDDEN GEM RESTAURANTS** (23,537)
- **OUTDOORS & RECREATION** (23,283)



FIRST AGENCY OF RECORD HIRED

- In the spring of 2023, the marketing department engaged a comprehensive RFP process to find an agency of record to bring the unique selling proposition research to life and also manage media buying for the future campaigns
- Out of 8 firms considered, KPS3 was selected as the new agency of record and began work in the fall of 2023
- We are looking forward to bringing this campaign work to life in the spring and summer of 2024



BEST PERFORMING SOCIAL POSTS

Gull Meadow Farms Walk through the Lights

- 1,511,484 reached
- 30,692 total engagements

Best Dive Bars in Kalamazoo

- 145,197 reached
- 11,182 total engagements

Cool Spots to Take Kids

- 75,527 reached
- 2,048 total engagements

Discover Kalamazoo
Tue 11/7/2023 6:42 pm EST

Gull Meadow Farms Walk Through the Lights begins November 25! This event is one of our favorite Kalamazoo holiday traditions. What...

Reach 1,511,484

Discover Kalamazoo
Thu 1/19/2023 6:38 pm EST

If you're in Kalamazoo and looking for something a little less fancy than a nightclub, with a close, cozy atmosphere, then a well...

Best Dive Bars in Kalamazoo, MI Accor...

Reach 145,197

Discover Kalamazoo
Sun 2/5/2023 1:08 pm EST

Whatever your kids are into (science, animals, the great outdoors), there are plenty of family-friendly things to do in Kalamazoo!

Cool Spots to Take Kids in Kalamazoo, ...

Reach 75,527

TRAVEL INFLUENCERS AND CONTENT CREATORS

- **Brian McIntosh**
 - <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CnjtkYrJnxW/>
 - Based in Toronto, Brian visited Kalamazoo in the winter to capture content at several restaurants/bars including Dabney & Co., Twine Urban Winery, ROCA, Principle, and Junglebird
- **Rachel Teodoro**
 - <https://www.discoverkalamazoo.com/plan-your-trip/trip-ideas-itineraries/traveling-with-teens/>
 - Rachel and her son made a college visit from the Seattle area and explored the top things to do in Kalamazoo when traveling with teens.
- **Courtney the Explorer**
 - <https://www.discoverkalamazoo.com/blog/post/lesbian-friendly-weekend-guide-to-kalamazoo-michigan/>
 - Courtney and her partner Liz visited from Chicago in the spring to experience Art Hop, the opening of the Kalamazoo Farmers Market, and female owned and LGBTQ+ welcoming businesses.
- **Busy Bea Travels**
 - <https://www.busybeatravels.com/post/exploring-black-owned-kalamazoo>
 - Bea visited from the Chicago area in July to check out arts and culture in Kalamazoo including attending the Black Arts Festival and highlighting Black owned businesses.
- **Rachel Kawate**
 - <https://www.discoverkalamazoo.com/blog/post/how-to-spend-a-fun-packed-weekend-in-kalamazoo/>
 - Rachel made a weekend getaway from Chicago in the fall to explore trails, farm-table eats, U-pick farms, and DIY activities.



Bea at the Black Arts Festival



Courtney & Liz at Kalamazoo
Candle Company

MEETINGS & EVENTS

56

**EVENTS
HOSTED**

17,787

ROOM NIGHTS

\$6.56M

**ECONOMIC
IMPACT**

***REPORTING
AT 95%**

EVENTS HOSTED IN 2023

- 58th Annual International Congress on Medieval studies
**first in-person congress since 2019*
- MI Society of Association Executives Annual Conference
- MI Association of Counties Annual Conference
- MI Library Association Annual Conference

TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Connect Midwest – Peoria, IL (January 2023)
- ABA Annual Marketplace – Detroit, MI (February 2023)
- MiSGMP Annual Education Conference – Port Huron, MI (March 2023)
- Connect Diversity – Las Vegas, NV (April 2023)
- Michigan Meetings Expo – Kalamazoo, MI (June 2023)
- TBEX North America – Eau Claire, WI (July 2023)
- International Multicultural & Heritage Tourism Summit – Miami, FL (July 2023)
- Michigan Society of Association Executives Annual Conference – Kalamazoo, MI (August 2023)
- Connect Marketplace – Minneapolis, MN (August 2023)
- Professional Fraternity Association Annual Conference – Albuquerque, NM (September 2023)
- Destination Midwest – Branson, MI (September 2023)
- Grand Rapids Meetings Marketplace – Grand Rapids, MI (October 2023)
- Small Market Meetings Conference – Cedar Rapids, IA (September 2023)
- Destination Michigan Showcase – Lansing, MI (November 2023)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

- Event Services Professional Association (ESPA) Annual Conference – Pittsburgh, PA (January 2023)
- Destinations International Sales & Services Summit – National Harbor, MD (March 2023)
- Michigan Society of Government Meeting Professionals (MiSGMP) Annual Education Conference – Port Huron, MI (March 2023)
- Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) Annual Conference – Kalamazoo, MI (August 2023)
- Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Great Lakes Education Summit – Grand Rapids, MI (November 2023)

MEETING SALES ACTIVITY

- Destination Michigan Lunch and Learn – Lansing, MI (January 2023)
- ABA FAM Tour – Kalamazoo, MI (February 2023)
- Destination Michigan Connect & Learn – Okemos, MI (April 2023)
- Destination Michigan sales mission – Lansing, MI (April 2023)
- MSAE 2023 Spring Golf Outing – Saint Johns, MI (May 2023)
- MPI Celebration – Kalamazoo, MI (June 2023)
- Destination Michigan sales mission – Lansing, MI (September 2023)
- Destination Michigan Showcase – Lansing, MI (November 2023)
- Detroit Meetings Marketplace – Detroit, MI (March 2023)
- Fall FAM Tour – Kalamazoo, MI (October 15-17, 2023)
- Fall FAM Tour – Kalamazoo, MI (October 29-31, 2023)
- Michigan MPI December Signature Series – Ypsilanti, MI (December 2023)
- Destination Michigan Holiday Lunch & Learn – Lansing, MI (December 2023)

TESTIMONIALS

I have had the pleasure of attending countless conferences and events in Kalamazoo over the years and every experience has been positive. From being simply an attendee at events like the Michigan Festivals & Events Association Annual Conference and the Pure Michigan Tourism Conference to helping plan and execute the Michigan's Great Beer State Conference & Trade Show, the people in Kalamazoo are the best to work with. They're professional and efficient, yet fun and friendly. I look forward to any time I have a reason to gather in Kalamazoo because of long-standing relationships that have been maintained over the years.

- Dianna Stampfler, President - Promote Michigan

The Discover Kalamazoo Team helped in planning and supported our event in ways that made hosting our event easier on the planning committee. All of the staff that we worked with did a great job in communicating with us and helped meet our needs. Thank you, Discover Kalamazoo!

- Jordan Olson, MIRSA State Workshop

Discover Kalamazoo is an organization that really steps up to the plate when planning an event in their area. I will use them in the future if planning an event in the area.

- Happy Begg, Model A Ford Foundation Corporation of America National Tour

I was delighted with the partnership with Discover Kalamazoo. Thanks to this collaboration, I had access to a wealth of information about local entertainment and dining options, allowing our attendees to explore the city with ease - especially on a Sunday evening! I highly recommend Kalamazoo and specifically Radisson Plaza Hotel to anyone seeking top-notch service, exceptional responsiveness, and a fantastic team that goes above and beyond to make your stay a delightful one.

- Tammi Connell, Michigan Association of Counties

Discover Kalamazoo is essential for our event and others to be successful in Kzoo! They are super friendly, knowledgeable, and a great asset to helping make sure your next event runs smoothly. They really care about the community they live and work in and it shows.

- Ariana Walker, Dokidokon Anime Convention

Many thanks to the Kalamazoo Discover team, who were always attentive to our needs during our conference at the Radisson hotel. They provided assistance to our attendees on activities in the city, where to dine out and also coupons and discounts.

- Javi Castillo, MI Speech Hearing Association

Discover! KALAMAZOO SPORTS™

70+

EVENTS
HOSTED

30,000+

ATHLETES

\$28.5M

ECONOMIC
IMPACT

45,820

TENTATIVE ROOM NIGHTS

29,105

DEFINITE ROOM NIGHTS



MAJOR EVENTS HOSTED

- **2023 MHSAA Team Wrestling Finals hosted by Michigan High School Athletic Association at Wings Event Center, Feb. 24-25**
 - Nearly 1,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 500+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$699,615.16
- **2023 USA Curling Mixed Doubles Championships hosted by USA Curling and Kalamazoo Curling Club at Wings Event Center, Feb. 27-March 2**
 - Nearly 100 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 200+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$103,518.99
- **2023 MYWAY Wrestling Individual State Championship hosted by Michigan Youth Wrestling Association at Wings Event Center, March 24-26**
 - Nearly 5,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 2,000+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$4,629,247.31
- **2023 MAC Women's Golf Championship hosted by Western Michigan University at the Kalamazoo Country Club, April 21-23**
 - Nearly 60 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 100+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$57,793.28
- **2023 MAC Men's Tennis Championship hosted by Western Michigan University at the Sorensen Tennis Courts, April 22-23**
 - Nearly 120 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 90+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$65,671.81
- **2023 Michigan State USBC Pepsi State Finals (over 3 weekends) hosted by Michigan State USBC at Continental Lanes & South Lanes (Three Rivers), April 29-30 & May 6-7 & May 13-14**
 - Nearly 1,500 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 100 hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$1,346,063.98
- **2023 USTA Boys' 18 & 16 National Championships hosted by USTA and Kalamazoo College**
 - Nearly 600 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 3,000+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct impact of \$1,458,340.87



TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Sports ETA Symposium
- Connect Sports
- NCAA Championships Host Symposium
- S.P.O.R.T.S. The Relationship Conference
- TEAMS Conference & Tradeshow

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4S Summit (Justin Zeldes)
- Leadership Kalamazoo (Madysen Doyle)

DISCOVER KALAMAZOO SPORTS NETWORK EVENT

- NIGHT OF NETWORKING WITH THE KALAMAZOO WINGS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GREENLEAF HOSPITALITY AND WMU'S SPORT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
- 15 AREA SPORTS PROFESSIONALS
- 25 STUDENTS IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT

2023 FEASIBILITY STUDY IDENTIFIES THE NEED AND MARKET DEMAND FOR AN INDOOR SPORTS FACILITY

- **Summary:** A comprehensive study by Conventions, Sports & Leisure (CSL) indicates a significant opportunity in Kalamazoo County for an indoor, tournament-ready hard court facility which can accommodate at least 8 basketball courts/16 volleyball courts for both local and regional use. Of the total projected development costs of \$40 million, we believe we can fund approximately \$25 million through incremental accommodations taxes, leaving a gap of approximately \$15 million. This facility is projected to host 372,000 local attendee days and 223,615 non-local attendee days, generate 36,000 hotel room nights, and deliver \$48 million in annual economic output.
- **Local need:** Local basketball and volleyball leaders have indicated a significant shortage of court time in our area. This leads to:
 - Limits on opportunities to participate
 - Insufficient training/practice time
 - Costly travel
- **Local Benefits of new facility:**
 - Greater access to the benefits of sports to more area youth
 - Projected annual economic impact of \$48.6 million
 - Projected 628 full and part time jobs
 - Projected \$600K annual operating income
 - Off-season hotel room night demand
- **Regional opportunity:** Basketball and volleyball are two of the sports with the highest participation levels within a 180-mile radius of Kalamazoo County. However, the nearest state-of-the-art tournament facilities for these sports are more than 100 miles away. Several factors make Kalamazoo County an ideal location for a new facility:
 - Centrally located in the region with access to 20 million people within 180 miles
 - Location at intersection of 2 major interstate highways
 - Sufficient hotels and other hospitality amenities
 - Strong local groups to sustain the facility and assist with tournaments
- **Sports Tourism Experience:** Kalamazoo County has a strong track record of hosting state, regional and national tournaments in ice hockey, wrestling, figure skating, curling and tennis, all of which are niche sports compared to basketball and volleyball. This new facility will enable us to translate this track record into the most popular sports in the region.

PROGRAM, SITE & BUSINESS MODEL: Hypothetical New Indoor Facility



TESTIMONIALS

Discover Kalamazoo Sports has been a great partnership and has helped us grow our Dirty Donut Race to be the second largest gravel bike race in the state of Michigan in just 4 years!

– *Dan Frazier, 1.131 Cycling: Dirty Donut Race*

Discover Kalamazoo was a great partner for our event, from initial kickoff conversations until the day of our event. Without Discover Kalamazoo's support, our event will not happen!

– *Chris Fusciardi, Continental Base Ball Club of Kalamazoo: Portage Vintage Base Ball Festival*

Working with Discover Kalamazoo was a great way to tap into resources we didn't know existed in our community which resulted in positive experience from them. It was so easy for us to get accurate information for hotel blocks, and it was a great way for us to provide information to the competitors at our event. They know what to do to support your group and the city. We are grateful that we have their expertise and support when we are hosting large events in our community and will continue to partner with them in the future.

– *Amy Yuengert, Western Michigan University Skating Teams: Bronco Challenge Cup*

As someone new to their role as an Event Coordinator working with Discover Kalamazoo, Taya Pettis helped facilitate a pub crawl with local breweries. She supported us with getting local hotels for rooms for over 75 out of town visitors. Taya was easy to communicate with and helpful when questions arise to make this event a success. I would recommend working with Discover Kalamazoo 100%.

– *Kris Rieck, Kalamazoo Curling Club: Kalamazoo Beerspiel*

Kalamazoo is a great sports event destination!

– *Ann Block, Michigan USBC Pepsi State Finals*



DESTINATION SERVICES & PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

62 Events Served in 2023 Including:

- VFW Department of Michigan Mid-Winter Conference
- Michigan Collegiate DECA
- MHSAA Team Wrestling Finals
- American Kennel Club (AKC) West Michigan Apple Blossom Cluster Dog Show
- Zeigler Kalamazoo Marathon Weekend
- 58th International Congress on Medieval Studies
- Kalamazoo Pride
- Department of Michigan VFW Spring/Summer Conference
- United Kennel Club (UKC)
- Michigan Society of Association Executives (MSAE) Annual Convention
- USTA Boys' 18 & 16 National Championships
- National Street Rod Assn. (NSRA) Nationals North
- Model A Ford Foundation Reunion
- Michigan Autism Conference (MAC)
- Michigan Library Association (MLA) Annual Conference
- American Kennel Club (AKC) West Michigan Harvest Cluster Dog Show
- Great Lakes Invitational Conference Association (GLICA) Model United Nations Conference

615

**INTERACTIONS AT
THE KALAMAZOO
BATTLE CREEK
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT**

TOURISM ACADEMY:

- 136 ambassadors with 63 completions
- 98% said the material somewhat to very relevant
- 93% said the presentation very or extremely clear
- 80% said it was the right amount of information
- 60% said the content was very or extremely engaging

TEAM VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- **MLK DAY OF SERVICE AT THE KALAMAZOO GOSPEL MISSION**
- **MI CARES FOR TOURISM PARK CLEAN UP AND PROJECTS AT MAYORS RIVERFRONT PARK IN CONJUNCTION WITH KZOO PARKS AND THE KALAMAZOO GROWLERS**
- **INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY OF SERVICE AT KALAMAZOO LOAVES & FISHES**

2024 AND BEYOND

We and our many exceptional partners work hard to drive visitation to Kalamazoo County and we are proud of our recent results. We also recognize that visitation is also influenced in part by key factors outside of our control, primarily spending on the Pure Michigan campaign to attract out-of-state visitors and Michigan's population (about ½ of our visitors come from within the state), both of which affect visitor spending throughout our state. Given this, when creating our new goal, we have decided to measure our success in our share of overall visitor spending in Michigan, and we aim to achieve a 3% share by 2030.

Our progress towards that lofty goal begins now. In 2024, after laying the groundwork in 2022 and 2023, we will launch a new advertising campaign to attract new visitors to Kalamazoo County. Also in 2024, together with Disability Network Southwest Michigan and Wheel the World, we will "map" more than 100 locations throughout the county to capture and publish accessibility data for travelers with accessibility needs, and then begin the journey of making Kalamazoo County even more accessible. Other big 2024 initiatives include a new Destination Services strategy and plan, and the commencement of a Destination Masterplan later in the year. We will continue to promoting the exciting new Downtown Event Center and the Mill at Vicksburg, while also working on advancing new destination development opportunities including an indoor youth sports complex for local and tournament use.

As always, we recognize the indispensable role played by our local partners in attracting visitors and delivering exceptional front-line hospitality. We look forward to a bright future together.