

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Discover! **KALAMAZOO®**

INTRODUCTION

Last year in our Annual Report we shared our ambitious goal to get to a 3% share of visitor spending in Michigan by the year 2030, from a steady 2% share pre-pandemic. In 2024 the team executed several initiatives which will help propel us towards that goal.

In June, the Marketing team launched our new advertising campaign after pre-testing it with one of the most rigorous tools available, measuring for breakthrough, brand recognition and persuasion in an in-context environment. The campaign, [which you can see here](#), exceeded our action standards in pre-testing and is helping us reach even more of our target audience with memorable ads which you can't help know are promoting Kalamazoo County.

The Business Development team hit an all-time high for tentative room nights (our key measure for group business we are trying to secure for Kalamazoo County), and increased definite room nights by 19% compared to 2023. Additionally, the team made significant progress towards bringing a new indoor hard court sports facility to Kalamazoo County, identifying the potential funding model and engaging in thorough site analysis in preparation for key decision-making in 2025.

In the Fall, the Destination Services team opened a Discover Kalamazoo visitors center on the lower level of the new WMU student center. Within a couple of months we had more interactions with visitors there than we do at our downtown visitors center in a typical year.

The key way we measure our success is visitor spending, and we learned late in 2024 that in 2023 visitor spending in Kalamazoo County grew 9.2%, reaching another all time high of almost \$750 million. As a result, our share of visitor spending in Michigan exceeded 2.5%, nudging us towards our 3% goal.

Thank you to the team and all of our partners for the transformational work which will have lasting benefit to our community.

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.

2024 DISCOVER KALAMAZOO STAFF

Taylor Abfall

Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Reed Benton

Director of Operations & Destination Services

Brad Beauregard

Sports Event Development Manager

Jane Ghosh

President & CEO

Mallory Hernandez

Office Manager

Brian Persky, STS, SDLT

Director of Business Development

Ashley Peruchietti, CMP

(Senior Group Services Manager)
Senior Manager of Business Development

Taya Pettis

Business Development Coordinator

Alyssa Seedorff

Senior Manager of Content Development & Strategy

Raina Skeels

Destination Services Coordinator

Amber Thompson

Partner Engagement Coordinator

Viviana Vidal

Senior Manager of Business Development

Dana Wagner

Director of Marketing & Communications

Justin Zeldes

Sports Event Development Manager

DESTINATION SERVICES SPECIALISTS

Jennie Ko

Monica Tufts

INTERNS

Diana Al-Nabulsi

Nick Biel

Alexandra Lutz

Margaret Phares

Prashnim Seth

2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dave Beysiegel (Treasurer)
Greenleaf Hospitality Group

Jeff Breneman (Vice Chair)
Western Michigan University

Craig Davies
Radisson Plaza Hotel & Suites

Jane Ghosh
Discover Kalamazoo

Kathleen Hoyle
City of Portage Parks and Recreation

Clarence Lloyd
The Chamber at Southwest Michigan First

Amy Luce (Secretary)
The Kalamazoo House Bed & Breakfast

Sterling Riethman
Bell's Brewery

Troy Thrash (Chair)
Air Zoo Aerospace and Science Museum

Joy Underwood (Past Chair)
Staybridge Suites

Andy Wenzel
Fishbeck

Abigail Wheeler
Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners



**2024 ADVISORY COUNCIL
(INCLUDES BOARD MEMEBERS ON PREVIOUS PAGE)**

Deb Droppers

Kalamazoo Experiential Learning
Center

Cherri Emery

Cherri's Chocol'art

Ken Fischang, CHME, CMP, CTA

Gilmore Car Museum

Tracy Hall

OutFront Kalamazoo

Michelle Hargrave

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts

Jeanne Hess

Kalamazoo City Commission

Stephanie Hinman

Kalamazoo State Theatre

Donte Hudson

The Kalamazoo Promise

Matt Kakabeeke

Kalamazoo Optimists Hockey
Association

Tracey Lawie

Miller Auditorium

Dani Lewis

Black Arts and Cultural Center

Kristie May

Dabney & Co.- Cocktail Bar & Lounge

Lisa Panich

Kalamazoo Nature Center

Nicole Miller

City of Portage

Bobby Patel

Best Western Plus and Comfort Inn

David Rachowicz

Kalamazoo County Parks & Expo
Center

Ida Salas

La Familia Cafe

Carla Sones

Southwest Michigan First

Pierre van der Westhuizen

The Gilmore

Justin Wendzel

Gull Meadow Farms

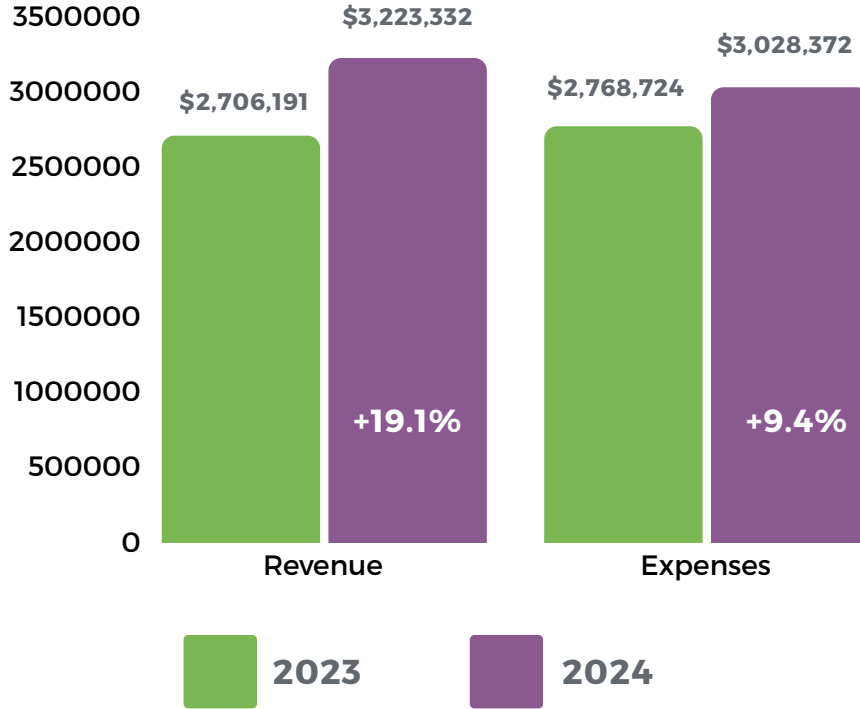
Craig Williams

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek
International Airport

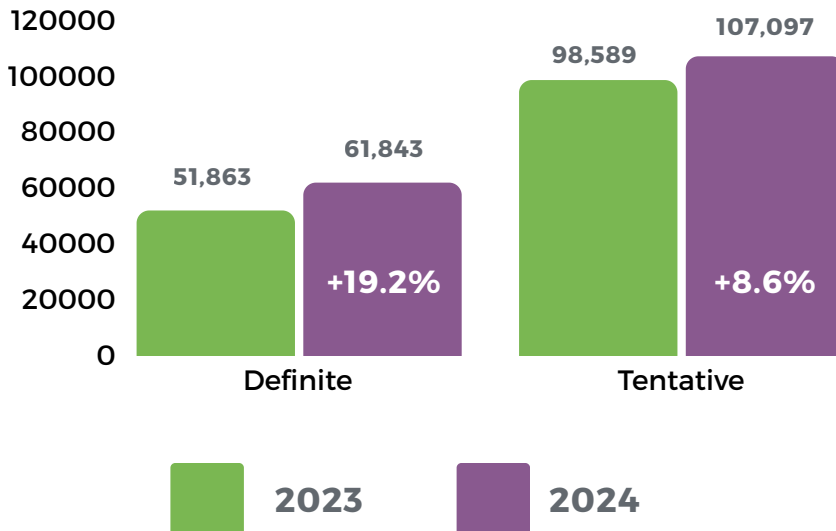
Megan Zielke

Vintage in the Zoo

FINANCIALS



ROOM NIGHTS



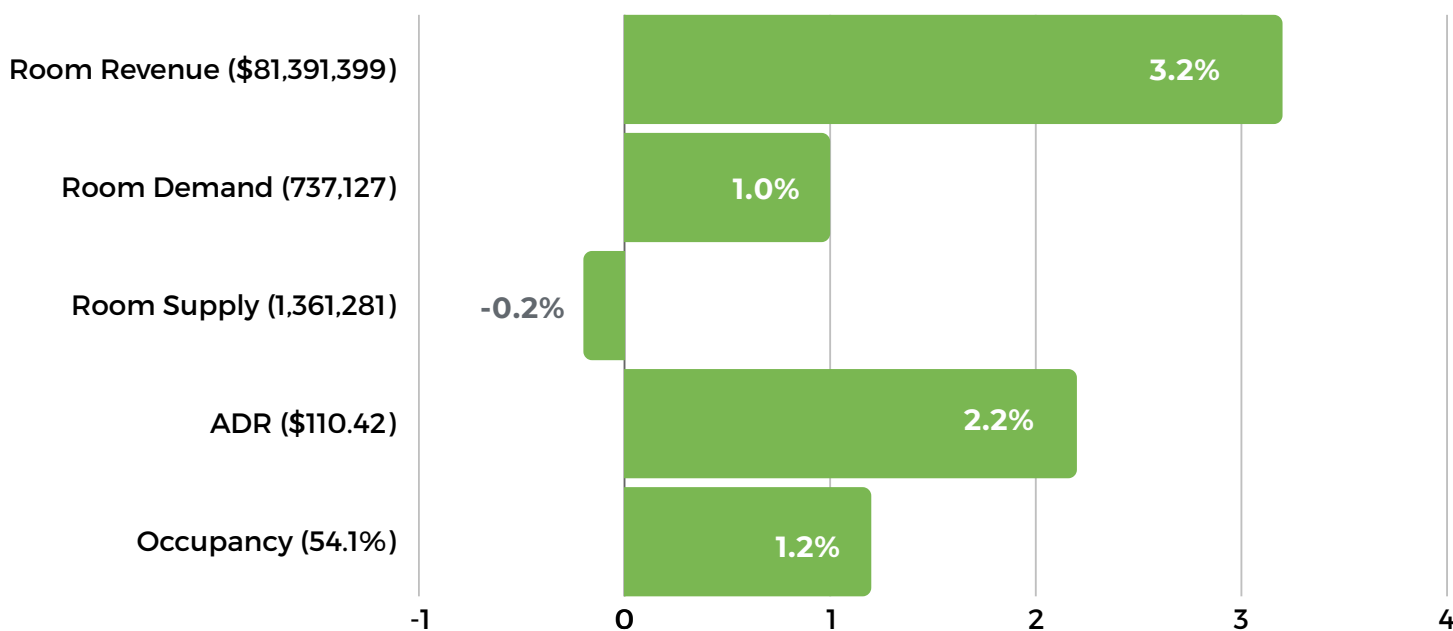
Definite:
Future room nights confirmed as definite

Tentative:
Future room nights distributed as tentative leads

2024 HOTEL TREND REPORT

Growth percentage vs. 2023

Source: STR, Inc.



MARKETING

753,996

**TOTAL WEBSITE
SESSIONS
(+10.8% YOY)**

613,990

**UNIQUE
WEBSITE
VISITORS
(+10.5% YOY)**



75,398 FOLLOWERS

+2,333 FROM 2023



37,567 FOLLOWERS

+2,761 FROM 2023



11,977 FOLLOWERS

-280 FROM 2023

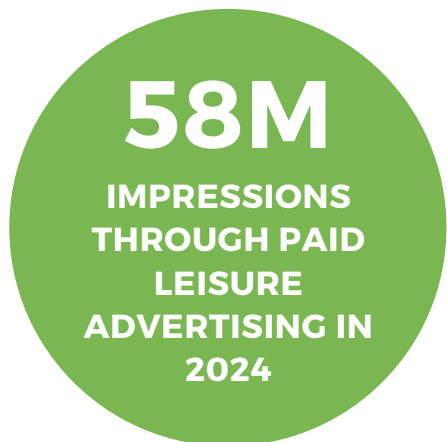


1,695 FOLLOWERS

+892 FROM 2023

MOST VISITED PAGES ON SITE AND PAGEVIEWS

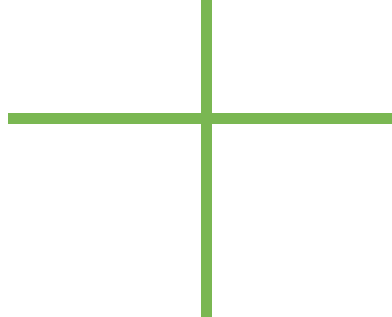
- **PLAN YOUR TRIP** (300,589)
- **EVENTS** (268,061)
- **OUTDOORS & RECREATION** (57,075)
- **FOOD & DRINK** (42,141)
- **LGBTQ+ WEEKEND GUIDE** (27,302)
- **DEALS & PACKAGES** (25,099)
- **THINGS TO DO WITH KIDS** (23,918)
- **CRAFT BEVERAGE WEEK** (21,450)
- **DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO MALL** (21,142)



FUN AWAITS YOU IN KALAMAZOO

- With our partners at KPS3, we launched a new leisure marketing campaign in June 2024 that brings the memorable power of rhyming to all the fun things visitors can do in Kalamazoo.
- Advertising was entirely digital and ran across Meta, Google, Stackadapt and included specific ad groups for multicultural travelers including a segment of LGBTQ+ ads on EDGE Media.
- The campaign far surpassed the original goals of reaching 15.6M people with 44.9M impressions.
- A photo/video shoot is scheduled for early summer 2025 to generate new campaign assets and continue the momentum.





BEST REACHING ORGANIC SOCIAL POSTS

Reindeer Ranch

- 317,432 reached
- 1,847 engagements

Gilmore Car Museum Blue Moon Diner

- 246,116 reached
- 956 engagements

Kazoo Books

- 83,661 reached
- 1,366 engagements

A screenshot of a Facebook post from 'Discover Kalamazoo' dated Tue 11/19/2024 12:52 pm EST. The post features a photo of a reindeer with large antlers. The text reads: 'Spending an afternoon at Kalamazoo's offers a magical experience! The atmos with excitement from the start. Welcorr'. The post shows a reach of 317,432 and engagement icons for comments, shares, and reactions.

A screenshot of a Facebook post from 'Discover Kalamazoo' dated Mon 7/22/2024 7:35 pm EDT. The post features a photo of a building with a lawn. The text reads: 'The most unique dining experience in the area? The authentic 1941 Blue Moon Diner at the Gilmore Car...'. The post shows a reach of 246,116 and engagement icons for comments, shares, and reactions.

A screenshot of a Facebook post from 'Discover Kalamazoo' dated Mon 2/5/2024 4:15 pm EST. The post features a photo of a bookstore interior. The text reads: 'Kazoo Books is a little hidden gem off of Parkview Avenue that every book lover should visit! 📖 They have five...'. The post shows a reach of 83,661 and engagement icons for comments, shares, and reactions.



2024 TRAVEL INFLUENCERS AND CONTENT CREATORS

- [Christopher Lau](#)
 - <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C-tGykmu9DI/?>
 - Christopher and his family of four visited in June 2024 and explored an array of family friendly activities including the return of the Caribbean Festival, Kalamazoo Valley Museum, Air Zoo, and Mac and Cheese Festival.
- [Colby Holiday](#)
 - <https://worldofawanderer.com/your-community-culture-and-culinary-guide-to-kalamazoo/>
 - Colby and her partner came for a summer visit to Kalamazoo and explored arts and culture including the Hot Air Balloon Festival at Gull Meadow Farms, Latinx Festival, Kalamazoo Candle Company, Root Beer Stand, Twine Urban Winery, Crow's Nest, Dabney & Co., and more!
- [Kim Barnes](#)
 - <https://www.discoverkalamazoo.com/blog/post/fun-filled-fall-family-weekend-in-kalamazoo-michigan/>
 - Michigan based content creator, Kim, and her family had a fun weekend exploring the Kalamazoo Nature Center, Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery, Lakeview Park, Bow in the Clouds Preserve, The Backyard of Kalamazoo, Bell's Eccentric Cafe, Chocolatea, Cravings Deli, and Gull Meadow Farms.
- [Pustika Samaddar](#)
 - <https://www.instagram.com/p/DBTn36fRme3/?>
 - Pustika visited from the east coast and explored Kalamazoo in the fall, checking out the Gilmore Car Museum, Sounds of the Zoo, Gull Meadow Farms, Air Zoo, and Kalamazoo Institute of Arts.



Colby at Twine Urban Winery



Kim & Family at Bow in the Clouds

MEETINGS & EVENTS

68

**EVENTS
HOSTED**

25,000+

ROOM NIGHTS

\$12.2M

**ECONOMIC
IMPACT**

MAJOR EVENTS HOSTED IN 2024

- Pure Michigan Governor's Conference on Tourism
- Michigan Science Olympiad State Tournament
- 110th Grand Council Session of the Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America
- USS Kitty Hawk Veterans Association Reunion
- Michigan Museums Association Annual Conference
- National Federation of the Blind of MI

TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Connect Midwest - Grand Rapids, MI (January 2024)
- Detroit Meetings Marketplace - Detroit, MI (March 2024)
- Connect Spring (Association track) - Las Vegas, NV (April 2024)
- HelmsBriscoe Annual Business Conference - Las Vegas, NV (May 2024)
- Connect Marketplace – Milwaukee, WI (August 2024)
- Small Market Meetings Conference -St. George, UT (September 2024)
- IMEX America - Las Vegas, NV (October 2024)
- Grand Rapids Meetings Marketplace – Grand Rapids, MI (October 2024)
- Destination Michigan Showcase - Lansing, MI (November 2024)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

- Michigan Society of Government Meeting Professionals Annual Conference - Gaylord, MI (March 2024)
- Professional Convention Management Association EduCon -Detroit, MI (June 2024)
- MPI Michigan Fall Symposium – Mt. Pleasant (October 2024)
- Michigan Society of Association Executives Annual Conference – Lansing, MI (December 2024)

MEETING SALES ACTIVITY

- Destination Michigan Connect & Learn (April 2024)
- Destination Michigan Sales Mission - Lansing, MI (April 2024)
- MSAE Golf Outing – Williamston, MI (May 2024)
- Destination Michigan Sales Mission - Lansing, MI (September 2024)
- Fall FAM Tour – Kalamazoo, MI (October 2024)
- Destination Michigan Holiday Lunch & Learn (December 2024)

TESTIMONIALS

The Discover Kalamazoo team was wonderful and superb! So personable, nice, helpful and there for us! They went the extra mile and showed us all around town near our hotel, so I was able to recommend these places to all our attendees. The signs all around town that we were there greeting us was totally awesome, the kids really got a big kick out of that! The Discover Kalamazoo team helped us see all the wonderful things in Kalamazoo in a short amount of time.

- *Vanessa Schwarz, Michigan Music Association Competition*

I can't say enough about the incredible experience we had working with the Discover Kalamazoo team! From start to finish, their dedication and expertise made all the difference. Throughout the planning process, they were always available and communicative. Their support and guidance made the logistics seamless, allowing us to focus on the content of our conference. Partnering with their team was a fantastic decision. I highly recommend them to anyone looking to host an event in this vibrant city!

- *Emily Rambo, American Academy of Pediatrics – MI Chapter*

We recently hosted our national conference - Up & Coming - in Kalamazoo. We loved Kalamazoo! From the conference hotel - Radisson Plaza - to the local food co-op - PFC - to local merchants - to the Discover Kalamazoo staff - everyone was friendly, helpful, professional and willing to go the extra mile! Thank you so much Kalamazoo for helping make our 2024 conference a success!

- *Deb Trocha, Up & Coming Food Co-Op Conference*

The Discover Kalamazoo team made event planning much easier for me and were able to take areas of planning off my plate that worried me. The review board was very satisfied with the material that your team provided in deciding if Kalamazoo was capable of handling the event as well. Good job team!

- *Marty Buehler, MI State Science Olympiad State Tournament*

The Discover Kalamazoo team was very responsive to our needs for the conference. Frequent check-ins, regular meetings, and the attention to detail with off-site events really added to our conference guests' experience.

- *Larisa Draves, Pure MI Governor's Conference on Tourism*

Discover! KALAMAZOO SPORTS™

50+

EVENTS
HOSTED

38,000+

ATHLETES

\$30.3M

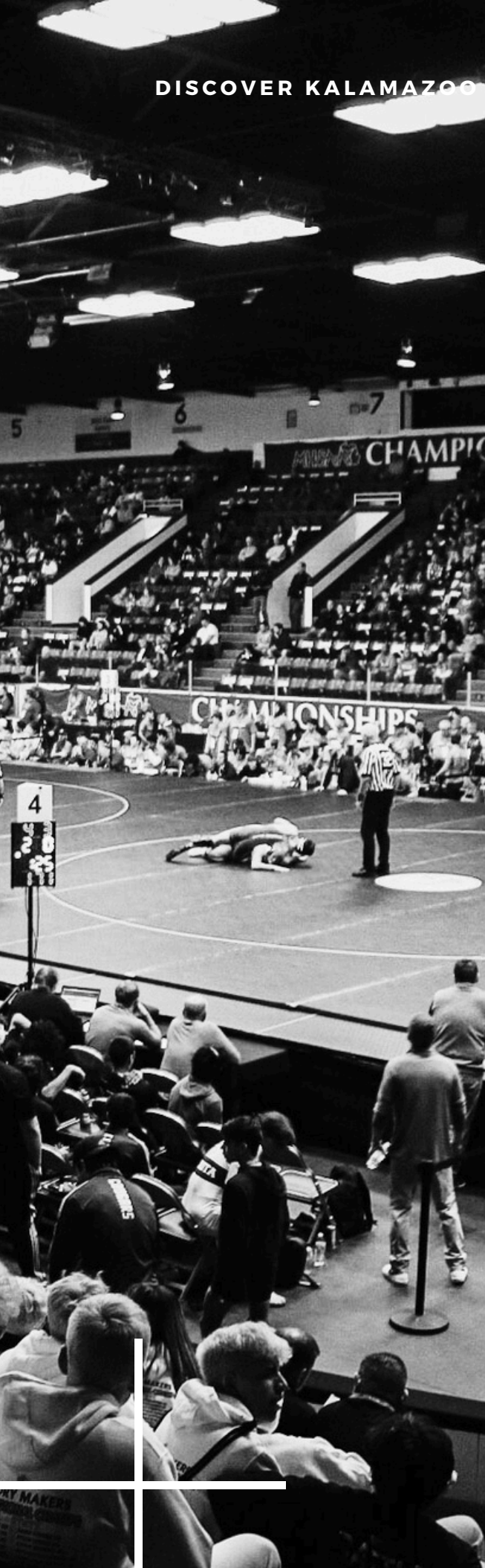
ECONOMIC
IMPACT

46,971

TENTATIVE ROOM NIGHTS

36,857

DEFINITE ROOM NIGHTS



MAJOR EVENTS HOSTED

- **2024 MHSAA Team Wrestling Finals hosted by Michigan High School Athletic Association at Wings Event Center, February 23-24**
 - Nearly 1,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 500+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$737,361
- **2024 MYWAY Wrestling Individual State Championship hosted by Michigan Youth Wrestling Association at Wings Event Center, March 22-24**
 - Nearly 5,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 2,000+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$4,910,604.28
- **2024 KISS Soccer Tournament hosted by TKO Premier at River Oaks County Park, May 24-26**
 - Nearly 3,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 1,000+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$2,481,144.42
- **2024 Zeigler Kalamazoo Marathon hosted by Zeigler Automotive in downtown Kalamazoo, May 4-5**
 - Nearly 2,700 athletes and various event personnel
 - 290 hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct economic impact of \$631,559
- **2024 USTA Boys' 18 & 16 National Championships hosted by USTA and Kalamazoo College at Stowe Stadium, August 2-11**
 - Nearly 420 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 3,000 hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct impact of \$1,453,071.13
- **2024 Teenage CrossFit Games hosted by The Pit Fitness Ranch at Wings Event Center, August 27 - September 2**
 - Nearly 200 athletes and various event personnel
 - 900 hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct impact of \$416,896
- **2024 Kick-Off Classic Synchronized Skating Competition hosted by Greater Kalamazoo Skating Association at Wings Event Center, November 22-24**
 - Nearly 2,000 athletes, coaches, and various event personnel
 - 1,000+ hotel rooms realized
 - Estimated direct impact of \$2,565,379.99



TRADE SHOWS AND CONFERENCES

- Compete Sports Diversity Winter Conference
- Colorado Springs Sports Sales Blitz
- Sports ETA Symposium
- TEAMS Conference

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Brad Beauregard, Sports Event Development Manager, attended Sports ETA's 4S Summit in November of 2024.
- Brian Persky, Director of Business Development, was elected to a 3-year term to the Sports ETA Board of Directors with his term beginning July 1, 2024.
- Brian also attended Destination International's Annual Conference and began his CDME certification courses/work.

DISCOVER KALAMAZOO SPORTS GOLF OUTING

- Golf outing and day full of networking at the Moors Golf Club on September 30, 2024
- 24 teams and nearly 100 attendees
- Building relationships with local businesses and sports professionals
- Net revenue increase of 25% (\$9,063) vs. the previous golf outing held in 2022

TESTIMONIALS

For the past 11 years as chair of our annual event, I have worked closely with Discover Kalamazoo. They are a great resource of information and support to host this event which brings in thousands of attendees and participants from all over the greater Midwest region and sometimes beyond. For anyone planning an event in Kalamazoo, I would highly recommend they make contact with Discover Kalamazoo early on in the planning process.

- *Kristen Crandle – Greater Kalamazoo Skating Association – 2024 Kick-Off Classic Synchronized Skating Competition*

Discover Kalamazoo is an incredible resource to both local and out of town event planners. They are organized, communicative, helpful and creative. They are always willing to lend a helping hand or find the right people to provide capacity. Discover Kalamazoo is my go-to community resource as an event planner and I am so appreciative of their partnership and support.

- *Emily Fink-Craig – Kalamazoo College – 2024 MHSAA Boys Division II Tennis Finals*

Discover Kalamazoo Sports has supported NUWAY Combat events for years, and their dedication to our events is second to none.

- *Dave Dean – NUWAY Combat – 2024 Grappler Fall Classic*

Working with Discover Kalamazoo Sports over the last 5 years has helped grow our Dirty Donut Race from a few hundred people to selling out three weeks before the race took place with 1,000 participants in 2024.

- *Dan Frazier – 1.131 Cycling – 2024 Dirty Donut Race*

UPDATES ON FUTURE INDOOR YOUTH SPORTS FACILITY

PROGRAM, SITE & BUSINESS MODEL: Hypothetical New Indoor Facility



Discover Kalamazoo engaged TowerPinkster to undertake a site selection evaluation and analysis to determine the preferred sites for the future development of a Youth + Amateur Sports Facility in Kalamazoo County as a follow up to a feasibility study performed by CSL in 2023. The purpose of the site evaluation and analysis was to bring together experts in the fields of land development, design, construction, local market knowledge and national sports tourism to determine recommended sites or locations within Kalamazoo County to be further pursued by Discover Kalamazoo for development.

A team of experts was assembled to assist in the site selection process. Using prior information from the feasibility study authored by CSL, input from Discover Kalamazoo and an informational meeting to gather input from community stakeholders a conceptual space program was developed for a Youth + Amateur Sports Facility of approximately 145,000 square feet. A conceptual layout of the facility was created based on cost effective constructability that could be utilized for site layout review. With the understanding the primary priority is to construct the Youth + Amateur Sports Facility to support local, regional and national activities and ensure necessary parking; sites were analyzed and evaluated.

All preselected sites provided by Discover Kalamazoo were evaluated through a scoring matrix as well as discussed by the team of experts to ensure all aspects of success were reviewed. Four sites were determined to have the highest opportunity for a successful location for a Youth + Amateur Sports Facility in Kalamazoo County to provide additional local opportunities as well as generate an increase in sport tourism to the area. Conceptual layouts of each of these 4 sites were created to verify traffic flow, facility, parking and storm detention. These site layouts in conjunction with the construction cost estimate will assist Discover Kalamazoo with the next steps in fund development.

DESTINATION SERVICES

Events Served in 2024 Include:

- Michigan Brewers Guild
- Horseless Carriage Club of America
- United States Tennis Association (USTA)
- Kalamazoo Experiential Learning Center (KELC) 2024 Maple Hill BBQ Bash
- Prodigies 2024 Teenage CrossFit Games
- Michigan Museums Association (MMA) Annual Conference
- National Federation of the Blind of Michigan Conference
- American Kennel Club (AKC)
- Zeigler Kalamazoo Marathon Weekend
- 59th International Congress on Medieval Studies
- Kalamazoo Pride
- United Kennel Club (UKC)
- National Street Rod Assn. (NSRA) Nationals North
- Michigan Autism Conference (MAC)

583

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

INITIATIVES AND UPDATES:

- 77 enrollments for Tourism Academy in 2024 and a fully updated and redesigned course will launch in 2025
- Launched a Strategic Plan for Destination Services to enhance visitor engagement, community connection, and partner collaboration.
- Surveyed stakeholders to evaluate satisfaction and interest in Discover Kalamazoo services.
- Prioritized promoting weekly events, easy-to-follow maps, and data-sharing tools as top-value services for partners and visitors alike.
- Partnered with Visit Widget in 2024 to design a custom trip planning app, interactive kiosks, and an integrated website planning tools. Launched in 2025 to elevate visitor engagement and trip planning across platforms.



INTRODUCING: THE CORNER AT THE WMU STUDENT CENTER

In partnership with Western Michigan University, Discover Kalamazoo opened a dedicated, interactive hub to connect students and visitors with local attractions and resources.

- **Campus-Community Engagement:** Staffed by Discover Kalamazoo, the promotes cultural, recreational, and business offerings in Kalamazoo County.
- **Enhanced Visitor Experience:** Features new displays highlighting Kalamazoo and attractions, along with complimentary visitor publications.
- **Strengthening Partnerships:** Reinforces Discover Kalamazoo's commitment to building strong ties with higher education and future workforce audiences.



TEAM VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- 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 WITH STEWARDS OF KLEINSTUCK AT KLEINSTUCK PRESERVE

LOOKING INTO 2025

Our transformational work continues in 2025. The Marketing team will continue to invest in our new campaign and extend it across all we do, to help it become a distinctive brand asset that someday will be synonymous with Kalamazoo County. The Business Development team will continue to attract new groups to our community leveraging our existing and our future assets. And the Destination Services team has a host of initiatives to help “meet people where they are,” many of which have already been launched in the early months of 2025.

We are energized by the understanding that all the work we do ultimately benefits our friends and neighbors in Kalamazoo County by supporting and sustaining the amenities that make Kalamazoo County a great place to live, work and play. We also recognize that it is our partners who attract and host visitors and residents alike, and we thank you for your partnership and outstanding hospitality.

