



# Visit Macon FY21 Annual Report

## **Fiscal Year 2021 was born out of the uncertainty and the ongoing uneasiness of the pandemic.**

Despite not knowing or daring to speculate about the year ahead, the Visit Macon Board of Directors and staff set aggressive goals and created new ways to reach and engage visitors. While there was built-up demand from the consumer, we remain vigilant and cautious.

The pandemic forced the travel and tourism industry to evolve as the mindset and consumer desire for travel and experience changed. The Visit Macon Team adopted the phrase “Never Assume” as the theme for FY21. The mantra was created with the everchanging tourism landscape in mind, but it also provided an evaluation of how Visit Macon does business.

In an uncertain year, Macon’s tourism industry enjoyed success with marquee events like:



### **The International Cherry Blossom Festival**

One of the first festivals in the Southeast to safely and successfully resume in FY21.



### **The Main Street Christmas Lights Extravaganza**

Attracted over 49,000 people from 50+ miles away.



### **Macon Burger Week**

Brought an additional 12,000 out-of-town visitors to Macon.

Our year would not have been possible without forging successful partnerships that will leave a lasting impact on Macon-Bibb County tourism and our community. Visit Macon joined New Town Macon to implement wayfinding signage in downtown and worked with the Macon Coliseum and Marriott to put new wayfinding at the Centreplex.

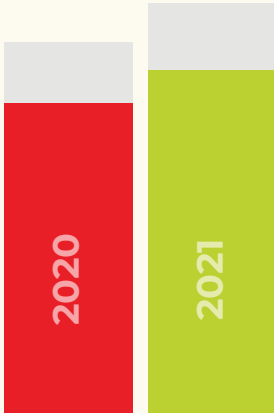
We continue to prioritize product development as our destination evolves and Macon’s film and TV industry continues to grow, bringing large crews to our hotels, restaurants and local businesses.

The following is a snapshot of some of Visit Macon’s key FY21 initiatives, innovations and successes. The virus and its variants persist, but Macon’s tourism team continues to persevere. Visit Macon’s successes support over 3,800 hospitality workers while keeping Macon-Bibb County’s economy strong.

Sincerely,

*Gary Wheat*

Gary Wheat  
President/CEO



**UP 4%**

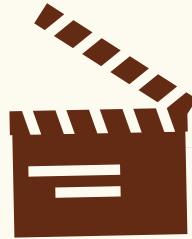
Surpassed hotel/motel revenue projections by 4% while eclipsing budget revenue projections by 14%.



Go Big Show production accounted for over **12,000 room nights**, replacing pandemic event losses.

**SIX PRODUCTIONS**

Film Macon attracted and serviced six productions during FY21.



**147** Leads generated by the Visit Macon Sales Team.

**126** Confirmed leads as definite.

**41,746** New room nights, which surpassed the FY21 goal by **167%**.

Visit Macon's sales team worked with the Georgia High School Association to host safe, successful basketball, wrestling championships and, for the first time ever, cheer state championship.

The GHSA Traditional State Wrestling Championship attracted **50,971 participants and fans** for an economic impact of **\$5.4 million**, while cheer hosted **41,189 attendees** for a **\$6.4 million impact**.



**8,581**

Guests visited Macon's two visitor information centers despite the I-75 VIC being closed for COVID during 2020.

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### \$49,000+ IN SPONSORSHIPS

Visit Macon distributed over \$49,000 in sponsorships for convention, sporting and community events during FY21.



From July 2020-December 2020, Visit Macon geofenced Georgia's nine welcome centers. Despite the centers being closed, travelers still stopped to rest and utilize the open restrooms.

**763** Travelers converted to one of Macon's hotel partners after seeing our ad on their phones.

Visit Macon's President/CEO was tabbed to serve on the newly-elected Mayor Lester Miller's transition team, assisting in developing the new mayor's priorities for his term.

Visit Macon's Steven Fulbright joined New Town's Emily Hopkins in presenting Macon's sign program to the Annual Georgia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus meeting.

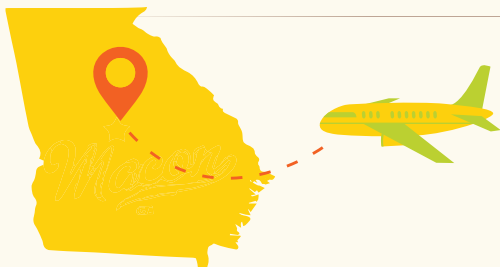


The Visit Macon Board of Directors welcomed three new board members in FY21, welcoming **Justin Andrews** of the Otis Redding Foundation, **Jamie Weatherford** of Rock Candy Tours and **Kathy Martin** of the Marriott City Center.

### 300+ TOURISTS



Visit Macon was selected to host the 2021 Southeast Tourism Society Annual Marketing College. The event welcomed over 300 tourism industry professionals to Macon for a week in June.



### THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The Visit Macon team and board of directors approved a new, three-year strategic plan for the recovery and future of tourism in Macon-Bibb County.

## **VISIT MACON STAFF**

**PRESIDENT/CEO** Gary Wheat

**EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT/OFFICE MANAGER** Irish Hubbard

**VP OF DEVELOPMENT/COO** Aaron Buzza

**VP OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS** Valerie Bradley

**VP OF SALES AND SERVICES** Steven Fulbright

**DIRECTOR OF VISITOR SERVICES** Kimberly Chambliss

**DIRECTOR OF SALES** Trish Whitley

**SENIOR SALES MANAGER** Ann Starley

**SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER** Elliot Fernandez

**MARKETING MANAGER** Hannah Hartman

**DESTINATION SPECIALISTS** Chris Abbott  
Billie Ingram  
Mary Ann Richardson  
Morgan Pilkington  
Melanie Eubanks  
Curtis Williams  
Cherie Arrington

## VISIT MACON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**MACON-BIBB COUNTY REPRESENTATIVE:** Mayor Pro Tem Seth Clark

**HOTEL OWNERS OR GENERAL MANAGERS:** Kathy Martin, Macon Marriott City Ctr  
Nancy Lott, Town Place Suites

**ATTRACTION DIRECTORS:** Yash Patel, Macon Beer Company  
Jamie Weatherford, Rock Candy Tours  
Justin Andrews, Otis Redding Foundation  
Susan Welsh, Museum of Arts & Sciences

**TOURISM ENTITY INCLUDING RESTAURANTS, RETAIL, ANTIQUES, ETC:** Tina Dickson, Ingleside Village Pizza

**COMMUNITY LEADERS:** Patricia Gibbs, Family Counseling  
Center of Central Georgia  
Jamilah Stuart, Tru by Hilton  
Susan Mitchell, Bibb County Schools

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:** Chair: Patty Gibbs  
Vice Chair: Tina Dickson  
Secretary/Treasurer: Jamilah Stuart  
Past Chair: Susan Welsh

**EX-EFFICIO/NON-VOTING MEMBERS:** David Aiello, Macon Centreplex/Spectra Management  
Gary Wheat, Visit Macon President & CEO  
Yvonne Williams, Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce  
Stacy Moore, International Cherry Blossom Festival

