



Visit Macon FY 2022
Annual Report

A man in a patterned shirt is looking up at a ceiling with a vibrant, geometric pattern in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The pattern consists of concentric, radiating lines that create a star-like effect in the center. The man is positioned in the lower right of the frame, looking towards the upper left.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Visit Macon is to unify and lead our community in marketing the Macon-Bibb County area as a superior visitor and meeting destination.

Dear Friends,

Our mantra for fiscal year 2022 was “Communicate.” On the surface, that might seem to be a given in the tourism industry. If the pandemic taught us anything, it is the value of sharing information and ideas in order to forge connection with one another. It is our job to communicate to those outside our beloved city that a visit to Macon is like food to the soul. After more than a year of having to remain within our own walls, there was pent-up demand for travel. Despite continued uncertainty related to the pandemic, the Visit Macon Staff and Board of Directors continued to set aggressive goals in order to bring more visitors, film productions, and sports event partnerships to Macon-Bibb County in fiscal year 2022. I am proud to report that not only were these goals met, they were surpassed. The Visit Macon team’s hard work, vision, energy, and enthusiasm paved the way for Macon-Bibb County’s *hotel/motel tax collections to increase by 42%* over those in 2021 and were 14% higher than the previous record year of 2019, which was, of course, pre-pandemic.

Visit Macon was able to distribute *over \$500,000 in American Rescue Funds* to 13 Macon-Bibb businesses and organizations that work to support and grow local tourism. These grant recipients suffered economically as a result of the pandemic. We were grateful to be able to assist these local partners, whose efforts are so vital to ours. More than ever, we understand the nature of teamwork, especially in surviving through difficult times.

The film and television industry continues to be a strong source of business development. The potential for a permanent presence within this realm is also in the works: we hope to bring *a new, permanent studio and sound stage to Macon*. Securing this would bring a continuous stream of visitors, in the form of actors and production crews, to our community.

Sports tourism also fueled our record-setting year. We saw *11 new event partnerships*, hosting district and statewide tournaments for pickleball, tennis, and the Georgia High School Association’s state tournaments for cheer, wrestling, and basketball. Visit Macon created the role of Sports Development Manager in March to capitalize upon even more development opportunities in the arena of sports tourism.

Despite these positive achievements, Visit Macon suffered an irreversible loss in 2022. Steven Fulbright, Vice President of Sales and Services, passed away on September 7. Steven was much more than a co-worker to all of us: he was our loudest cheerleader, most uplifting friend, and the best ambassador Macon-Bibb tourism has ever had. Visit Macon’s record-setting year, set against numerous challenges, was due in very large part to Steven. To say that he will be missed is a vast understatement. The Visit Macon team will forge ahead, with Steven’s spirit of enthusiasm as our inspiration.

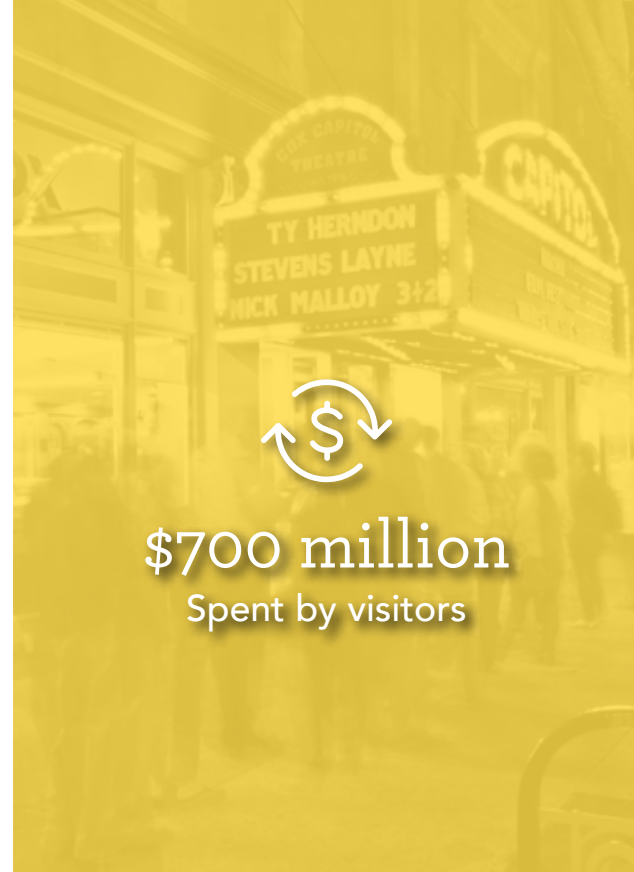
We hope to make him proud.

Sincerely,



Gary Wheat, President/CEO

**Fiscal year 2022 was
a record setting year
for hotel/motel tax
collections for Visit
Macon and Macon-
Bibb County.**





4.6 million

Visitors stayed an average of 4.3 nights
(.4 more nights than the national average)*

**For comparison, overnight visitors to Memphis, TN, another soulful Southern town, averaged a 3.12-night stay per visitor.*



11 million

Visitors to Macon



4,644

Tourism jobs in Bibb County

\$368.8 million

Visitor spending in Bibb County
(26.3% increase over 2020)

\$31.3 million

Local Tax Revenues

\$537.80

Saved in annual household taxes in Bibb County



Destination Sales

Marketable trips are key indicators of successful destination marketing. In FY2022, these were 6% higher in Macon-Bibb than the national average. This was the direct result of effective destination marketing and advertising by our sales team, led by Steven Fulbright. The sales team surpassed both of their leads goals:

Marketable Trips:	181 Leads Generated:	Room Nights:	149 Leads Turned Definite:
6% higher	115% over goal	42, 259	126% over goal

Destination Marketing

In addition to our main event geofence campaigns for the International Cherry Blossom Festival and the Main Street Christmas Lights Extravaganza, along with our general travel campaign that runs consistently throughout the year, we also ran additional campaigns to focus on outdoor adventures, Macon’s music heritage, and local music scene. All of the campaigns surpassed expected benchmarks, performed beautifully, and brought visitors into the city of Macon.

Film

Macon has served as the backdrop for numerous film productions. Our tree-lined streets and beautifully restored downtown area hold great appeal as a setting for both television and film projects. In FY22, Macon was the location for two major studio productions:

The Color Purple

The second film adaptation, produced by Stephen Spielberg, Quincy Jones, and Oprah Winfrey, was filmed in downtown Macon and is slated to be released in 2023.

Go-Big Show

Filming locations included Poplar Street, Carolyn Crayton Park, and Terminal Station for season two of this popular, high-stakes competition show.

Sports Tourism

Macon features a wide variety of local leagues and hosts several crowd-drawing sporting events each year—including national, regional, and state championships. In an effort to bring in new events year-round, Visit Macon has increased our focus on sports, most recently creating the role of Sports Development Manager. We’ve also renewed partnership with Macon Mayhem, middle Georgia’s hometown hockey team.

Georgia High School Association (GHSA)

In 2022, the GHSA State Championships returned to Macon, including: cheer and cheer game day, wrestling, and basketball.

Macon Area Tennis Association

MATA hosted 15 events; these included USTA-Sponsored Events, which led to an economic impact of \$1.5 million for Macon-Bibb.

Total economic
impact of these:
nearly \$9.6
million



Season of Soul Campaign (8/26/21—12/31/21): Award-Winning Marketing Campaign

Visit Macon was awarded the Platinum Hermes Creative Award for the “Season of Soul” campaign in the Strategic Campaigns/Marketing/Digital Marketing Campaign category. We received a score between 90-100 to obtain this award. In addition, this campaign resulted in:

- Approximately 1,931,000 impressions
- Average reach of 4,900 per day on social networks
- 600+ conversions into hotel stays





“There’s a reason
Macon is called
**The Festival Capital
of the World.**”

Events

From annual festivals to weekly events, visitors in Macon enjoy live music, sporting events, craft sales, farmers markets, and more. In 2022, Macon’s tourism industry enjoyed the success of these annual events:

Main Street Christmas Light Extravaganza

This event attracted more than 50,000 visitors from 50+ miles away, half of whom stayed in Macon for more than one day.

Cherry Blossom Festival

The 40th internationally-attended event brought visitors from all over the U.S. and around the world to experience the “Pinkest Party on Earth.” It also boosted visitation to downtown Macon by 71%.

Macon Burger Week

This event brought close to 15,000 visitors to Macon to support local restaurants.

Public Relations

Since December of 2021, we have invested in two public relations teams to help us work towards building momentum in bringing more travel writers and journalists to Macon and gaining national coverage for the many stories we have to share and all we have to offer—from our hotels and festivals to our beautiful outdoors, to our rich music scene and the progress of Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. With coverage from *Lonely Planet* and *Men's Journal* to *Southern Living* and *Forbes*, below are some of our top performing articles to date.

TK PR

TK Public Relations gets media coverage for destination, hospitality, luxury, and resort brands.

- "The 10 Best Cities to Visit for History Buffs" (*Best Life Online*)
- "The 13 Best Spots for a Classic American Float" (*Fodors*)
- "20 Affordable Family Vacations You Haven't Thought of Before" (*Southern Living*)
- "A Music-Lover's Guide to Macon, Georgia, the Birthplace of Southern Rock" (*Matador Network*)
- "21 Best Urban Parks and Trails if You're Seeking Green Spaces" (*Men's Journal*)
- "Small Towns with Big Black History Stories" (*Travel Awaits*)
- "12 Best Places to Travel in August" (*Travel and Leisure*)
- "A Weekend Guide To Macon, One Of The South's Best Kept Secrets" (*Forbes*)

Hemsworth Communications

Top-ranked public relations firm with local, regional, national, and global reach.

- "Warm Weather Destinations That Celebrate the Holiday Season in Style" (*Forbes*)
- "These Hotels Offer Affordable Luxury Priced Under \$200" (*Forbes*)
- "This Cherry Blossom Festival Promises to be 'The Pinkest Party on Earth'" (*Yahoo Sports*)



Come see what...
and who, **makes**
Macon special.



Visit Macon Staff

President/CEO — Gary Wheat

VP of Development/COO — Aaron Buzza

VP of Sales and Services — Steven Fulbright

Executive Assistant/Office Manager — Irish Hubbard

Director of Visitor Service — Kimberly Chambliss

Director of Sales — Trish Whitley

Sports Development Manager — Ann Starley

Marketing Manager — Hannah Hartman

Web/Social Media Manager — Haley Garrett

Lead Destination Specialist/Membership Coordinator —
Christopher Abbott

Destination Specialists — Cherie Arrington, Billie Pippin-Ingham,
Cynthia Lopez, Mary Ann Richardson

Tour Guides — Janice Habersham, Naomi Peterson

Board of Directors

Macon-Bibb County Mayor Appointee
Mayor Pro Tem Seth Clark

Hotel Owners/General Manager
Nancy Lott, Towneplace Suites
Kathy Martin, Marriott City Center

Attraction Directors
Susan Welsh, Museum of Arts and Sciences
Jamie Weatherford, Rock Candy Tours
Justin Andrews, Otis Redding Foundation
Rosetta Boatright, Anderson Conference Center

Tourism Entity (Restaurants, Retail, Etc.)
Tina Dickson, Ingleside Village Pizza

Community Leaders
Patty Gibbs, Family Counseling Center of Central Georgia
David Thompson, Piedmont Construction
Emily Hopkins, NewTown Macon

Ex-Officio Members
David Aiello, Macon Centreplex/Oakview Group
Stacy Moore, Cherry Blossom Festival
Ron Shipman, Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce

Executive Committee
Patty Gibbs, Chair
Tina Dickson, Vice Chair
Justin Andrews, Treasurer
Susan Welsh, Past Chair

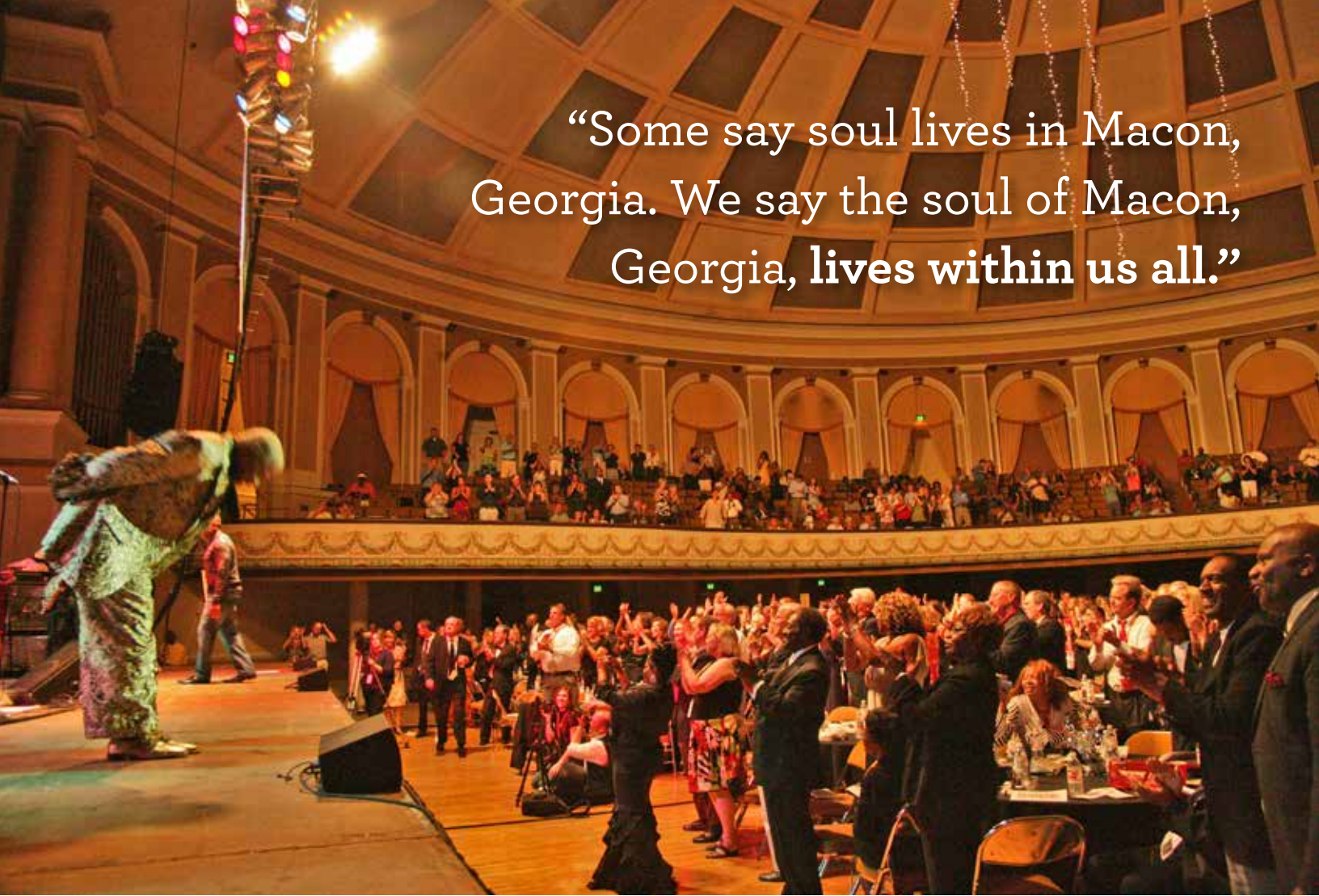


Steven Fulbright,
Vice-President of Sales & Services
(1980-2022)

Steven was a true star. He brightened every room he entered and every soul he met. Steven took the time to get to know others, and to make them feel important—because everyone was important to Steven. He was a devoted husband to David Quackenbush. A loving son, brother, uncle, and beloved member of the Macon-Bibb community, Steven “never met a board he didn’t like.” He served on too many local boards to count, just as he made too many friends to count. He loved Macon-Bibb and its people, especially those of us who were lucky enough to work with him every day.

Thank you, Steven Fulbright.
We are all better for working beside,
knowing, and loving you.





“Some say soul lives in Macon,
Georgia. We say the soul of Macon,
Georgia, **lives within us all.**”

Let's Keep in Touch!

Visit us online at maconga.org

Follow us on Twitter [@MaconGaSoul](https://twitter.com/MaconGaSoul) | Instagram [@visitmacon](https://www.instagram.com/visitmacon) | Facebook at [@VisitMaconGA](https://www.facebook.com/VisitMaconGA)

Call us at **478.743.1074** or **800.768.3401**

Email us at info@maconga.org

Visit us at **450 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Macon, Georgia 31201**

macon
where soul lives