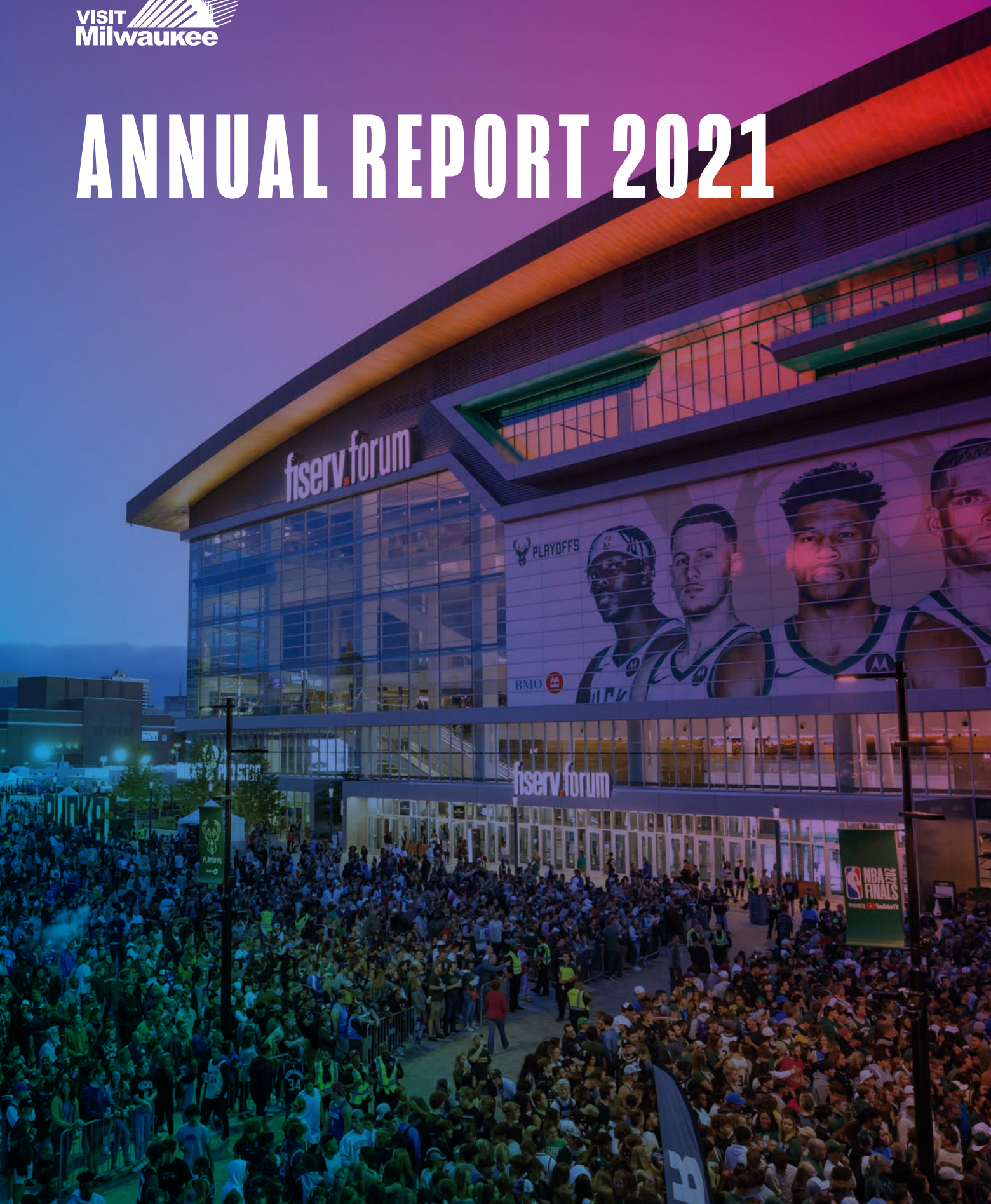




# ANNUAL REPORT 2021





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# MISSION

**WE ARE A COMMUNITY ASSET** that enhances the prosperity and public image of Milwaukee by developing strategic partnerships, driving impactful promotion and delivering indispensable expertise to companies, hotels and municipalities.





# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- OUR WORK IS BUILT ON HONESTY, INTEGRITY AND UNITY.
- WE VALUE DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS.
- WE STRIVE TO EXHIBIT A HIGH DEGREE OF ACCOUNTABILITY, STRATEGIC AND ANALYTICAL THINKING, AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATIONS IN ALL WE DO.



# DEAR PARTNERS,

The change from one year to the next often feels perfunctory. Yet the transition from 2020 to 2021 felt different, like a leap forward rather than a step.

Following a difficult year in 2020, we headed into 2021 with cautious optimism. Loosening Covid restrictions, new flights to Milwaukee, and the improving performance of Milwaukee's restaurants, hotels and venues were all critical milestones on the path to recovery. It turns out that optimism was well placed. As detailed throughout this report, 2021 was a year of meaningful recovery for the region's travel and tourism economy, which realized \$5.2 billion in total business sales, a figure that is only 11.9% shy of 2019's record-breaking amount.

On the hotel side, average daily rate in Milwaukee remained among the highest compared to our peer cities in 2021, driven by the leisure travel market, which exceeded expectations. This is even more impressive given our hotel supply has increased 8% since 2019. While 151 events were canceled in 2020, Milwaukee held over 171 events in 2021 and bookings for 2022 and future years are growing by the day. Our restaurants and performing arts venues, which were among the hardest hit during the pandemic, continued to claw back to more normalized sales.

This is thanks to the work of many, including our partners, elected officials, like-minded organizations and the community at large. At VISIT Milwaukee, we are proud to work alongside them and others to rebuild and grow a thriving Milwaukee. We are driven to advocate for our community, innovate new and compelling ways to market our assets, and leverage our collective strengths to make sure the world knows Milwaukee is an amazing place to live, work, and especially to visit.

As part of this work, in 2021, we signed another four-year contract with the Wisconsin Center District, and as part of this, we will be contributing a six-figure sum to the City of Milwaukee in a payment in lieu of taxes arrangement (PILOT). These funds go toward necessary city services that benefit visitors and locals alike.

While the pandemic continued to impact our daily lives in 2021, it did not stop an indomitable Milwaukee. Towards the end of the year, we welcomed a new mayor, Mayor Cavalier Johnson, who understands the economic impact of tourism on the city

and our region. We also experienced an abbreviated festival season, with highlights like a massive Juneteenth Day celebration, Irish Fest, and Mexican Fiesta. Wisconsin State Fair saw nearly 900,000 visitors despite poor weather, and Summerfest reopened to a ready audience in September with a new weekend format.

Our very own Milwaukee Bucks brought home the first NBA Championship in 50 years and the entire city celebrated the momentous occasion. Team USA clinched the Ryder Cup along the shores of Lake Michigan bringing fans to our city from all over the world. And to top it all off, we broke ground on the Wisconsin Center expansion, which will help to position Milwaukee as a premier convention destination for years to come.

We ended the year by working with partners across the community to put forth a bid for the 2024 Republican National Convention. As of this report, we are currently still in the running to host the convention that will create an economic impact of \$200 million and bring 15,000 journalists to our city, who will undoubtedly help to tell our story to the world.

Among the challenges facing us all, these and other moments remind us that there are "Good Things Brewing" in Milwaukee. This has been our rallying cry over the past couple years, and it aptly applies to years ahead. But we are ever mindful our recovery is far from complete, and for our community to truly thrive we must continue working together to not only stay ahead of the pandemic, but to also address other challenges that face our city.

If the past two years have taught us anything, it is the power of what can be achieved by working together. There really are Good Things Brewing in Milwaukee, and we are thrilled to make that known far and wide.

With gratitude,



**Dr. Eve M. Hall,**  
VISIT Milwaukee Board Chair



**Peggy Williams-Smith,**  
President & CEO

# ROAD TO RECOVERY

The popular Milwaukee Night Market returned in 2021.

→ **FEW AREAS OF THE** national economy have rebounded from the pandemic as strongly as travel and tourism\*. Essential to our local and national economy, tourism is a job creator, revenue generator, and reputation builder. But just as – if not more – importantly, tourism is a people connector, joy builder, and memory maker.

The continued recovery gives us high hopes for all that's possible. Together with our partners, VISIT Milwaukee is harnessing the momentum pushing our travel and tourism industry forward.

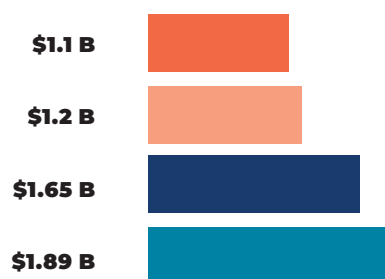
## RECOVERY STATS

- MILWAUKEE COUNTY 2021
- MILWAUKEE COUNTY 2019
- GREATER MILWAUKEE AREA 2021
- GREATER MILWAUKEE AREA 2019

### DIRECT VISITOR SPENDING



### LABOR INCOME



### TOTAL BUSINESS SALES



**FEW AREAS**  
OF THE ECONOMY  
HAVE RECOVERED  
AS WELL AS TRAVEL  
AND TOURISM\*





MILWAUKEE COUNTY IMPACT

**\$188.4 MILLION**

GENERATED FROM STATE AND LOCAL TAXES

**-27.5%**

**DECREASE  
FROM 2019**

**TOURISM SUPPORTED 25,092 FULL-TIME JOBS**

DOWN 25% FROM 2019



# SHOOTING HIGH

→ **FROM OUR NBA CHAMPION** Milwaukee Bucks to the global excitement of the Ryder Cup to thousands of records and team victories across diverse youth tournaments and events, we know champions compete in Milwaukee.

The economic impact of sporting and athletic events (see Bucks Economic Impact, below) on our travel and tourism industry is immense. There were more than 52,000 hotel room nights spread across 100 sport events we booked in 2021 for future years.

## TOTAL ESTIMATED ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR ENTIRE PLAYOFF RUN

**First Round**  
May 22-29 vs.  
the Miami Heat

**\$2.7  
MILLION**

**TOTAL  
ECONOMIC  
IMPACT**

**Second Round**  
June 5-19 vs. the  
New Jersey Nets

**\$12.8  
MILLION**

**TOTAL  
ECONOMIC  
IMPACT**

**Third Round**  
June 23-July 3, vs.  
the Atlanta Hawks

**\$14.1  
MILLION**

**TOTAL  
ECONOMIC  
IMPACT**

**NBA Finals**  
July 6-July 20 vs.  
the Phoenix Suns

**\$28  
MILLION**

**TOTAL  
ECONOMIC  
IMPACT**

**\$57.6 MILLION**

TOTAL  
ECONOMIC  
IMPACT OF  
PLAYOFFS





→ **IN 2021, VISIT MILWAUKEE** launched a new dedicated sports division – Sports Milwaukee – to intentionally focus on helping professional, amateur, recreational and youth sports think of Milwaukee first for their events.

## MAJOR SPORTS MILWAUKEE BOOKINGS, 2022-2023

Event Name	Total Attendance	Estimated Economic Impact
2022 US Olympic US Speedskating Team Trails	8,525	\$1.06 million
2022 NCAA Division 1 Men's Basketball Championship	18,000	\$6.5 million
2022 Badger Region Volleyball Championships	17,750	\$3.56 million
2022 NAIGC National Championships	1,700	\$1.6 million
2022 Windy City Classic	11,000	\$3.3 million
2022 USA Ultimate Frisbee College Championships	3,940	\$2.2 million
2022 Tour of America's Dairyland	4,500	\$137,775
2022 Redbull Flugtag X Milwaukee	7,000	\$1.03 million
2022 USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships	15,000	\$3.1 million
2023 Wisconsin Juniors Winter Classic	6,000	\$2.3 million
2023 Badger Region Volleyball Championships	13,500	\$3.56 million
2023 Midwest Twisters Invite	8,000	\$547,968
2023 Midwest Twisters Region 4 Championships	10,500	\$536,656
2022-2023 Baseball Tournaments at The Rock Complex	9,461	\$4.55 million



The Milwaukee Bucks' NBA Championship playoff series resulted in \$15,546,762 of direct spending.



"We have always talked about Milwaukee as a well-kept secret, but with the proactive work of the VISIT team, we now are really finding our stride as a city that we promote with some of the finest in the U.S. and the world. It is so important to continue to drive awareness of the offerings we have in event spaces big and small, activities around the city, and our food and beverage scene. They're as good as any city in the U.S., and not just for the local economy but also as a point of pride."

— JIM KANTER, CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER OF CENTRAL STANDARD CRAFT DISTILLERY





# BREAKING NEW GROUND

→ **FOR YEARS**, our region has dreamed of and planned for a larger, more flexible convention center. A true destination that highlights the very best of our region and serves as a compelling beacon for large events and conventions.

Today, thanks to the work of so many, this dream is now a reality. With steel, cement, and rebar rising from the ground, the new convention center is taking shape.

The new convention center will be 40% larger than before and able to accommodate an additional 100,000 new out-of-state visitors each year along with multiple overlapping events. Already a destination for events and groups, the new convention center will elevate Milwaukee even further with meeting and event planners as well as attendees.

Wisconsin  
Center  
Convention  
expansion  
renderings



**Once complete, Milwaukee will boast a new, modern, dynamic facility that features:**

**445,000**

**SQ. FT. TOTAL CONVENTION CENTER SPACE**

**300,000**

**SQ. FT. EXHIBIT HALL**

**100,000**

**SQ. FT. NEW ROOFTOP BALLROOM AND MEETING SPACE**

**52**

**FLEXIBLE BREAKOUT SPACES**

**11**

**BALLROOM SPACE DIVISIONS  
ROOFTOP BALLROOM**



# SELLING MILWAUKEE

→ **THROUGH SALES**, paid advertising, experiential marketing and earned media, VISIT Milwaukee promotes the region as a premier destination for business and leisure travel.

We are the only local organization solely dedicated to marketing Milwaukee on a national and international scale.

We do that by highlighting and promoting our businesses, venues, facilities and family attractions. By telling the story of what our amazing city and region have to offer. By hosting tours and influencer events. And by traveling around the country to bring

Milwaukee to meeting and event planners.

Even our little brother in Illinois took notice. As part of our experiential leisure marketing campaign, VISIT Milwaukee took over Amtrak Hiawatha to make sure Chicagoans know the best summer festivals are just a train ride away.

And, as of this writing, we are a finalist for the 2024 Republican National Convention, an event that will bring a global audience and more than \$200 million at our hotels, restaurants and bars over the course of a week.

BOOKED IN 2021 FOR FUTURE YEARS

**167,994**

**HOTEL ROOM NIGHTS**

**102**

**SPORTING EVENTS**

**261**

**MEETINGS / CONVENTIONS**

**1 BILLION**

EARNED MEDIA IMPRESSIONS



**LEISURE**

664 MILLION

**MEETINGS / CONVENTIONS**

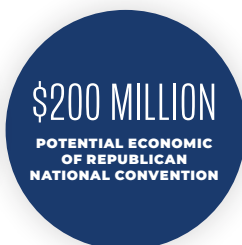
252 MILLION

**WISCONSIN CENTER DISTRICT**

250 MILLION

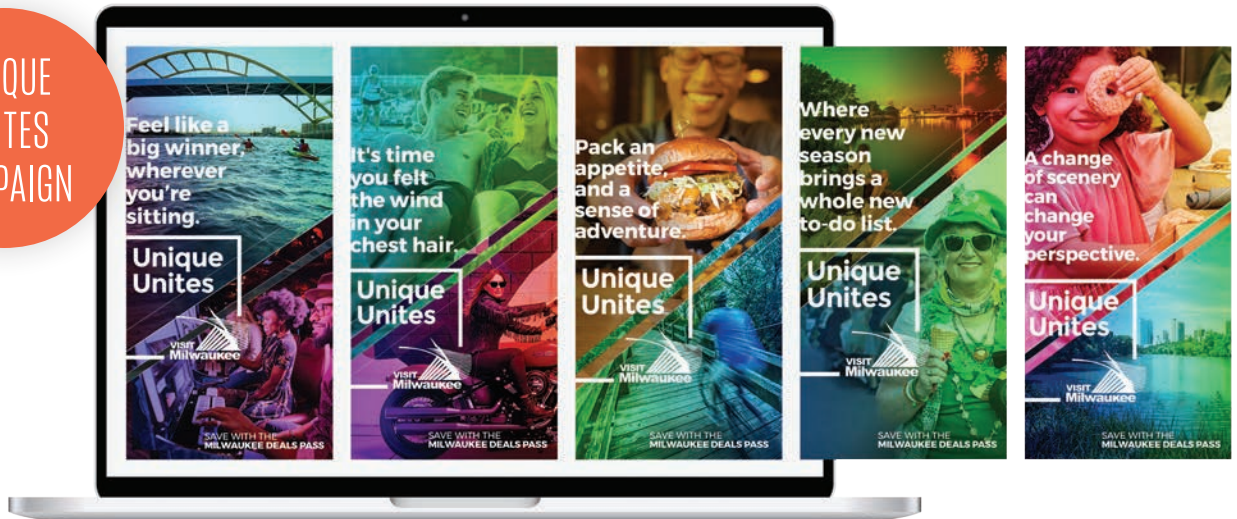
**102 MILLION PAID MEDIA IMPRESSIONS**

LEISURE: **54 MILLION** • MEETINGS / CONVENTIONS: **48 MILLION**



Left, VISIT Milwaukee and DJ Shawna made a splash at Connect 2021. Right, VISIT Milwaukee activates Amtrak.

UNIQUE  
UNITES  
CAMPAIGN



SOCIETY OF AMERICAN TRAVEL WRITERS ANNUAL CONVENTION

**200+**  
ATTENDEES

**50+**  
ARTICLES  
GENERATED

**100+**  
PARTNERS  
INVOLVED





"Thanks for taking the lead on Museum Week.  
Beyond the importance to the museums, the attention  
from VISIT means a lot."

— MAME McCULLY, PABST MANSION/  
MILWAUKEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY





# CELEBRATING MILWAUKEE

→ **WE'VE ALL ASKED** friends, family or colleagues, “What do you want to do?” VISIT Milwaukee and our partners have created outstanding answers to this question!

For those looking to escape the winter and pandemic “blahs,” we kicked the year off with **Museum Week**. Twenty-two museum partners offered free or discounted admission and special events.

Interested in our outstanding local breweries, bars and pubs? The **Brew City Beer Pass**, launched in September, offers visitors and locals the perfect opportunity to have great beer next to a great lake. This free pass allows users to redeem ‘buy one, get one’ (BOGO) beer from some of the best breweries in the Greater Milwaukee area.

And for those looking for activities, the **Milwaukee Deals Pass**, also launched last summer, helps visitors and locals with dozens of ways to save on restaurants, breweries, museums, theaters, boutiques, tours and fun activities, all while supporting more than 70 local businesses. These passes have been downloaded by over 6,200 deal-loving locals and visitors alike.

For the out-of-towners and staycationers alike, we brought back **Milwaukee Hotel Month** better than ever. We partnered with over 20 hotels to offer enticing packages. Perks included restaurant and store gift cards, food and drink vouchers, free or reduced overnight parking, late checkout, room upgrades and more.

## Clockwise:

The Westin, Taqueria El Cabrito, Third Space Brewing and America's Black Holocaust Museum.



6,200+  
MILWAUKEE DEALS  
& BREW CITY BEER PASS  
DOWNLOADS



# UNIFYING MILWAUKEE

→ **AS VACCINES BECAME** more widely available, VISIT Milwaukee made it easier for our front-line hospitality employees to feel safer at work and to give them – and our tourism economy – a shot in the arm by hosting Hospitality Vaccination Days at the Wisconsin Center in May.

Despite the difficulties of doing business during a pandemic, we're proud to have retained 91% of our partners, welcomed 44 new diverse businesses, and brought on two new corporate partners in 2021. Together we work to achieve our common goal of making Milwaukee an amazing place to live, work, and, of course, visit.

**Clockwise:**  
Irish Fest,  
PrideFest,  
Mexican  
Fiesta, and  
Juneteenth.



→ **NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE,** you are welcome in Milwaukee. From the largest events to intimate community gatherings, across our great city there truly is something for everyone to experience and enjoy.

In Milwaukee, unique truly unites. In 2021, this theme was central to our marketing and communication initiatives. But it also captures how we work and live. From one

of the country's most accessible beaches, to festivals that celebrate a multitude of heritages, to being among the most LGBTQ+ friendly communities\*, Milwaukee is where everyone can be their most authentic self.

At VISIT Milwaukee, we know that to represent a diverse community our team must be representative of those we work to support. Simply put, we're better together.





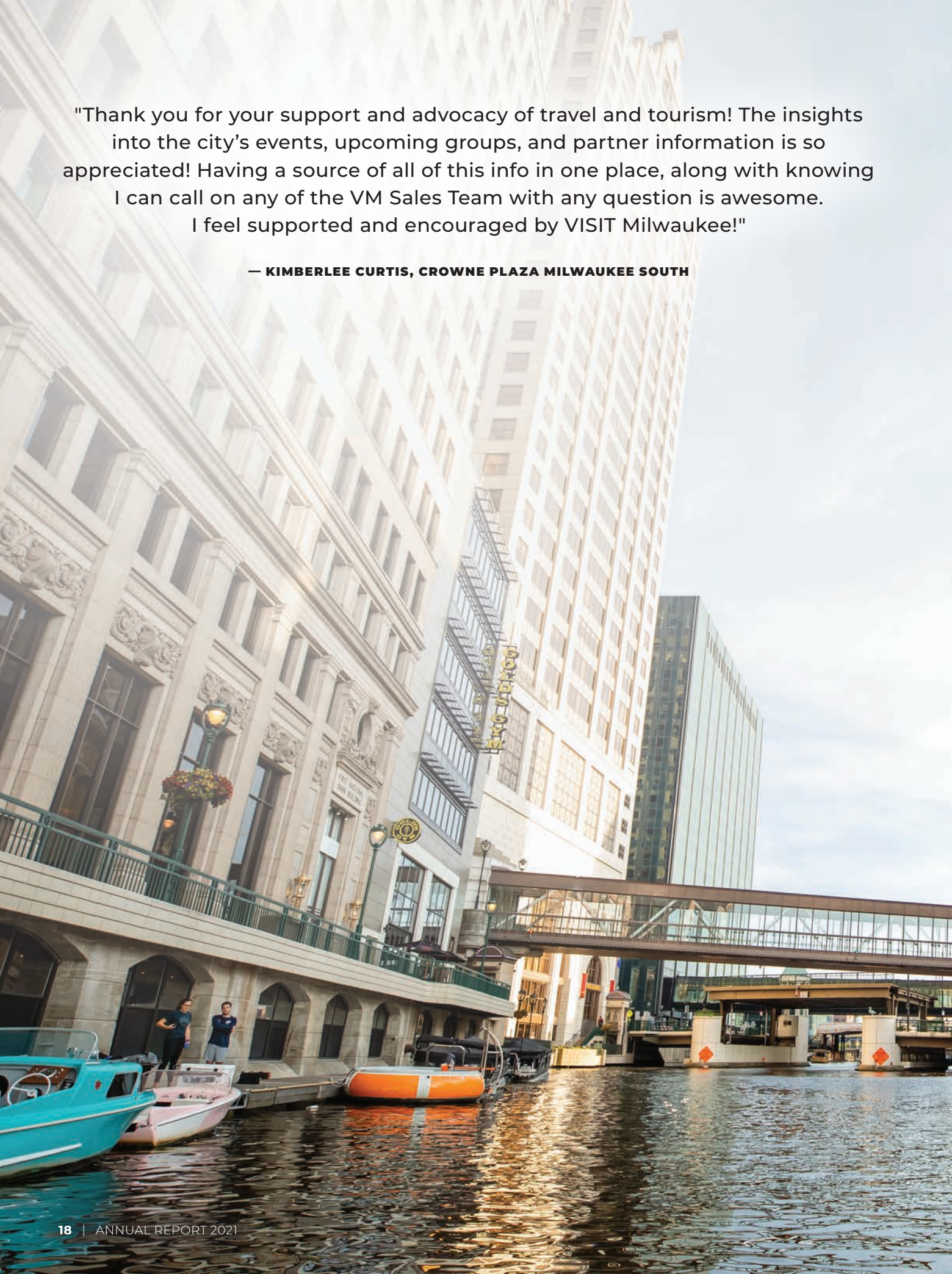
"Becoming a member of VISIT Milwaukee has been one of the best decisions we made as a new business to the area! They introduced us to many key personnel and helped guide us in the best direction to exploring the city and everything that it has to offer. I cannot thank the team enough."

— JESSICA BROCKWAY, SALES & EVENTS MANAGER AT HOWL AT THE MOON



"Thank you for your support and advocacy of travel and tourism! The insights into the city's events, upcoming groups, and partner information is so appreciated! Having a source of all of this info in one place, along with knowing I can call on any of the VM Sales Team with any question is awesome. I feel supported and encouraged by VISIT Milwaukee!"

— KIMBERLEE CURTIS, CROWNE PLAZA MILWAUKEE SOUTH





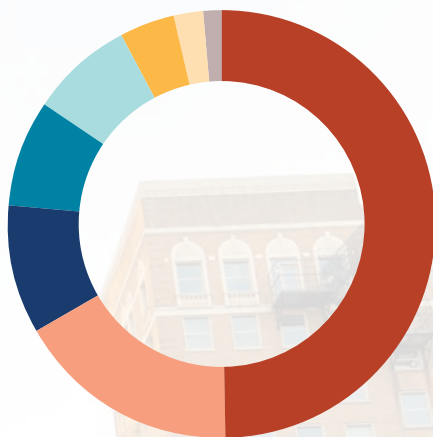
# FINANCIALS

TOTAL 2021 OPERATING BUDGET

**\$5,924,757**

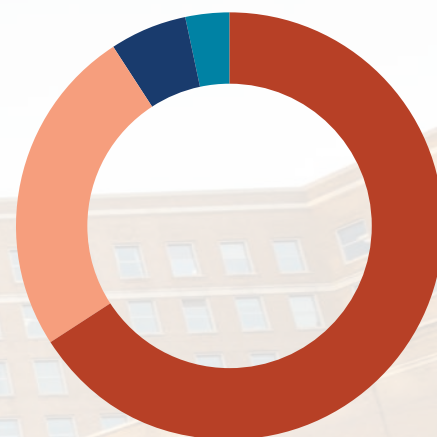
**-46%**

**% CHANGE IN  
OPERATING BUDGET  
VS 2020**



## 2021 FUNDING

- 50% 2020 Hotel occupancy taxes & public funding
- 17% Destination Marketing Grant
- 10% Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan Forgiveness
- 8% Employee Tax Credits
- 8% Partner Dues & Programs
- 4% Program & Service Revenue
- 2% Marketing Sponsors & Ad Sales
- 1% Grants & Other



## 2021 SPENDING

- 66% Convention Sales, Marketing & Communications
- 25% Administrative
- 6% Event experience
- 3% Partnerships



# OUR LEADERSHIP

## SENIOR LEADERSHIP



**Peggy Williams-Smith**  
President & CEO  
VISIT Milwaukee



**Joshua Albrecht**  
Vice President  
of Marketing &  
Communications



**Leslie Johnson**  
Vice President  
of Sales



**Charlotte Hayslett**  
Vice President of HR



**Luis Ayala**  
Vice President  
of Finance



**Meg McKenna**  
Partnership Director



**Michelle Haider**  
Director of Event  
Experience



**Claire Koenig**  
Communications  
Director

## SALES



**Kim Casey**  
Group Tour & Sales  
Account Executive



**Chad Chappell**  
National Account  
Executive



**Christina Fox**  
Convention Sales  
Coordinator



**Lauren Hyps**  
Associate Director  
of Sales



**Megan Husband**  
National Account  
Executive



**Connie Kopecky**  
Account Executive



**Laura Lutter Cole**  
National Account  
Executive

## MARKETING



**Katie Pfankuch**  
Sales Support  
Specialist



**Marissa Werner**  
Director of Sports  
Development



**Miranda Allison**  
Digital Marketing  
Manager



**Chris Ammon**  
Marketing  
Coordinator



**April Ko**  
Meetings and  
Conventions  
Marketing Manager



**Kathryn Lavey**  
Senior Creative  
Manager



**Alex Zimdars**  
Graphic Designer

## COMMUNICATIONS



**Ina Li**  
Social Media  
Coordinator



**John Blust**  
Communications  
Coordinator



**Jake Meister**  
Leisure  
Communications  
Manager



**Nicole Bedner**  
Event Experience  
Specialist



**Teresa Benson**  
Visitor Experience  
Associate



**Emily Boulden**  
Event Experience  
Coordinator



**Andrew Knuth**  
Event Experience  
Manager



**Tony Snell**  
Visitor Experience  
Manager

## EVENT EXPERIENCE

## PARTNERSHIP



**Bryan Kubel**  
Partnership Sales  
Manager



**Maria Strand**  
Partnership  
Coordinator



**Lesa Edwards**  
Finance Manager



**Aaron Kosma**  
Administrative  
Coordinator



**Ann-Marie Parker**  
Staff Accountant



**Der Vang**  
HR Specialist

## ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

# OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## OFFICERS



**Dr. Eve M. Hall**  
Incoming Chair  
Milwaukee Urban  
League



**Steve Baas**  
Vice Chair  
Metropolitan  
Milwaukee  
Association of  
Commerce (MMAC)



**Jim Villa**  
Treasurer/Secretary  
National Association  
for Industrial &  
Office Parks (NAIOP)



**Peggy Williams-Smith**  
President & CEO  
VISIT Milwaukee



**Luis Ayala**  
Assistant Secretary  
VISIT Milwaukee



**Rafael Acevedo**  
City of Milwaukee



**Danielle Bergner**  
J. Jeffers & Co.



**Kate Braasch**  
Marquette University



**Marty Brooks**  
Wisconsin Center  
District



**Starr Butler**  
Milwaukee Bucks



**Kathy Causier**  
Wauwatosa  
Common Council



**Grady L. Crosby**  
Johnson Controls



**William J. Davidson**  
Harley-Davidson  
Museum



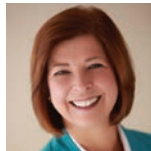
**Brian Dranzik**  
Milwaukee Mitchell  
International Airport



**Michael Evans**  
Marcus Hotels  
& Resorts



**Mark Flaherty**  
Jackson Street  
Holdings



**Kristine Hillmer**  
Wisconsin  
Restaurant  
Association



**Tracy Johnson**  
Commercial  
Association of  
REALTORS®  
Wisconsin



**James Kanter**  
Central Standard  
Craft Distilling



**Curt Kluth**  
Saz's Hospitality  
Group



**Lynda Kohler**  
SHARP Literacy



**Jeremy Lucas**  
Milwaukee County  
Parks



**Tom Malloy**  
Potawatomi  
Hotel & Casino



**Dennis McBride**  
Mayor of Wauwatosa



**Arlisia E. McHenry**  
City of Milwaukee



**Rose Murack**  
Radisson Hotel  
Milwaukee West



**Kevin Newell**  
Royal Capital



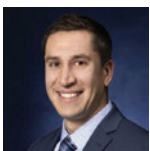
**Kathleen O'Leary**  
Wisconsin State  
Fair Park



**Jason Rae**  
Wisconsin LGBT  
Chamber of  
Commerce



**Gerard A. Randall, Jr.**  
Milwaukee  
Partnership  
Academy



**Maxx Rodriguez**  
Milwaukee Brewers



**Sarah Smith  
Pancheri**  
Milwaukee World  
Festival, Inc.



**Omar Shaikh**  
Ex Officio  
SURG Restaurant  
Group



**Howard Snyder**  
Northwest Side  
Community  
Development Co.



**Beth Weirick**  
Milwaukee  
Downtown, Bid 21



**Melissa Weiss**  
City of Wauwatosa,



# OUR PARTNERS

→ **FROM HOTELS,** restaurants, bars, retailers, event services, and so much more, VISIT Milwaukee's 700+ partners believe in the power of tourism. And our corporate partners believe that making Milwaukee an amazing place to visit can help create an even more amazing place to live and work. Together with our partners, we're working to make a better Milwaukee every day.

## REGIONAL



## CORPORATE





Strategic  
partner  
Potawatomi  
Hotel  
& Casino







VISITMilwaukee.org  
(800) 554-1448 | info@Milwaukee.org



@VISITMilwaukee | @DearMKE