This summer we saw signs of recovery from the COVID pandemic despite a few hiccups along the way. If we were to describe the last three months it would be with two words: Resilience and Hope.

From people masking up at local Farmers Markets to diners returning to their favorite locally owned and operated restaurants eager for the salads, crispy fried chicken, pasta, and sandwiches they had missed in previous months; cities started to come alive again as visitors, looking for an escape, made their way to the Great Rivers & Routes region. And while there may still be some restrictions on indoor dining in some areas, our restaurants jumped in to offer outdoor dining, carry-out and curbside services.

Spending time outdoors never seemed better. The allure of our 130-plus miles of hiking and biking trails caught the attention of people who wanted room to roam. Taking a ride up the SkyTour, climbing to the top of Monk’s Mound at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, exploring the final 60-miles of Route 66 in Illinois, going to a drive-in theater and learning more about the region’s history in our riverfront communities became new bucket list activities.

There were bright spots for the region in the first quarter of FY 2021. Although we missed the grand fireworks displays along the Mississippi River; Edwardsville, Grafton and Jerseyville put on spectacular light shows over the July 4th holiday. Some events were canceled or postponed but All-Star Restaurant Week went off without a hitch. And slowly but surely more events are taking shape throughout our communities, though they might look a bit different from years’ past.

The value of tourism on local economies was emphasized in July when the state released its annual Tourism Revenue Report for 2019 and we saw a 3.3 percent increase in our region alone. While next year’s numbers won’t be as shiny, we know tourism is essential to the recovery and economic growth of our region.

That’s why we continue to highlight the good news in our region. That’s why we are working hard to show visitors we are the perfect and safe destination for a road trip. We are a great place to spend the night and explore our great locally owned and operated restaurants, attractions and outdoor delights.

WE ARE THE ONLY PLACE IN AMERICA WHERE THE MOTHER ROAD MEETS THE GREAT RIVER ROAD, AND WE ARE GREAT RIVERS & ROUTES STRONG!

[Signature]
Interim Director • Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau
WE KICKED OFF THE QUARTER HOSTING ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL ALL-STAR RESTAURANT WEEK IN JULY. WE SAFELY DISTRIBUTED CARDINALS-THEMED RESTAURANT WEEK GLASSES THROUGH THE ALTON VISITOR CENTER WINDOW AND HAD A FUN TIME TALKING WITH EVERYONE ABOUT THEIR DINING EXPERIENCES. THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE RESTAURANTS WHO PARTICIPATED!

Restaurant Week Participants:
- Airliner Bar & Grill
- Alton Wood River Sportsmen’s Club
- Bakers & Hale
- Bluff City Grill
- Brown Bag Bistro
- Carver’s Southern-Style BBQ
- Castelli’s Restaurant at 255
- Decaro’s
- Gentelin’s on Broadway
- Grafton Winery & Brewhaus
- Great Rivers Tap & Grill
- Joe’s Pizza & Pasta - Brighton
- Joe’s Pizza & Pasta - Godfrey
- Johnson’s Corner Restaurant
- My Just Desserts
- Old Bakery Beer Company
- Roper’s Regal Beagle
- State Street Market
- The Winery at Aerie’s
- Tony’s Steakhouse & Bar

We debuted our free Rivers, Routes & Refreshment mobile pass, which features eight local wineries, breweries and distilleries. To participate, download the pass from Explore. RiversandRoutes.com and check in at four or more locations to win a free Great Rivers & Routes face mask. The Walk with Lincoln and Civil War Legacy Tour mobile pass is also available. Tour through Alton’s historic riverfront and enjoy audio clips at each location.

Our staff was proud to help support the “Name the Team” announcement event at Lloyd Hopkins Field on August 14. The Alton River Dragons will be the new Prospect League baseball team making its home in Alton. The inaugural season will start in the summer of 2021.

We are also working with the University of Illinois and the University of Illinois Extension office on a potential tourism grant in our region.

Throughout this quarter, we continued hosting outreach meetings with our lodging, attractions and signature events partners. The quarterly and monthly meetings have served as a valuable resource for sharing information during these unprecedented times, collecting updates to share on our website and in marketing materials and continuing to work together to share our story with potential visitors.

JULY - SEPTEMBER VISITOR CENTER STATS

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<tr>
<td>2,958 PHONE INQUIRIES</td>
<td>212 WEB CHATS</td>
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<td>1,474 VISITOR GUIDES MAILED</td>
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In August, we debuted a **monthly blog series** focusing on the history and impact of African ancestry on the six county Great Rivers & Routes region. The blogs are written by Charlotte Johnson and Renée Johnson. The first topic focused on the collective history of the **Rocky Fork area**.

Our **2020 Fall/Winter Travel Guide** was released around Labor Day. The new 68-page guide featured great road trip adventures in Southwest Illinois including fall color drives, **regional orchards and roadside stands**, **Haunted Alton** adventures and the **best spots to see eagles**.

Over the course of the past 16 weeks, we were one of 19 DMOs in Illinois participating in an organic campaign entitled, **“Illinois Road Trip Round-Up”** to encourage Illinois residents to safely explore the state during the pandemic. The weekly campaign ended on Sept. 15 and reached approximately 294,570 unique users. The highest performing week was **“Best Pizza”** with a reach of 30,246. Other topics included **“Local Breweries and Distilleries,” “Family Fun,” and “Best Ice Cream Spots.”**

**Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site** was featured in the “Have you seen it” section in the September/October 2020 edition of **AAA Living**. The Hartford to Grafton section of the **Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway** was featured as one of the best riding routes on **Outside magazine’s** best road trip list. The **Discover Blog** published its Best Road Trip in Each State list and **Litchfield** was listed as a Road Trip Highlight for Illinois. The new Great Rivers & Routes website was a Gold recipient of the **dotCOMM Awards**, an international competition honoring excellence in web creativity and digital communication.
Our sales manager participated in the SportsBiz Xchange virtual sales conference in August. Our Bureau had 14 appointments during the three-week show and we are currently pursuing new leads with US Cheer, Adrenaline Sports (pickleball), Kayak Bass Fishing and Major League Quidditch. Sporting events throughout the region had a big economic impact in July, including the American Junior Golf Association tournament at Spencer T. Olin Golf Course and the baseball and softball tournaments at the new Plummer Family Park in Edwardsville.

In August, we sent a Touring Tidbits email newsletter sharing the online link to the new Destination Guide. The newsletter was sent to 1334 tour planner email addresses and had a 19.82% open rate. In September, we sent an email newsletter promoting ways to meet safely at the Gateway Convention Center thanks to their new cleaning protocols. The message was sent to 328 meeting planner email addresses and had a 18.29% open rate. We also sent a Field Trip News email newsletter promoting the virtual learning opportunities at the Lewis & Clark State Historic Site, National Great Rivers Museum, 1820 Colonel Benjamin Stephenson House and more. The newsletter was sent to 825 educators and had a 19.76% open rate.

We continue to work with our group tour contacts to keep existing October tour reservations, reschedule cancelled tours and book new business for 2021 and 2022.

**JULY-SEPTEMBER SALES METRICS:**

- **TOTAL LEADS:** 36
- **TOTAL LEAD ROOM NIGHTS:** 2695
- **TOTAL BOOKINGS:** 9
- **TOTAL BOOKED ROOM NIGHTS:** 2373
MISSION
Advance the overall destination experience and awareness for Madison, Macoupin, Montgomery, Jersey, Calhoun and Greene counties, in collaboration with community stakeholders, to strengthen the local economy and quality of life.

VISION
Provide world-class destination management and marketing leadership that improves this region’s quality of life and economic vitality.

GREAT RIVERS & ROUTES STAFF

BARBARA STRACK  
Interim CEO/Operations & Finance Director

STEPHANIE TATE  
Marketing Communications Director

KATIE BENNETT  
Sales & Reporting Manager

GAIL WALLACE  
Tourism Manager

MIRIAH HARING  
Tourism Coordinator

JOHN HOPKINS  
Board Chairperson  
Hopkins Law Firm

LAUREN PATTAN  
Vice Chair  
Old Bakery Beer Company

KRISTI HYTEN  
Secretary/Treasurer  
Community Volunteer

MITCHELL BAIR  
City of Collinsville

MICHAEL BARKER  
Argosy Casino

KAREN BRNCIC  
Alton Marina

BRIAN CAMPBELL  
City of Alton, 1st Ward Alderman

KIM DURR  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

STACY FRIEDRICHHINRICHS  
DoubleTree by Hilton-Collinsville

TOM GUARINO  
Bella Milano

SANDY HEFNER  
Jersey County Board

CAMEO HOLLAND  
City of Alton

LINDA JUN  
Vandalia Bus Lines

JD LORTON  
Aerie’s Resort

CATHY LUTTRELL  
Holiday Inn Express & Suites Edwardsville

MIKE McCORMICK  
Village of Godfrey

DAVE MILLER  
St. Louis Regional Airport

PATTY ROTERMUND  
Best Western Premier Alton-St. Louis Area Hotel

DOUG STOTLER  
Lewis & Clark Community College

ERIN VENTIMILIA  
Tony’s Restaurant

CINDY WARKE  
Gateway Convention Center