**SHORES & ISLANDS OHIO**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2022**

2022 was a strong year for our region’s tourism industry with lodging tax, sales tax, overall room occupancy, and many other metrics up over 2021. It was also another year of transition for our organization. We started the year as Lake Erie Shores & Islands and in late March unveiled our new logo and destination name: Shores & Islands Ohio. We started the year with some gaps in our personnel needs, and began the new year with renewed strength after having brought on new team members in social media, sports tourism, and website content management.

We established an organizational structure that combined Destination Development functions that were a component of our new strategic plan with the Visitor Experiences team. We aligned our Marketing and Group Accounts teams under one department. We brought the tasks associated with the physical operation of the welcome centers, the human resources functions, and all financial tasks under the Operations department.

We launched a new website using a new content management platform; began offering our partners additional promotional opportunities; established a destination development grant and resident engagement program; brought back our annual meeting, the *Shore Awards* that recognize outstanding achievements of our partners, and the *Ambassador* program, a network of volunteers who assist us at special events in the region. We received multiple marketing awards and other acknowledgements, including being honored by both OCIC and ECEDC with economic development partner awards.

Several team members achieved personal educational milestones that will benefit them and our organization in many ways: Mackenzie Toll became our newest *Ohio Travel Association Tourism Leadership Academy* graduate, Chris Lewis received his drone pilot license and also certification from the Sports ETA organization as a Sports Tourism Strategist, Dawn Weinhardt received certification from the Cornell University Human Resources Essentials & Management program. We have additional team members working toward other such goals and will finish up this year.

2022 was the first year of our new strategic plan with goals set based on the plan’s four main components: *Commit to Community Engagement, Inspire Destination Development, Support Economic Development, and Achieve Organizational Excellence*. We set a high bar for what we would accomplish in 2022, and with the support of our board members and partners, attacked our goals with determination. Most were completed or were in-process at the end of the year. Others are longer-term projects that will continue to be worked on this year.

I wish to thank all of the Shores & Island staff team for the hard work in 2022, also the Erie and Ottawa County Commissioners for their support, and our board members for their time and guidance over the past year: Lee Alexakos, Mike Barr, Abbey Bemis, Wendy Chambers, Billy Criscione, Kimberly Domokos, Emily Dunfee, David Dunn, Jude Hammond, Amy Hoffman, Jeff Hoffman, Brian Huston, Peter Huston, Paul Jeris, Gary Lickfelt, Kimberly Kaufman, Nicole Kochensparger, Kim Morrison, Brad Ohlemacher, Brian Peiffer, Steve Poggiali, Swathi Ravichandran, Carolyn Rodenhauser, Amy Roldan, Cecelia Ruta, Raffaele Ruta, Brian Shanle, Commissioner Pat Shenigo, Chris Singerling, James Sortino, Lisa Sortino, Commissioner Mark Stahl, Jim Stouffer, David White, Eric Wobser, and Rebekah Zimmerman.

Following are some of our major activities and accomplishments from 2022.

* Launched the new Shores & Islands Ohio destination name and logo with a spring event that attracted 170 partners from across the region. Following the event, we began switching out the old and new name/logo in hundreds of physical locations and thousands of online locations.
* Initiated “coffee chats” with chambers of commerce, Main Street organizations, and merchant groups across the region. These gatherings provided an opportunity for community members to learn about new ways to engage with our organization for mutual benefit. More than 20 such gatherings were held.
* Launched a new website incorporating a new database platform that enables us to make nearly all website additions and updates internally. The site incorporates several new features including an accessibility feature (AudioEye), a user-generated content tool (CrowdRiff), and an interactive 3D tour function (Threshold 360). Website sessions in 2022 totaled 1,673,666.
* We began offering partners new promotional opportunities including premium website placement, website blogs, boosted social posts, and other methods of promoting their businesses. The number of partners engaging with us through travel guide advertising or our new offerings in 2022 was 342.
* We increased our focus on supporting events in the communities we serve and had a presence at 25 special events in the two-county region during 2022. We also distributed more than 400 Shores & Islands logo flags to residents and businesses in the region as a way to reinforce our new destination name and the relationship between the communities in it.
* We assisted in planning and production of the Ohio Travel Association Fall Conference held at Kalahari in early October. More than 250 tourism industry representatives from across the state attended the event that included educational sessions, networking activities, and the opportunity for us to showcase our region to this influential audience.
* Launched a new Destination Development Grant to assist organizations and communities in Erie and Ottawa County in adding transformational projects and initiatives. $441,465 was awarded to 28 projects in Erie County, and $98,400 went to 19 projects in Ottawa County. Nearly all communities in the region were represented by receiving at least one grant award.
* Followers on our main social platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) increased by 10,297 over the year to a total of 320,605. In addition, we added Linked In as a focus and grew the following 73% over the year to 1,067.
* Over 2022 we tracked 446 positive media mentions of communities/attractions in our region representing a potential reach of 4.47 billion. In addition, our PR team managed the development of
44 blog articles that were posted to our website and/or social pages. We hosted 13 travel writers over the year for various projects and provided editorial assistance to 31 additional media outlets covering communities/attractions in our area.
* As trade shows began coming back to pre-Covid levels, our group accounts team activity picked up accordingly. During the year we engaged with 109 non-sports groups and 35 sports groups in some way such as responding to RFPs, providing services to groups in the destination, or awarding grants.
In addition, over 50 meetings were held with group planners regarding future potential business and 80 qualified leads from trade shows were distributed out to partners.