

Accessible CU

Champaign-Urbana has a long history of developing accessible opportunities. Dating back to the late 40's following World War 2, when the Galesburg campus closed, it caused the many veterans with disabilities to advocate for keeping the campus open so they could continue their education. The closure moved forward, but a dedicated group of advocates came to the main campus in Urbana-Champaign to show they deserved an education. Six years of "experimental" status on campus allowed the students to show their abilities and was supported by then Governor Stratton. In 1966, Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) was dedicated, leading to major innovations including the development of the first architectural accessibility standards that would become the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standards. They also developed the first wheelchair-accessible fixed route system, the first accessible university residence halls, the first service fraternity and advocacy group comprised of students with disabilities, and the first collegiate adapted sports and recreation program.

Through all these achievements, and the many more to come, it was clear that Experience Champaign-Urbana needed to add to that list and create a partnership that would provide ways for all to explore and enjoy our brilliant community.

According to the CDC, in the U.S. alone, 26% of the adult population lives with a disability. MMGY Global conducted a study in 2018, showing that 12.5 million people with a disability traveled that year, contributing \$52.8 billion to the economy. They anticipated these numbers to triple by 2028.

To help develop an authentic look at accessibility in our community, we partnered with Community Choices, a local nonprofit that helps people with developmental disabilities in Champaign County pursue independence and opportunity, and the College of Education at the University of Illinois to evaluate the accessibility of local businesses.

We approached them in 2022, at which time they created a weekly forum for its members to discuss what accessibility means to them. The team first referenced the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. Members, however, expressed that true accessibility is a much broader concept that includes a range of additional features, such as the way people with disabilities are treated by employees, available sensory information, and cognitive access. Through conversations with disabled community members, Community Choices staff, and faculty from the Special Education Department at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC), the group spent over a year developing the "Accessible Champaign Checklist." The checklist outlines the physical, sensory, cognitive, and accommodation-ready characteristics of businesses.



Students taking education classes at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign then used this checklist to evaluate the accessibility of businesses in Champaign County. The data was reviewed and organized by Community Choices and shared with us to upload the data to a new page on our website:

experiencecu.org/accessible-cu.

The website launched in early August with nearly 80 businesses listed. Users can search businesses by category—i.e. food & drink, shopping, arts & culture, etc.—and they can filter search results using metrics that were incorporated in Community Choices' evaluation of businesses. These filters include whether a business has easy-to-open doors, a crowded layout, multi-stall bathrooms, wide stall doors, Braille signage, and nearly 30 more attributes relating to physical and cognitive needs.

In partnership with the College of Education, Community Choices plans to continue to expand this project, evaluate businesses, and ensure that Champaign County is a leader in accessibility. We continue to add listings to the website as evaluations are completed. Additionally, we're developing additional partnerships within DRES to work directly with students currently being served at the university.

The immediate response to the launch of Accessible CU has been overwhelmingly positive. We are excited to continue developing this resource for residents and visitors, and we look forward to finding more opportunities to make Champaign-Urbana more accessible.

Are you a hospitality business and want a review of your location? Or do you want to make improvements based on the evaluation criteria?

Contact Tim to get the process started at 217-351-4133 or timo@experiencecu.org.

From Our CEO



Looking back on the first quarter of FY24, my first reaction is “Wow” at many epic adventures near and far. I combined a road trip to hike national parks in South Dakota while attending the UMCVB Conference in Brookings, SD. This came fairly shortly after a family road trip to CA visiting national parks along the way. I enjoy being a traveler as much as hosting travelers to our community.

And what a summer/early fall it's been with festivals and events: United Way Battle of the Paddle; welcoming the opening of the Hidaya Academy of CU; premiere of *You're Out!* film at Savoy 16; the Mahomet Music Festival; the Soul Food Family Festival to benefit DREAM; marching in the Pride Parade; 13 weeks of Friday Night Live hosted by 40 North; Toast to Taylor block parties; Champaign Center Partnership Street Fest. The list goes on and on. We also welcomed back a record class of UI students and cheered on the Illini at football games and volleyball matches.



A very special evening recognized ECU Board member, Shayla Maatuka, with the 2023 ATHENA Award presented by the Executive Club of Champaign County. Congrats to Shayla!

A shout out to Alice Campbell Alumni Center for hosting our July ECU Board meeting, to Martens Center for hosting our August board meeting, and to Donna Pepper and all the Paxton businesses who warmly welcomed the combined ECU and ECU Foundation Boards for our annual FAM (familiarization) Tour in September.

Thank you to outgoing ECU Board member, Rob Kowalski, for 10 years of wonderful service—wishing him the best in his new position with the City.

Grateful for our board leadership, our partners, and our workforce as we build bigger tables to foster a place where residents and visitors feel a shared sense of belonging. When we come together to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces, we all win!

Jayne DeLuce

Foundation Update

On September 5, the ECU Foundation hosted the groundbreaking ceremony for transforming Skelton Park into a tribute to African American musicians from the area. The ECU Foundation generates resources that support the destination experience of people who visit, work, and live in the greater Champaign-Urbana area. Current initiatives include supporting the Champaign County African American Heritage trail, the Champaign Welcome Crew program, the Champaign County Regional Film Office, and bids for recruiting and retaining major events to the community.



CCAHT Update

After years of meetings, hard work, and fundraising, the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail officially broke ground on the transformation of Skelton Park. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on September 5 with elected officials, members of the community, and the park's sponsors—including the Rotary Club of Champaign, the Champaign Park District, the City of Champaign, and Champaign County. The park is anticipated to be completed in early 2024 and will pay homage to Champaign County's legacy of African American musicians. Sculptor Preston Jackson and Joy Kessler stopped by the ECU Office with a mockup of the brilliant sculpture that will be installed in just a few weeks.

Jayne had a great meeting with Representative Carol Ammons and Senator Paul Faraci about advancing the efforts of the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail and how this project could serve as a role model for other communities statewide.

We were also proud to represent the Trail at Champaign Park District's CU Days on August 12. Members of our staff joined the Heritage Trail's co-chairs, Barbara Suggs Mason and Angela Rivers, to pass out water bottles, flyers, and to provide mini history lessons on the mural wrapped bus at Douglass Park.

Finally, the Trail is continuing to take shape with the installation of three more large signs and two smaller signs during the first quarter, bringing us to 10 signs total! Our new signs include “Early African American Achievements and Education” (107 N. Main St., Homer), “African Americans in the Civil War” (101 E. Main St., Urbana), and “African Americans and the Illinois Central Railroad” (corner of Main and Chestnut St., Champaign). We also worked with the University of Illinois to install two smaller signs on campus, recognizing St. Elmo Brady inside Noyes Laboratory and Albert R. Lee on the second floor of Ikenberry Commons. We plan to have many more signs installed in the coming months so we can begin bus tours to different locations in 2024.



Out & About

New Faculty Welcome Tour

As part of Welcome Week for University of Illinois new faculty, Terri presented to trailing partners on the many amenities the community has to offer. Immediately following, she and Carly McCrory-McKay from the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation hosted a table during the resource fair, highlighting the Chambana Welcome Crew, the New to CU Mixers, and a variety of local resources. At the booth, new faculty registered for the 2nd Annual New Faculty Community Bus Tour, held on August 26. Over two dozen attendees joined Carly and Terri as they showcased our downtown and campustown districts, while also sharing highlights from our entire region. These programs are in collaboration with the Provost's Office, and we continue to be grateful for their support of our efforts to welcome new residents.



Destinations International

Jayne was grateful to participate in the Destinations International Convention on July 17-20 in Dallas. Education centered around DEIA, advocacy, sustainability, homelessness, digital marketing, AI, and mental wellness. She also participated in DI Board meetings, as well as EDI and Advocacy Committee meetings. It was a busy and hot week in Dallas!



You're Out! Film Screening

In 2021, Mike Koon worked with the producers and directors of *You're Out!*, a "screwball comedy" that was filmed both in the Champaign County area and Chicago. The film was released this summer and we were excited to host a screening at the Savoy 16 on August 12. Immediately following the screening, a Q&A session was held with the director, Katharin (Ladie K) Mraz and writer/producer, Sandy De Lisle.



UIUC New Student Welcome Celebration

The University of Illinois hosted a new student welcome celebration on August 18 across from Memorial Stadium. Immediately following convocation at the State Farm Center, thousands of students made their way to the resource fair where we were set up, distributing guides and maps. Students found the maps exceptionally helpful! Outreach to new students continues to be a priority as we educate them on what the broader Champaign-Urbana area has to offer.



CCAR Luncheon

As an affiliate member of the Champaign County Association of Realtors, Terri has become a staple at the monthly new realtor

orientations, training them on the many resources available as they welcome newcomers to the area. In August, Carly & Terri were able to speak at the monthly luncheon to over 100 realtors and affiliate members on our new resident programs including the Chambana Welcome Crew, New to CU Mixers, the Community Job Application, and other opportunities. Through this education, we'll have more ambassadors helping us get this content into the hands of those moving to the Champaign-Urbana area.

UMCVB Conference

Jayne participated in the 2023 Upper Midwest CVB (UMCVB) Conference on September 11-13 in Brookings, SD. Terrific sessions on Native American cultural tourism, Artificial Intelligence role with DMO's, and sports tourism, with receptions at McCrory Gardens on the SDSU campus, plus the Children's Museum of South Dakota.

Welcoming Week

In partnership with the New American Welcome Center, the City of Champaign, and the City of Urbana, we participated in the Welcoming Week kickoff event. Welcoming Week is a nationwide event promoted by the Welcoming America organization. Through Welcoming Week, organizations and communities bring together neighbors of all backgrounds to build strong connections and affirm the importance of welcoming and inclusive places in achieving collective prosperity. The event, held in Lincoln Square, included children's activities, musical performances, and food and vendor opportunities. We provided community information as well as free postcards so people could send letters home to family members in other countries.





Board FAM Tour

Every September, the ECU and ECU Foundation Board of Directors engage in a familiarization tour to provide a deep dive into a part of our community. This year, we explored our newest regional partner—Paxton. The community is undergoing a major transformation, with many new businesses in their downtown and enhanced streetscapes that create a welcoming environment. Donna Pepper, director of Paxton Main Street, served as an excellent guide as we discovered area businesses and attractions including Kino's Coffee, Prairie City Wine Room, Mom & Pop's Kettle Korn Stop, The Cadillac (a new live music venue), the Ford County Historical Society and Water Tower Museum, and the historic Sheriff's Mansion and Jail. We were treated to a delicious lunch from Market Street Grill, opening soon!



Pride Parade

The Chambana Welcome Crew, led by Experience Champaign-Urbana (ECU) and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation, marched in the CU Pride Parade on September 30. Members of each organization's staff, plus a few of our Chambana Welcome Crew ambassadors marched to downtown Urbana alongside the ECU van. Hundreds of enthusiastic people of all ages and backgrounds attended the parade and were treated to candy and rainbow-colored "Brilliant" stickers from our team. Approximately 25% of new and prospective residents who request to connect with a Chambana Welcome Crew ambassador identify as LGBTQ+, so this was an opportunity to let the world know that we are proud to be an inclusive community for all!

Connect Marketplace

Caitlyn attended Connect Marketplace in Minneapolis, August 22-25. She met with over 40 decision-makers across the specialty meetings market. She also participated in the Illinois aisle with 6 other DMO's from the state with the intention of co-selling our areas and promoting Illinois as a great meetings destination.

Small Market Meetings

Caitlyn also attended Small Market Meetings, held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, September 27-29. Caitlyn met with 22 conference planners who were looking to connect with areas of our size to host their conferences and events.

Sales & Marketing Efforts

Occupancy Rate

Reporting June-August 2023

Champaign County 65.8%

Bloomington 62.3%

Peoria 59.6%

Springfield/Decatur 62.1%

Average Daily Rate

Reporting June-August 2023

Champaign County \$108.42

Bloomington \$110.99

Peoria \$115.21

Springfield/Decatur \$109.29

This data is collected and reported by STR®.

SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

3

leads

2

tentative

1

definite

1,220

estimated room nights

CONFERENCES

11

leads

4

tentative

7

definite

4,184

estimated room nights

GROUP TOUR

4

leads

1

tentative

3

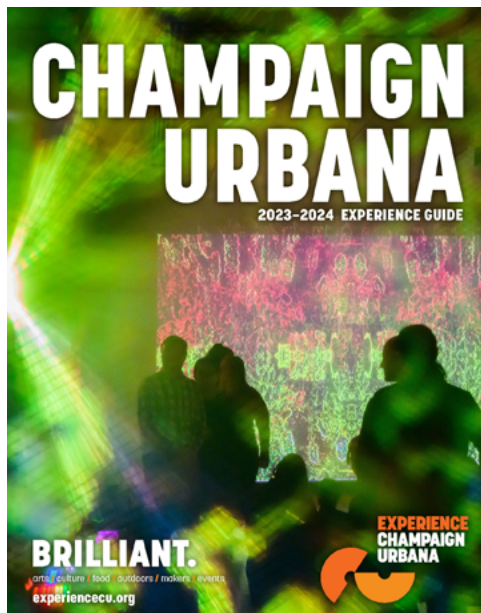
definite

LEAD: Potential business distributed to hotels

TENTATIVE LEAD: Potential business, no commitment yet

DEFINITE LEAD: Business secured





iPres Conference

Experience Champaign-Urbana was thrilled to host the 2023 i-PRES conference at the University of Illinois. There were 307 attendees from 36 different countries in attendance. We were onsite each day of the conference, engaging with attendees and assisting with community questions and recommendations.



Experience Guide

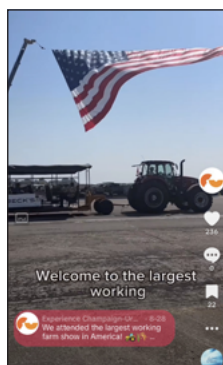
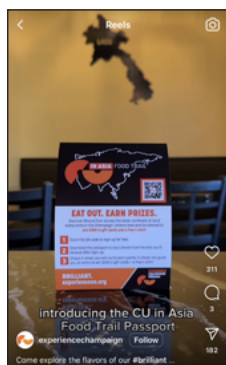
Following our award-winning guide in 2022/23, the pressure was on to continue to tell our community's stories in new ways. For 2023-2024, the guide features a new sustainability section, highlighting businesses that have made sustainable practices a significant part of their business model. The guide also features over ten testimonials from members of the Champaign Welcome Crew on their favorite spots or activities around the greater Champaign-Urbana area, providing an authentic look at what residents enjoy most. Features this year include Art Coop, The Wheelhouse, and Exile on Main St. alongside content promoting comfort food, local shopping spots, outdoor adventures, arts and culture, and so much more. 40,000 copies of the guide have been printed, with over 9,000 guides distributed in Q1.



WGN Campaign

For the second year, we partnered with WGN to promote the Champaign-Urbana area as a destination beyond University of Illinois offerings. The promotion focused on a live interview with radio personality John Williams. Leading up to the interview, we received a full week of commercials promoting the segment, as well as the giveaway for a weekend in our community. We also had a full takeover of their website as well as digital ads and social media mentions. In total, the contest had over 400 entries, more than double the submissions from 2022. This will continue to be a part of the marketing mix as we reach out to Chicago, which contributes more than 35% of total visitation to our area.

Social Media & Web Stats



Facebook
Monticello Railway
Museum Polar
Express
27,206 reach
758 reactions
142 shares

11,024
Followers



X/Twitter
9 Things You Didn't
Know
578 views
43 engagements

6,230
Followers



Instagram
CU in Asia Food Trail
6,059 views
311 likes
182 shares

8,398
Followers



TikTok
Half Century of
Progress
4,861 views
236 likes
34 shares

1,779
Followers

WEBSITE REPORT

110,907 Page Views
23,411 Scrolls to End of Page
6,053 Clicks on Page
42,295 Total Users
8.09 Events per User

TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events
Our Stories
Experience Passes
Food & Drink
Outdoors

69.5%

of website traffic is from outside the greater
Champaign-Urbana area

46.3%

is from outside of Illinois
Top States: Indiana, Texas, Missouri



OUR MISSION

We promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents.

Partners

DESTINATION FOUNDER

Illinois Office of Tourism // City of Champaign
University of Illinois // Rotary Club of Champaign
Champaign County // City of Urbana

DESTINATION LEADER

Busey // Carle

DESTINATION BUILDER

OSF Healthcare // Hyatt Place // Village of Rantoul
Village of Savoy // Spherion // Ameren
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois
University of Illinois Community Credit Union
Jane Hays & Dave Downey // John & Bonnie Dauer

DESTINATION BACKER

Illinois American Water // John Blackburn // D&V Farms
First State Bank // Gies College of Business
Roberta Gordon // I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center
Parkland College // Habeeb Habeeb // Champaign-Urbana
Public Health District // William Shiner // Homer Historical
Society // Copper Creek Church // Urbana Park District
Champaign Asphalt // Village of Mahomet // City of Tuscola
Hilton Garden Inn // Family of Eugene & Hester Suggs
Fairfield Suites // Courtyard by Marriott // Janet & Doug
Nelson // Home2 Suites // Village of St. Joseph // Homewood
Suites // Lynne & Dick Barnes // Curt & Jo Anderson
Max & Betsy Mitchell // Barbara Suggs Mason // Robeson
Family Benefit Fund // Steve Horve // News-Gazette

REGIONAL PARTNERS

Amish Country of Illinois
Monticello Chamber of Commerce
City of Paxton

For information on our Destination Partner Program and
how you can support our mission visit:

experiencecu.org/partners



2023-2024 Board of Directors

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Caleb Miller, Treasurer, Carle
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Bridget Broihahn, City of Urbana
Bob Flider, University of Illinois
Rob Kowalski, City of Champaign
Jennifer Locke, Champaign County Board
Shayla Maatuka, Matuuka Al-Heeti Emkes, LLC
Michael McDonald, Wood N' Hog Barbecue
Vanna Pianfetti, Champaign City Council
Sam Santhanam, I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center
Charles Smith, Village of Rantoul
Christopher Walton, Village of Savoy

Experience Champaign-Urbana Team

217.351.4133 | 17 E. Taylor St., Champaign, IL 61820



Jayne DeLuce, President & CEO
Terri Reifsteck, Vice President of Marketing & Community Engagement
Caitlyn Floyd, Director of Sales & International Travel
Marcus Flinn, Communications Manager
Tim Oravec, Community Development Manager
Brooke Gordon, Director of Administrative Services
Estella Samii, Visitor Experience Coordinator
Leslie Lundy, Finance Manager (contracted)



2023-2024

Experience Champaign-Urbana
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