

SERVING OUR RESIDENTS



There's a saying in our world, coined by Maura Gast of the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau, that goes: If you build a place people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live. If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people want to work. If you build a place where people want to work, you build a place where business needs to be. If you build a place where business has to be, you'll build a place where people have to visit. Sounds simple, right?

It should be, but being front and center in these various areas has not always been part of what destination marketing organizations do for their communities. This is changing nationwide, but in leaps and bounds here in Champaign County.



Last August, the **Chambana Welcome Crew** launched with a dozen passionate community ambassadors ready to greet newcomers to the area and help them settle into their new home. Since the launch, the Crew helped 30 new and potential residents in their transition, from residents moving from France for a new career to a couple from Atlanta, Georgia, who just wanted a change of pace. Our ambassadors are sharing their experiences and helping these individuals and families realize why the greater Champaign County area is an amazing place to live, work, and visit.



To further connect new residents, VCC and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation (the team behind the Chambana Welcome Crew) held our first New to CU Mixer at the Blind Pig Beer Garden. We invited any resident that moved to the community since 2020 to join, and more than 100 people attended! The event created a welcoming space for attendees, most of whom are in the same situation, to start conversation, form relationships, and feel connected in their new community. Simply meeting other new residents where they are went a long way in making everyone feel welcome. These mixers will continue quarterly, so stay tuned for updates!

Continuing to serve the needs of our residents, the VCC team and committee members of

the **Champaign County African American Heritage Trail** ventured to two well-attended community events to share updates on the project and to get feedback from residents. At booths during Champaign Park District's Juneteenth Celebration and the Jettie Rhodes Day at King Park in Urbana, the committee and VCC shared the status of the Trail, a map of planned stops, and the history that will be included. Kids were able to color Trail logos and take them home as reminders of this new project designed to educate area residents and visitors alike. Many of the event attendees took the time to share their memories and history in the community, which is critical to ensure the Trail is reflective of the African American experience in Champaign County. Outreach in neighborhood events will remain an important part of sharing our community amenities with residents and learning about what they would like to see as we continue to grow as a destination.

University of Illinois students are also residents in our community for at least four years, and they cannot be overlooked during this process. VCC is dedicated to getting undergraduate students off campus to experience all the community has to offer so that post-graduation, they might consider staying and working in the area. For six weeks during the summer, VCC set up a table at the New Student Orientation at the Illini Union every morning to share resources and help students understand that getting off campus is important to their college experience. All new students receive an Experience Guide in their bags, and we encourage them to check us out on platforms that they enjoy, like TikTok and Instagram.

We are all about meeting people where they are—whether they're new residents feeling overwhelmed in an unfamiliar area, established residents in underserved communities who need their voices heard and stories told, or students who are leaving home for the first time. VCC is prepared to make everyone feel welcome and looks forward to additional opportunities to connect, learn, and serve.

FROM OUR CEO



This last quarter hit our organization with rapid intensity, as we transitioned team members, wishing well to Jen Peddycoart and Taylor Bauer, while implementing a search process to find new team members Tim Oravec and Estella Samii, and welcoming Brooke Mayer as Director of Administrative Services.

We celebrated alongside the community, including the Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend (April 28-30); Tribute to Olympians and Paralympians induction ceremony (June 4); weekly Friday Night Live by 40 North; Champaign Park District's Street Fest; plus the new Toast to Taylor Street block parties in front of our office. Adding in Mahomet Soda Fest (June 4); Neighborhood Nights at Urbana parks; the list goes on and on—spring/summer is hopping in our outside of ordinary community!

A shout out to 25 O'Clock Brewing Co. for hosting our April board meeting, to Frasca Field for hosting our May board meeting, and to Pour Brothers for providing a wonderful setting for our combined VCC Board and VCC Foundation Board year-end meeting in June. Shout out to outgoing VCC Board members, Dee Shonkwiler, plus Dennis Robertson, who served from 2008-22 and also 2015-22 with the VCC Foundation Board. He is the epitome of a community ambassador.

I'm grateful for our board leadership, our partners and our work force who support a community-based mission to promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors that strengthens economic opportunity and enhances the lives of residents. Everything starts from that point.

On a personal note, I'm much appreciative of everyone's kind words about the passing of my father, Jim Turpin, on April 10, 2022. He always believed in loving your community and being your community.

Jayne DeLuce



Champaign County African American Heritage Trail Update

Much progress is being made on the development of the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, including the content and design of 25 interpretive signs, a new website built by Surface 51, education curriculum for local schools, and the signature project of celebrating Black music through the decades at Skelton Park. The committee provided information and activities during the Juneteenth Celebration at Douglass Park (June 18) and during MLK Jettie Rhodes Neighborhood Day at King Park (June 25), along with a presentation to the Parkland College Faculty/Staff on June 16. Financial support is always appreciated at ccafricanamericanheritage.org.

VCC Foundation Update

The VCC Foundation serves as the portal for financially supporting the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, the Champaign County Regional Film Office, the Chambana Welcome Crew program, plus major events this quarter including the Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend (April 28-30), Teen Masters Bowling Championship (May 1) and upcoming events later this summer and fall. The VCC Foundation Board also approved six new board members in late June (Curt Anderson, Sean Baird, Katie Miller, Susan Muirhead, Iowa Mwilambwe, and Jon Salvani) and also recognized outgoing board members (Victor Fuentes, Natalie Kenny Marquez, Rob Kowalski, Jody Quiram, Dennis Robertson, and Orlando Thomas.)



Welcome Tim & Estella!

Tim Oravec has lived in Chicago, Oregon, and Los Angeles, but he's thrilled to now call Champaign County home. As Community Development Manager, Tim will work on a variety of projects, including the African American Heritage Trail, the Chambana Welcome Crew, the Foundation, and more. When out of the office, you might find Tim exploring hiking trails, trying new restaurants, or curling up at home with a book. Estella Samii, our new Visitor Experience Coordinator, is a 2020 Central High School graduate and ready to get back in touch with her community. She has been active in the theatre community from a young age and enjoys frequent trips to the library, baking, and swimming. Estella loves to try new things if she is good at it on the first try. You can always find her with a good book in hand.

XO CU Retail Space

In June, we officially opened our retail store in the Visit Champaign County Welcome Center! Designed and installed by NORDEN German Design Studio's Johann Rischau, our vision for a retail space came to life. With a desirable location in downtown Champaign and a large amount of foot traffic, the shop has already proven to be a great addition to our neighborhood. Currently for sale are our Chambana Proud t-shirts and totes, with a goal of soon adding local makers' and artists' goods to complement existing retail in downtown Champaign. We are excited to showcase a variety of unique gifts for residents and visitors alike. Come see us at 17 E. Taylor St.!

Vibrant New Mural

To continue to beautify the space in the heart of downtown, Visit Champaign County wanted to work with a local artist to create an inviting mural that would also serve as a backdrop for pictures for residents and visitors. In collaboration with 40 North, VCC brought the latest mural to downtown Champaign from local artist, Lisa Kesler. The mural, which is a reflection of the native wildlife and plants in the area, is located on the South side of Visit Champaign County's Welcome Center. Stop by on your next downtown visit and snap a pic in front of this vibrant art.



OUT & ABOUT



Illinois Race Weekend Wrap-Up

For the first time since 2019, Illinois Race Weekend took over April 28–30. Although the full marathon was not a part of the weekend, more than 10,000 participants graced the streets of Champaign-Urbana for distances ranging from 1-mile to 13.1 miles. In addition to Visit Champaign County's financial contribution, we coordinated efforts at the 4th Mile Celebration on Friday and 14th Mile on Saturday. Sponsors Meijer and Christie Clinic had interactive booths; 90's Daughter provided the entertainment; Riggs Beer Company provided a free beer to participants aged 21+; and food trucks Watson's, La Paloma, Sidney Dairy Barn, and Jimmy John's gave runners and spectators some post-race re-fueling options. The VCC staff and board volunteers also welcomed participants at the Health & Fitness Expo at the ARC on Thursday and Friday distributing Wooden Nickels that were good for discounts at 24 area businesses.

ICCVB Spring Meeting

The Visit Champaign County team traveled to Springfield, May 16–17 for the spring ICCVB meeting. The day and a half conference presented panels and keynote speakers on topics



ranging from accessibility to data. Podcaster Adam Stoker from Destination Marketing talked about introducing your destinations through podcasts and invited DMOs to share their stories with him during a remote broadcast. Terri took the opportunity to discuss the Chambana Welcome Crew and our talent attraction efforts. These events are critical for the team to network with their colleagues and learn what is happening in the industry.

National Travel & Tourism Week

During National Travel & Tourism Week, May 1–7, Visit Champaign County visited the Salt Kettle Tourism Information Center located westbound on I-74 outside of Danville. Terri and Marcus set up a table with area information and talked to motorists making their way through Illinois. Many travelers were excited to learn about the area and committed to making lunch stops to/from their trip. While onsite, manager Harry Buerkett impressed Terri and Marcus with his creative spirit in showcasing the state of Illinois and the greater Champaign County area. Throughout National Travel & Tourism Week, VCC shared important stats on the role tourism plays in helping a destination thrive.

SALES & MARKETING EFFORTS

African American Travel Conference

Caitlyn attended the African American Travel Conference in Topeka, Kansas, April 12–15. The AATC is the leading organization in group travel for African American travel planners and represents 2,500 travel clubs in the USA. During the conference Caitlyn met with 34 planners and discussed options for bringing their groups to our area. One of the many highlights was the newly developed Champaign County African American Heritage Trail that received a lot of interest from the group. Many of the planners specifically seek out areas that have historical significance and attributes in Black history.



Sports ETA

Mike attended the annual Sports ETA Symposium, May 2–5, in Ft. Worth, Texas. Mike had 21 appointments with event planners, and met many more during networking events. There are at least four promising events as a result, with one confirmed booking. Rank Up Football will conduct a 64-team tournament at the Rantoul Sports Complex August 12–14. The tournament will bring teams

from as far away as Texas and provide 855 room nights to area hotels. In addition to representing VCC, Mike was one of eight members of Sports Illinois that sponsored a puppy petting station inside the Ft. Worth Convention Center, and also hosted a private gathering of 15 event planners at an off-site location in Ft. Worth.

City Nation Americas

As tourism and economic development continue to collide, Terri and Carly McCrory-McKay attended the City Nation Americas conference in Pittsburgh, May 10–13. This 2.5 day conference brought together EDOs and DMOs from around the country to discuss place branding and placemaking, talent attraction, political issues impacting cities' attraction efforts, and much more. This was the first time attending this conference, which was valuable to identifying the areas where Champaign County is a leader, and areas we can continue to grow to be competitive in these spaces.

Midwest Travel Network

Terri visited St. Cloud, Minnesota, for the Midwest Travel Network Conference which brings together DMOs and content creators to showcase the Midwest as a travel destination. This was the first time VCC participated in the event. Terri had many conversations with bloggers and content creators about the community discussing the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, our culinary scene, the accessible arts and culture opportunities, and outdoor adventures. With a lot of follow-up from the event, Terri has already secured two visits happening in the coming months that will help share our area's story to travel enthusiasts.



Occupancy Rate

Reporting March–May 2022

Champaign County 58.9%

Bloomington 65.3%

Peoria 50.0%

Springfield/Decatur 53.6%

Average Daily Rate

Reporting March–May 2022

Champaign County \$104.48

Bloomington \$102.70

Peoria \$101.07

Springfield/Decatur \$91.43

This data is collected and reported by STR®.

SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

3

leads

2

tentative

1

definite

1,216

estimated room nights

CONFERENCES

9

leads

4

tentative

5

definite

2,580

estimated room nights

GROUP TOUR

3

leads

0

tentative

3

definite

LEAD: Potential business distributed to hotels

TENTATIVE LEAD: Potential business, no commitment yet

DEFINITE LEAD: Business secured



Wooden Nickel Wrap-Up

To take advantage of the additional foot traffic created by the Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend, Visit Champaign County works with area businesses on the Wooden Nickel discount program where businesses create a special offer that will attract participants. This year, 24 businesses participated, many of them for the first time offering such great deals as a free small coffee at Art Mart to \$20 off a \$40 purchase at Hamilton Walker's. Thousands of nickels were distributed during the Health & Fitness Expo and at the 14th Mile Celebration. Nickels were also available at hotel partners throughout the community. Industrial Donut had the most nickels redeemed during the week, and all businesses are interested in participating in the future. This program is a free and easy way for local businesses to partner with a large community event.

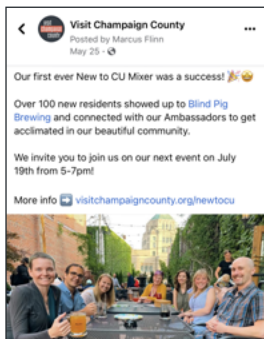


Influencer Visits

This summer, Visit Champaign County had the opportunity to host two up and coming influencers in the area who wanted to share their experiences on their social media channels. Photojournalist Carrie Goldstein visited in early June to showcase family-friendly destinations in our area. She captured photos of herself and her children experiencing Allerton Park & Retreat Center and downtown Champaign that VCC will be able to use in promotions. Instagram and TikTok influencers Red & Becca visited over the first weekend in June, staying in the Roger Ebert House. They visited Urbana's Market at the Square, the Sipyard, Allerton Park, and Friday Night Live. Their combined reach during the visit exceeded 30,000 impressions.



TOP SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



Facebook

CU Mixer Wrap-Up
5,215 Reach
667 Engagement
24 Link Clicks
4 Shares



9,740
Followers



Twitter

4th of July
Weekend Blog
2,945 Impressions



6,341
Followers



Instagram

Green St. Mural Reel
4,645 Views
292 Likes
72 Shares



6,276
Followers

Website Report

84,103 Visits
125,995 Page Views
71,265 New Visits
1.5 Pages/Session

Top Visited Pages

Top Events for Warmer Weather
Hot Spots to Get Art & Music Fix
Top Spots for Enjoying the Outdoors
Top Spots to Enjoy Spring's Flavors
Women-Owned Businesses to Support

88.5%

of website traffic is from outside the greater Champaign County area

39.6%

is from outside of Illinois

71

events submitted on our website

Our Mission

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

VISIT CHAMPAIGN COUNTY PARTNERS

Destination Founder

Illinois Office of Tourism
City of Champaign
University of Illinois
Champaign Rotary Club

Destination Leader

Busey
Carle
City of Urbana

Destination Builder

Ameren	OSF Healthcare
Champaign County	University of Illinois
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois	Community Credit Union
Hyatt Hotel	Village of Rantoul
	Village of Savoy

Destination Backer

Lynne & Dick Barnes	Village of Mahomet
Copper Creek Church	Janet & Doug Nelson
CU Public Health District	Randall & Marcia Nelson
D&V Farms	Parkland College
First State Bank	Robeson Family Benefit Fund
Gies College of Business	City of Tuscola
I Hotel & Conference Center	Urbana Park District
Illinois American Water	Village of St. Joseph
Sarah Laufenberg	

Regional Partners

Amish Country of Illinois
City of Tuscola
Monticello Chamber of Commerce

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

visitchampaigncounty.org/partners



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Dennis Robertson, Market Place Shopping Center
Sam Santhanam, I Hotel & Conference Center
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Katie Simpson, Village of Savoy
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Visit Champaign County Team

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Jayne DeLuce, President & CEO
Terri Reifsteck, Vice President of Marketing & Community Engagement
Caitlyn Floyd, Director of Sales & International Travel
Mike Koon, Director of Sports, Special Events & Film
Marcus Flinn, Communications Manager
Tim Oravec, Community Development Manager
Brooke Mayer, Director of Administrative Services
Estella Samii, Visitor Experience Coordinator
Leslie Lundy, Finance Manager



2021–2022 Visit Champaign County Foundation Board of Directors

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Natalie Kenny-Marquez, Grow Marketing & Communications LLC
Max Mitchell, ReMax
Jody Quiram, Gordyville USA
Dan Waldinger, Mahomet Recreation