

Filming in the Champaign-Urbana Area

Following the production of *Consumed* in 2014, Experience Champaign-Urbana was approached by local filmmakers and production companies to start a Film Office. Since that time, our organization has built a continually growing infrastructure that helps location scouts and film crews choose the Champaign-Urbana area as a destination for film.

Since 2015, we've worked with a variety of productions, large and small, to find locations and secure permission to film in those areas. Attracting more film to the area continues to grow in importance as people are discovering the breadth of available locations, as well as the affordability of filming in our community, and Illinois as a whole. Illinois offers a 30% tax credit, which is very competitive in the industry. Leveraging these savings alongside the vast opportunities of filming affordably in the Champaign-Urbana area is key to our messaging moving forward.

In collaboration with Shatterglass Studios and The Line Co., we hosted our first familiarization tour for location scouts out of the Chicago area. The Village of Rantoul graciously offered their bus and a driver to take seven scouts across our community. The tour started in Rantoul where we toured the new Shatterglass space at the former Chanute Air Force Base. Additional stops on the tour included downtown Urbana, downtown Champaign, the University of Illinois campus, Willard Airport, and Allerton Park & Retreat Center. Representatives from Champaign, the University, the airport, and Allerton were on hand to share the ins and outs of filming in these spaces. The tour opened the eyes for all involved on the possibility of using our destination as a backdrop for locations. Based on the success, we will look to host similar tours in the future.

Building off the tour, we continue to enhance our services to ensure we are providing the information needed to help attract and support filmmakers in our area. One such service is building a film location database that film scouts can use to find the ideal venue in our community. Locations will include descriptions and images of public areas and private properties submitted by their owners. Film scouts will then be able to reach out to ECU when they have location needs so that we can easily assist them with finding the perfect venue for their film.

To help facilitate the directory, we will be coordinating a series of informational sessions for the public in partnership with local filmmakers. Topics will include what to expect when your home or



business is a film location, providing props and vehicles, working on a film, product placement, workforce training, and much more. Look for details of these workshops, coming soon!

Finally, with Mark serving as the new director of the Film Office, he is connecting with several local film studios to ensure that we follow best practices in the film industry. We hosted a meeting with representatives of these studios in December 2023 to kick off the location database project, discuss filmmakers' needs, and design a special film crew t-shirt. He is also in contact with several other significant members of the film community, including the Illinois Film Office and a director that has directed major motion pictures and TV shows in New York and Los Angeles.

The foundation of filmmaking in our community is strong and only continues to grow. Our office is thrilled to be a part of this booming market and looks to maximize its impact in our area through job growth and generating revenue that can be reinvested in our area.

From Our CEO



During this busy second quarter of FY24, we began mapping Destination 2027 with Whereabout Destination Strategies, who is guiding our strategic planning process. This includes a survey, interviews, focus group, and planning sessions and will be followed by a deep dive organizational assessment as we've grown exponentially over the last decade and need to adjust for the success of our future. I'm excited about this process!

We appreciated the opportunity to present a FY23 Year in Review to our destination partners including St. Joseph (October 10); Mahomet (October 24); Rantoul (November 7); and Savoy (November 15); with Urbana (January 16), Champaign (January 23) and Champaign County (TBD) on the horizon.

A shout out to Independent Media Center for hosting our October ECU Board meeting with Nicole Frydman (UP Center) as our guest speaker; to I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center for hosting our November board meeting; and to Triptych Brewing (plus Watson's Food Truck) who warmly welcomed the combined ECU, ECU Foundation, and EDC (Economic Development Corp) Boards for our holiday gathering in December.

Welcome Joan Walls (City of Champaign) to the ECU Board; Jeff Kurtz (UI College of Gies) to the ECU Foundation Board; and two new ECU team members, Jan Troutt, Director of Administration, and Mark Brown, Director of Sports, Events & Film.

Grateful for our board leadership, our partners, and our work force 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

Welcome New Team Members

We're excited to welcome two new team members to ECU! Jan Troutt is a life-long resident of Champaign County. She has spent much of her career illustrating textbooks and is excited to turn her attention to representing our community in her role as Director of Administration. You can find Jan singing in a couple local choirs, trying new restaurants, volunteering, and attending art events. Mark joined ECU as the Director of Sports, Events, and Film after spending the last two years in the educational technology sector, preceded by nine years as a middle school teacher. He is excited to join ECU in promoting Champaign County as a premier destination for sporting events and film. In his free time, he enjoys walking his dog Hash Brown in the many CU parks, in addition to cooking delicious meals in his instant pot.



THANK YOU

Your contributions in 2023 supported our ability to host events, assist film productions, welcome and attract new residents, and develop the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail.

WE RECOGNIZED

5

Tourism Impact Award Winners

Japan Beer | Triptych Brewing | 52 Nogue | M. M.C. | Ben | Michael | Coling

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL

We raised over **\$410,400** in sponsorships, donations, and grants for the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail.

144

Bricks Sold for the Renovated Skelton Park.

We **11** installed Trail Signs

1

website featuring 71 trail stops and points of pride.

cchtr.africanheritage.org

We **53** Champaign Welcome Crew ambassadors welcomed **115** new and prospective residents.

6

New to CU Mixers hosted 550 newcomers.

We **HOSTED YOUTH & ADULT SPORTS** tournaments including:

- 3rd Annual State Basketball Tournament
- 11th Annual State Wrestling Championships
- 3rd Annual Football
- 2nd Annual Soccer
- 2nd Annual Tennis
- 2nd Annual Volleyball
- 2nd Annual Badminton
- 2nd Annual Table Tennis
- 2nd Annual Table Tennis

We **ATTRACTED STATE, NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES** including:

- 2023 State of Illinois School Library Education
- 2023 State of Illinois School Library Education
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- 2023 State of Illinois School Library Education

We **HOSTED 6** film projects assisted by the Champaign County Film Office.

how we did it

93% Foundation Board of Trustees Contributing

53

Destination Partners

162

Individual Donors

experiencecu.org/foundation

Foundation Update

The ECU Foundation utilized Giving Tuesday on November 28 to thank every single partner and donor who has supported our ability to host events, assist film productions, welcome and attract new residents, and develop the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. We raised over \$410,400 in sponsorships, donations and grants for the trail; sold 144 bricks to pave the trail at Skelton Park; hosted 550 newcomers through 6 New to CU Mixers; attracted state, national, and international conferences; hosted youth & adult sport tournaments; assisted 6 film projects; and more! For more information on getting involved with the Foundation, please visit experiencecu.org/foundation.

Champaign County First

Jayne & Tim participated in the Champaign County First Advocacy Day in Springfield on November 8 with other community representatives, including the opportunity to provide an update on the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail with area legislators and state departments.

Candle Making

The ECU Team enjoyed a fun holiday gathering with candle making at Fire Doll Studio on December 20, complete with Jupiter's Pizza!

2 | January 2024 | experiencecu.org

CCAAHT Update

The African American Heritage Trail made considerable progress on its website, signs, and Skelton Park in 2023, but our vision for this project is so much bigger, encompassing tours, art, and public programming. With the grant we received from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, we are excited to move forward on those other projects in 2024. Among the efforts kicked off late last year—the Housing Authority of Champaign County granted permission to install a mural on the Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center building as part of the African American Heritage Trail. 40 North will spearhead the effort to identify potential artists for the project, which we anticipate will be completed in late summer. We also began the creation of a mobile wayfinding app that will allow users to find Heritage Trail stops and “points of pride” near them, create routes, and then begin exploring.

Finally, we signed a contract with Visage Arts, a local, Black-owned media company, to develop a video in early 2024 about Frederick Douglass’ visit to Champaign in 1869. We are excited to share the video when it’s completed!



Accessibility Efforts

With the development of the new Accessible CU site, we realized that there were steps we needed to take in our own office to be more welcoming and inclusive. In December, we took two steps forward. First, we made the two front doors to our office and storefront more accessible by adding devices to automatically open them with the push of a button. Doors—especially ones as heavy as ours—can be difficult for many people to open, so the new door openers will help remove that barrier. Additionally, ECU became LEAP Certified after our entire team attended a presentation hosted by Community Choices. LEAP stands for “Leaders in Employing All People,” and the training provides information about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Our team learned a lot about how we can become more inclusive with future hiring decisions.



Out & About

Illinois Listening Tour

Recently appointed Illinois Office of Tourism Deputy Director, Daniel Thomas, embarked on a multi-city tour of the state to learn from local communities about the relevance, needs, and challenges regarding travel and tourism. ECU hosted a listening tour at the State Farm Center on November 2 with over 50 individuals representing our small businesses, transportation, hotels, and stakeholders. The conversation was lively, with many positive accolades for the area with additional thoughts and ideas on how to continue to improve locally and statewide.



Illinois Made Makers

Congratulations to both Fire Doll Studio and Cloud Mountain Kombucha for being inducted into the Illinois Made Makers program! Additionally, Kayla Brown was invited as one of 5 women-owned Illinois Makers to be featured in the press conference with Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker on November 28 in Ravenswood. We are so proud of our local businesses showcased in Illinois and beyond and look forward to nominating future makers!



State Tourism Meeting

The ECU team traveled to Bourbonnais October 4-5 for our fall meeting with our peers from around the state. During the event, the new branding from the Illinois Council of Convention & Visitors Bureaus (ICCVB) to Illinois Destinations Association (IDA) was launched. The new branding unites our industry and makes our message clearer as we speak with our legislators. The conference included many relevant topics including upcoming HR changes in Illinois, ChatGPT, and promoting outdoor destinations.

Destinations International Board Meeting

In her role serving on the Destinations International Foundation Board, Jayne participated in the joint board meeting on December 12-13 in Tampa, FL (where the DI Convention will be held in July 2024). Discussion topics centered around budget approval; business plan; destination stewardship; and membership growth.



Forty Under 40

On October 19, the Experience Champaign-Urbana team attended Central Illinois Business magazine’s “Forty Under 40” reception at the I Hotel. ECU’s Tim Oravec was part of the 2023 cohort. Other award recipients included ECU board member and Savoy Village Administrator Christopher Walton, and Chambana Welcome Crew ambassadors Maggie Baker, Jordan Neal, and Breaden Belcher. Congratulations to all!



Sales & Marketing Efforts



Quadball Wrap Up

ECU hosted the US Quadball Midwest Qualifier two-day tournament November 17-19. Eighteen teams traveled to the Rantoul Family Sports Complex (RFSC) to compete for a spot in the 2024 National Championship. Among the many highlights of the event, our local Illini Ridgebacks advanced to the national tournament. ECU provided significant financial support to US Quadball and RFSC, in addition to coordinating a tented fun zone for participants and spectators. Participants, spectators, and tournament organizers shared their gratitude and positivity about how well the tournament operated. ECU looks forward to hosting US Quadball once again for the 2025 National Championships!

Active America China

Caitlyn attended Active America China tradeshow in San Francisco October 31– November 3– the first time held since 2019. She met with 29 Chinese tour operators for 12 minutes each, including appointments that we met with at previous shows to reconnect and build on those relationships. As an added bonus, the assigned interpreter was a former student at the University of Illinois from China who received her undergraduate degree and master's in Champaign-Urbana. She was able to speak of her authentic experience in our area that really resonated with many of the operators.



Community Tours

ECU continues to be a resource for area organizations that are recruiting and welcoming new residents to the community. Among those that took advantage of these personalized tours– the Fighting Illini Wheelchair Basketball program, showing the community to the parents of athletes; Carle and the University of Illinois for high-level new hires and recruits; and Keller Williams Realty to provide their teams with better talking points as they work with their clients. These tours have proven successful in these individuals committing to our community. If your organization is in need of assistance for tours, contact Terri at terrir@experiencecu.org.

Illini Fest

The University of Illinois launched a new event this fall for prospective students–Illini Fest–replacing multi-weekend campus visits. Terri served on the committee for the event and tabled at the Illini Union where thousands of students and their families checked in to start the day. She was able to answer many community questions as students and their parents consider a move to Champaign-Urbana. The event will continue in 2024.

Occupancy Rate

Reporting September–November 2023

Champaign County	57.9%
Bloomington	58.4%
Peoria	53.7%
Springfield/Decatur	55.6%

Average Daily Rate

Reporting September–November 2023

Champaign County	\$115.88
Bloomington	\$109.96
Peoria	\$111.96
Springfield/Decatur	\$103.31

This data is collected and reported by STR®.

SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

10 leads	3 tentative	7 definite
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3,952

estimated room nights

CONFERENCES

8 leads	3 tentative	5 definite
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7,612

estimated room nights

GROUP TOUR

3 leads	0 tentative	3 definite
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LEAD: Potential business distributed to hotels

TENTATIVE LEAD: Potential business, no commitment yet

DEFINITE LEAD: Business secured





Updated Website

As part of the rebrand to Experience Champaign-Urbana, the organization underwent a website revamp to better match the vibrancy of the new look. The new homepage easily connects meetings and sports planners to resources they need to bring their business to our area. Among one of the most exciting new attributes is an interactive map, highlighting the many communities we represent. Each community gets a pop-up page with a description and three business features that will rotate monthly. Additionally, the directory pages featuring our local businesses now include opportunities for more content, helping improve SEO and driving more individuals to our site. Check it out at experiencecu.org.



HERC Dual Career & Land Connection Presentations

This quarter, Terri represented ECU at several speaking engagements. In October, Terri and Carly McCrory-McKay (Champaign County EDC), were asked to speak at the monthly Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) on our efforts in working with attracting and retaining new faculty. The attendees represented universities and colleges of all sizes from across the country including fellow Big Ten schools, Ivy League, and many private institutions. In December, Terri also presented at the Land Connection's Agritourism Summit and shared with potential and current agritourism destinations the benefits of the industry and relevant data to keep in mind when marketing your destination. The summit was attended by farmers from across Illinois.



Restaurant Week Preview

The 8th Annual Champaign-Urbana Area Restaurant Week returns January 26-February 3, growing once again. To date, 49 restaurants have signed up to showcase their cuisine with special menus to enjoy. Make your plans to explore our award-winning culinary scene by checking out the menus at curestaurantweek.org.

Social Media & Web Stats



Facebook

Anthem Opening
28,409 reach
651 reactions
80 shares

11,301

Followers



X/Twitter

Shop Local Guide
270 views
6 engagements

6,202

Followers



Instagram

Anthem Opening
9,404 views
345 likes
170 shares

8,498

Followers



TikTok

Places to See Fall Foliage
375 views

1,798

Followers

WEBSITE REPORT

108,100 Page Views
17,982 Scrolls to End of Page
5,834 Clicks on Page
51,278 Total Users
36,430 New Users

TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events
Our Stories
Experience Passes
Food & Drink
Shopping

78.8%

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

43.5%

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



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

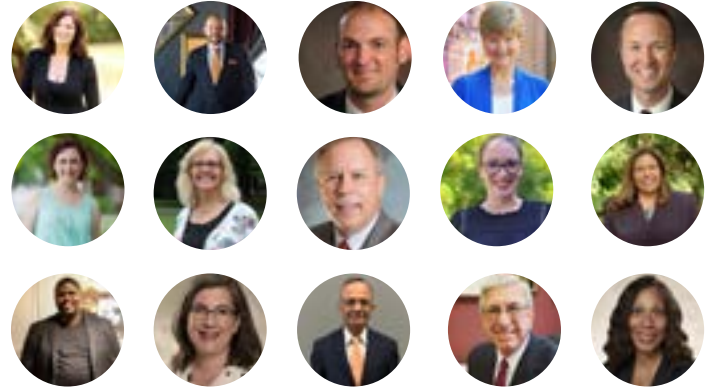
Illinois American Water // John Blackburn // D&V Farms
First State Bank // Gies College of Business
Roberta Gordon // I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center
Parkland College // Habeeb Habeeb // Champaign-Urbana
Public Health District // William Shiner // Homer Historical
Society // Copper Creek Church // 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



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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
Mark Brown, Director of Sports, Events, and Film
Marcus Flinn, Communications Manager
Tim Oravec, Community Development Manager
Jan Troutt, Director of Administration
Estella Samii, Visitor Experience Coordinator
Leslie Lundy, Finance Manager (contracted)



2023–2024

Experience Champaign-Urbana
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