

Air Service Development

The University of Illinois Willard Airport is a key transportation hub for Champaign County and the surrounding area. Daily flights to Chicago O’Hare and Dallas/Ft. Worth via American Airlines generate an annual economic impact of \$99.75 million.

Recently, planes have been upgraded to allow for 2-by-2 seating in economy and 1-by-2 seating in first class, increasing the capacity at Willard by almost 50%. This is a much-needed enhancement to serve more travelers in our market.

However, there is still a demand for additional air service, particularly for leisure airlines to popular destinations. To attract airlines to our airport, a minimum revenue guarantee (MRG) is needed to create an incentive to take on a new market. Since the airport isn’t funded through local tax dollars, the Airport Advisory Board is raising funds through the community. The University of Illinois has contributed \$500,000 towards service to any airport in Florida, Arizona, or Las Vegas, and a matching \$500,000 from community stakeholders and employers will significantly increase the likelihood of securing a new airline and route.

These growth opportunities will not only enhance the quality of life for residents in Champaign County and beyond, but also allow for additional business retention and attraction, increased tourism, and talent attraction within key sectors as well as remote workers.

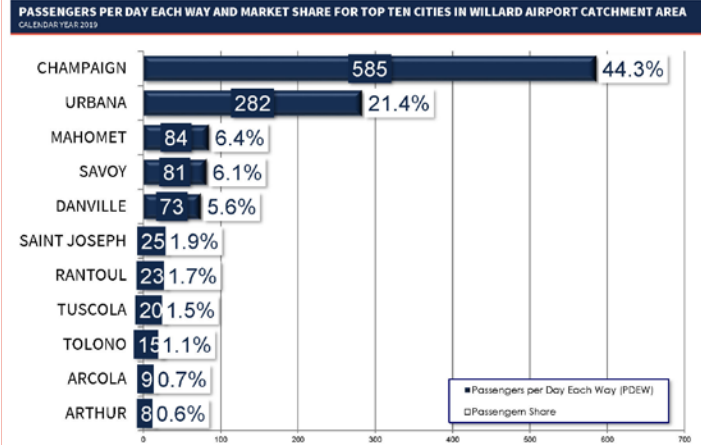
In 2019, over 1,200 passengers were from Champaign, Douglas, and Vermilion Counties. Top leisure markets include Orlando, Las Vegas, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Ft. Myers/Punta Gorda, and Phoenix. As seen, per day, 89 passengers from our community are traveling to Orlando, only 5 of whom are currently utilizing Willard.

Through the MRG, the attraction of a new airline will allow our local passengers to fly locally at low-cost. The impact of each additional airline seat equates to 0.6 new full-time jobs, \$26K in payroll, \$16,900 in new tax revenue, and \$82K in economic impact.

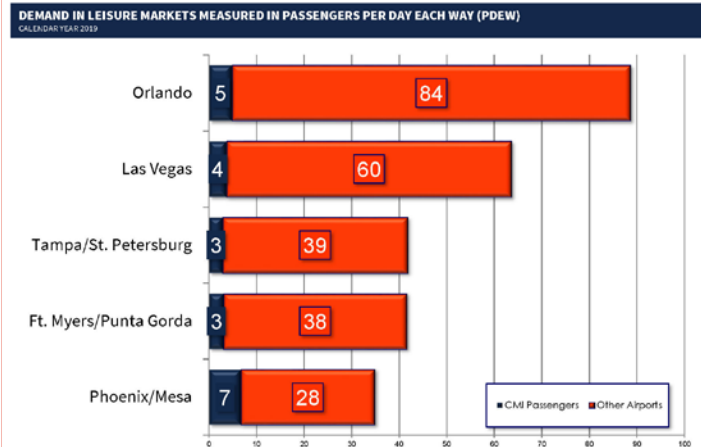
The importance of community stakeholders coming together to fulfill the MRG is critical as we continue to retain and grow a thriving and diverse population. Experience Champaign-Urbana is proud to support this initiative and looks forward to its potential impact.

If you would like to get involved in supporting our air service development efforts, please reach out to Carly McCrory-McKay, Executive Director, Champaign County Economic Development Corporation at carly@champaigncountyedc.org or 217-649-2586.

MANY CITIES GENERATE SIGNIFICANT PASSENGERS



MOST LEISURE PASSENGERS USE OTHER AIRPORTS



EACH SEAT BRINGS HUGE REWARDS

IMPACT OF EACH ADDITIONAL AIRLINE SEAT AT WILLARD AIRPORT
BASED ON FISCAL YEAR 2019



From Our CEO



Love your community. Be your community. This long-time philosophy has resonated strongly as we map out Destination 2027 with Whereabout Destination Strategies. After an active two-day planning retreat on January 24-25, we are even more convinced our purpose is to uplift the Champaign-Urbana region by igniting economic impact

through visitation, advocacy, and fostering community pride. Stay tuned as we finalize our Destination 2027 strategic plan and continue a deep dive organizational assessment to ensure continued success in our future.

We wrapped up presenting a FY23 Year in Review to our destination partners including Urbana (January 16), Champaign (January 23), and went back to several of our destination partners this quarter on supporting air service development (see cover story.)



A shout out to the Lake House at Crystal Lake Park for hosting our January ECU & ECUF Board meeting (plus Destination 2027 planning sessions); to Krannert Art Museum for hosting our February board meeting; and Homewood Suites for hosting our March board meeting.



I also enjoyed participating in the Illinois Destinations Association (IDA) Board Strategic Planning retreat hosted by Visit Galesburg in late January. Followed by our board meeting hosted by Visit Peoria in conjunction with their hosting the Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism in March. There have been a tremendous amount of community events that I'm proud our team actively promotes and/or participates in. We live and work in an actively brilliant community!

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

Toast to Tourism Save the Date

The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation will honor our Tourism Impact Award Recipients at the annual Toast to Tourism on Wednesday, May 15, from 4:00-6:00 p.m. at Carmon's in Champaign. The event will celebrate the many milestones achieved over the past year while shining a spotlight on those in our community that strive to make this region brilliant. RSVP online at experiencecu.org/toasttotourism.



Destinations International Catalyst Report

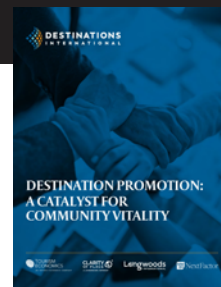
ECU is extremely honored to be one of ten destinations featured in an international study: *Destination Promotion: A Catalyst for Community Vitality*. This landmark study shows the work we do improves resident quality of life; supports government services; encourages workforce development; and strengthens a broad economic base. Some key findings include:

- Average results show a return of \$8 in tax revenue per \$1 invested in destination promotion.
- Visitor spending generates benefits to industries outside the hospitality sector, such as finance, insurance, real estate, and business services.
- Company relocation decisions are impacted by the quality of life in the destination and the ability to attract talent.
- The work we do as destination organizations aligns with community values, fostering positive perceptions and success through tourism promotion.
- Tourism supports the preservation of local culture and protects the community's authenticity.

Specific to Experience Champaign-Urbana, the report highlights our efforts to be a "Convener of Place" where we focus on quality of life for our residents through various programs. Our re-brand was a case study in "Brand Development, Adoption, and Broader Benefits." Finally the report also highlighted our "Talent Attraction Programs," specifically our Community Job Application and Chambana Welcome Crew. Thank you to the various stakeholders that participated in this research study. To request a full copy of this report, please contact Terri at terrir@experiencecu.org.

Foundation Update

The ECU Foundation has been busy prepping for Toast to Tourism on May 15 (4-6pm at Carmon's) with selecting the Tourism Impact Award recipients (stay tuned for announcement!); seeking sponsorships for the first time to help offset event expenses and keep this popular community event free and accessible to all; plus creating a "Why I Give" video to be premiered at Toast; and generating excitement for this popular community-wide celebration! The ECU Foundation trustees have also actively participated in mapping out Destination 2027, volunteering for IHSA State Boys Basketball, and supporting Heritage Trail activities. The mission of the ECUF continues to support our ability to host events, assist film productions, welcome and attract new residents, and develop the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. For more information on getting involved with the Foundation, please visit experiencecu.org/foundation.





"A Pictorial History of African Americans of Champaign County"

CCAAHT Update

In 1978, artist Angela Rivers created a mural at the corner of Park & Fifth Streets that told the story of the African American experience from Africa to Champaign County. When the building was demolished in 2011, no other local artwork reflected this incredible history. In late 2020, community members asked if we could help install one new mural to fill the gap.

Thanks to funding from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation, we hope to install four or five murals celebrating local African American history in 2024. In March, we partnered with 40 North to launch a call for artists, and we were blown away by the response: 93 extraordinary artists from 32 states and five countries applied. 40 North led a jury to review artist applications and narrowed the pool down to a few select choices for each site. Work will begin with artists and property owners in Q4 to finalize contracts and coordinate logistics. Additionally five new Heritage Trail signs have been installed to recognize the Dr. Ellis Subdivision, William F. Earnest, African American Architects from UI, Maudelle Bousfield, and the Special Educational Opportunities Program (also known as Project 500). We are now more than half-way through our goal for interpretive signs.

Inaugural Film Workshop

Hosted at the Champaign Public Library, Experience Champaign-Urbana partnered with Shatterglass Films and The Line Film Co. to host a workshop on February 28 for property owners interested in becoming a location for filmmaking. The interactive workshop informed attendees about the ins and outs of film locations, and better prepared them for what to expect if their property is used for film. ECU will host subsequent quarterly workshops for various aspects of the filmmaking industry, in addition to continuing to increase properties on our film location database. The next event, So You Want to be a Film Vendor, will be on May 23 at Analog Wine Library at 5:00 p.m.



Out & About

Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism

Members of the ECU team traveled to Peoria for the annual Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism. Artificial Intelligence was the hot topic, showcasing tools and opportunities to utilize to streamline efforts within our industry. Other topics included grants updates, sports marketing, state and national trends, and workforce development. Additionally, Terri moderated a panel on Tips for Growing Agritourism with local panelists Rachel Coventry (Curtis Orchard) and Dr. Renata Endres (UI Recreation, Sports, & Tourism), alongside Neil Dahlstrom (John Deere) and Ken Myszka (Epiphany Farms Hospitality Group).



New to CU Mixer

Experience Champaign-Urbana and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation continue to collaborate on wildly successful mixers for new residents to meet each other, develop friendships, and begin building roots in the community. On February 21, we hosted our eighth New to CU Mixer. A group of approximately 60 new residents and community ambassadors met at Triptych Brewing in Savoy with food provided by Watson's Shack and Rail.

Attendees bonded over fun ice breaker activities, cold drinks, delicious food, and the shared experience of being new to the community. Thank you to the Village of Savoy for sponsoring this mixer! Our next New to CU Mixer is currently planned for May 21 at Pour Bros. in Champaign, sponsored by BankChampaign.



IHSA State Wrestling Tournament

The IHSA Individual State Wrestling Finals have been a significant event in Champaign-Urbana since 1967. This year's event, which took place from February 15-17 at State Farm Center, drew nearly 37,000 fans, with 15,000 attending the finals on Saturday. The event generated an estimated economic impact of \$5.5 million. We hosted a welcome booth and sponsored the Official's Party on Friday night at Eastland Suites. Prior to Friday evening's semifinals, ECU Board Chair Annie Easterday and Foundation Board Chair Lynne Barnes addressed the fans and presented our financial contribution to IHSA Assistant Director Sam Knox and IHSA board members.



Sales & Marketing Efforts

IHSA Basketball Wrap Up

The IHSA Boys Basketball Championships were held in Champaign on March 7-9 and were a huge success with over 36,000 fans attending over the three days. On Saturday, there were more than 13,000 fans in attendance for the championship sessions. The event brought an estimated \$4 million in economic impact to the area. ECU organized community hosts who helped teams by arranging hotels, practice facilities, restaurant recommendations, and more. The University of Illinois police provided escorts to the State Farm Center. Additionally, the ChambanaMoms.com All Star Zone was held in the Traditions Club and provided a great fan experience with Illini eSports, DICK'S House of Sport, caricatures by Dan Wild, face painting and glitter tattoos with Wild Style, button making, and oversized games to play. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped welcome fans and teams to the area.



Middle School Basketball Wrap Up

March also featured the return of the Illinois Middle School Basketball Championships, March 15-17. Over 175 boys and girls teams from around the state descended on the ARC, the Leonhard Center, Martens Center, St. Thomas More High School, St. Malachy Catholic School, and JW Eater Jr. High School. ECU sponsored the event, which had an estimated economic impact of \$2.1 million.

American Bus Association's Marketplace

Caitlyn attended the American Bus Association's (ABA) Marketplace held in Nashville, January 13-16. This long-standing show for motorcoach and group travel/tour business in North America where she met with 22 tour operators from across the country. Tour Illinois also hosted a successful dinner with 12 individual planners the evening before the event with great participation and networking.

Meetings & Conferences Wrap Ups

The Illinois Transportation and Highway Engineering Conference (T.H.E.) celebrated its 110th anniversary in February at the I Hotel & Conference Center. This year's conference witnessed record-breaking attendance with over 1,500 transportation professionals. Professor Jeffery Roesler, the conference director, stated, "It is an honor to host this event on the University of Illinois campus for transportation professionals in the Midwest, to discuss recent transportation projects and innovations as well as collaborate on future challenges."

The Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm Systems (ILEAS) annual conference returned to Champaign in March for its second year following a 20-year run in Springfield. Nearly 300 people attended from over 150 agencies across the state. We hope to see this event and partnership grow as they establish their new home here in Champaign-Urbana.

Occupancy Rate

Reporting December 2023-February 2024

Champaign County	42.1%
Bloomington	45.6%
Peoria	41.7%
Springfield/Decatur	42.2%

Average Daily Rate

Reporting December 2023-February 2024

Champaign County	\$95.21
Bloomington	\$103.54
Peoria	\$108.46
Springfield/Decatur	\$98.32

This data is collected and reported by STR®.

SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

10
leads

3
tentative

7
definite

13,542

estimated room nights

CONFERENCES

11
leads

4
tentative

7
definite

6,655

estimated room nights

GROUP TOUR

2
leads

0
tentative

2
definite

LEAD: Potential business distributed to hotels

TENTATIVE LEAD: Potential business, no commitment yet

DEFINITE LEAD: Business secured



DI MarCom Summit

Terri attended the annual Destinations International MarCom Summit in Salt Lake City, February 27-29. This intensive conference focuses on group discussions, allowing top-level marketers to share and discuss challenges and solutions. Among the many takeaways were looking at future job roles within DMOs, utilizing AI in marketing, and pop-up events to engage the community. During the summit, Terri co-presented with Bandwango, the vendor who creates Experience Passports, on the CU in Asia Food Trail and how it contributes to DEIA efforts.

Restaurant Week Review

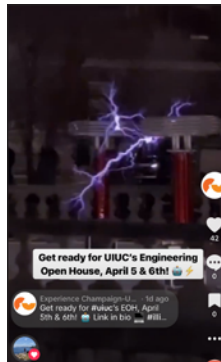
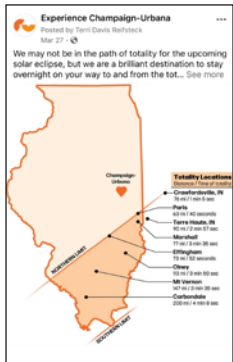
The 8th Annual Champaign-Urbana Area Restaurant Week was the largest to date, with 50 participating restaurants across the region offering special menus for nine days. Eleven new restaurants joined in 2024, and Paxton had their first participant—Market Street Grill. The event website saw nearly 81,000 pageviews from over 30,000 unique users—our largest digital presence to date. Feedback from participating restaurants has been overwhelmingly positive. “Restaurant Week was such a huge success for us. I think we have new regulars now because of it.” –Isis Griffin, Soovie Bros. Bar B Que. “You folks saved Antica’s winter! Restaurant week was a great success for Antica and helped us stay open.” Ramin Karimpour, Pizzeria Antica.

Art in CU Pass

Following the success of the CU in Asia Food Trail, we launched the Art in CU Passport, featuring nearly 200 pieces of public art throughout the Champaign-Urbana area. This easy-to-use passport allows user to find art near their location or in pre-determined districts such as downtown Champaign, downtown Urbana, campus, and Meadowbrook Park. Once users check-in at 50 locations, they will earn a free tee or sweatshirt from Chambana Proud. Since launching, there have been over 100 downloads of the passport and 340 check-ins. Promotions surrounding the passport will begin mid-April. Download your passport at experiencecu.org/experience-passes.



Social Media & Web Stats



Facebook
Solar Eclipse
Totality Locations
321,973 reach
423 reactions
152 shares



X/Twitter
IHSA Wrestling Finals
2048 views
20 engagements



Instagram
Solar Eclipse Totality
Locations
5,551 views
356 likes
157 shares



TikTok
Engineering Open
House 2024
511 views
42 likes

11,668
Followers

6,196
Followers

8,657
Followers

1,821
Followers

WEBSITE REPORT

165,121 Page Views
22,966 Scrolls to End of Page
6,042 Clicks on Page
62,108 Total Users
20,940 Users via Organic Search

TOP VISITED PAGES

Restaurant Week
Calendar of Events
Food & Drink
Savoring Spring Story
Hotels

76.7%

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

43.6%

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



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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2023–2024

Experience Champaign-Urbana
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