

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING TO INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS

In today's challenging political climate, it may be tempting to scale back efforts aimed at international markets. However, now more than ever, sustained engagement with global travelers and tour operators is essential for long-term success and destination resilience.

Over the past quarter, we had numerous opportunities to showcase our region to international media and tour operators from around the world. It was critical that we pushed forward with these familiarization tours as international travelers plan far in advance and often invest more in their trips. By nurturing relationships with tour operators and media abroad now, we secure future bookings and build long-term brand loyalty. A paused conversation today could be a missed tour group two years from now.

In early May, we held a reverse sales mission with several tour operators from Canada in collaboration with the Illinois Office of Tourism. We were their final stop on their week-long visit to the state. During their visit, this group visited Allerton Park & Retreat Center, Riggs Beer Company, and enjoyed dinner and a tour at Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery. While on the tour, owner, Laura, spoke so passionately about the land in Central Illinois and how it provides so generously for us to enjoy, that the tour operators gave a rousing round of applause. The following morning, we enjoyed a walking tour of downtown Champaign, and another engaging tour and discussion at Krannert Art Museum, followed by a tour at the new Hotel Royer. Upon their departure, while they made clear it would be some time before their groups would be ready to come to the US, they were ready to add our region to their offerings.

During the same time, we also hosted a travel writer from *The Independent* in the United Kingdom, who had traveled Route 66 in Illinois. We were her final stop, and only were able to host an overnight. However, after a busy week, we were able to provide her with a restful stop with a phenomenal dinner and overnight stay at Prairie Fruits Farm, an opportunity she can share with her readers abroad looking for a way to unwind.

Our biggest opportunity came following IPW, the largest travel trade show in the country, which was held in Chicago in late June. Following the show, we hosted a post-FAM tour with 18 international tour operators and media from China, Japan, Mexico, Colombia, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, India, Vietnam, and Malaysia. From Aikman Wildlife, and Yoder's Kitchen, to Allerton Park & Retreat Center, Middle Fork River's Dark Sky Park, and Friday Night Live, this group got an incredible glimpse of our brilliant community. While it may take several years to see business from this visit, it was clear we made an impression and groups and visitors will come.

Travel trends show that while politics may shift, the desire to explore, learn, and connect remains strong. Tour operators and travelers are adept at navigating uncertainty. Our role is to be a consistent, positive presence in the conversation—ready when they are.





# From Our CEO



This fourth quarter has been one of meaningful advocacy and memorable transitions.

In late April, I traveled with Champaign County First to Washington, D.C., to advocate for federal funding to support critical community infrastructure, followed

by a visit to Springfield on May 8 to continue that work at the state level. These efforts reflect our commitment to investing in the future of our region.

We also celebrated several important leadership milestones.

In May, we honored outgoing University of Illinois Chancellor Robert Jones and Urbana Mayor Diane Marlin, as well as Rantoul Mayor Chuck Smith. In June, we warmly welcomed new UI Chancellor Charles Lee Isbell, Jr. It was also exciting to mark the long-anticipated grand opening of the Hotel Royer on June 11, a transformative project years in the making.



Most significantly, this quarter marked a leadership transition for our own board. We celebrated outgoing Board Chair Annie Easterday for her remarkable service and welcomed incoming Chair Nathan Escue. We also bid farewell to board members Bryan Snodgrass, Mayor Smith, and Christopher Walton, and are pleased to welcome new members Rantoul Mayor Sam Hall, Savoy Mayor John Brown, and Emily Scherzer. And we wished Estella Samii, Destination Experience Manager, the very best, as she moved on to her next career chapter on June 27.



Thank you to Spurlock Museum for hosting our April ECU Board meeting, to Pear Tree Estate for hosting our end-of-year board meeting and celebration in May, and to the brand new Hotel Royer for hosting our June board meeting.

It has truly been a quarter of change (including my daughter's wedding in May!) and momentum; and we're excited for what's ahead.

Jayne DeLuce



## Foundation Update

The fourth quarter of our fiscal year was marked by celebration, connection, and community leadership. We were pleased to welcome Zach Sehy, Chief Operating Officer and Legal Counsel at Christie Clinic, as the newest trustee to the ECU Foundation Board. We hosted our Spring Trustee Meeting on April 16 and concluded the year with the Annual year-end meeting and celebration on May 29 at Pear Tree Estate—a meaningful event to reflect on the impact of the past year.

On May 7, we proudly hosted **Toast to Tourism: Celebrating Community Brilliance**, presented by OSF HealthCare. Prior to our award celebration, we heard PechaKucha-style presentations from Mayor Deb Feinen on downtown projects, Oscar Joyo on creating murals for the Heritage Trail, Jen Shelby on filmmaking in Champaign County, Jaclyn Friedlander on being a new resident, and Lynne Barnes on how the ECU Foundation supports all of these efforts.

The event honored this year's Brilliant Spirit Award recipients:

**Ruthie Harper**, Ion Grove at Willard Airport  
**John Stephens**, Little Theatre on the Square  
**Laura Raney**, Comfort Suites  
**Jan Seeley**, Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend  
**Irene Macedo**, La Paloma

This celebration was made possible thanks to the generous support of our sponsors:

**Weekend Warriors**—Heartland Coca-Cola, Farnsworth Group, Hickory Point Bank, and State Farm Kurt Lenschow Agency

**Day Trippers**—Clark Dietz, First Federal Savings Bank of Champaign-Urbana, First State Bank and Trust, Hamilton Walker's, Pear Tree Estate, Serra Champaign, Sterling Wealth Management, Surface 51, and UI Community Credit Union

**Venue Sponsor:** Hilton Garden Inn

**Dessert Sponsor:** Nothing Bundt Cakes

Throughout the quarter, the Foundation proudly supported multiple tours of the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, as well as several sporting events and conferences that contributed to local tourism and economic vitality. As we close out the fiscal year, we're deeply grateful for our trustees, partners, and community champions who continue to make our work possible.





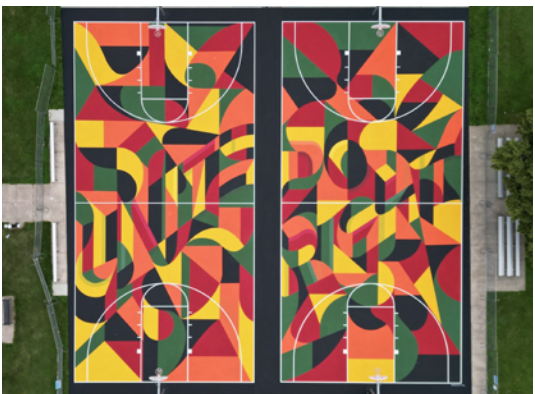


## Heritage Trail Updates

This past quarter saw the installation of our final sign of “Phase One” of the Heritage Trail. Focusing on African American Healthcare, this sign features Dr. Henry E. Rowan, the first African American doctor to practice in Champaign-Urbana, followed by Dr. Henry D. Ellis. It also features the first African American nursing student, Vivian Grundy, and the first nurse, Lucille Clark, who served at Carle Foundation Hospital for 45 years. The sign is located outside Fire Doll Studio and was sponsored by Carle Health.

Additionally, we hosted ten private and community tours this quarter, including tours for the Lincoln Academy of Illinois Laureates and a conference of librarians from Europe and Africa. We also hosted a tour for area art teachers from Stratton Elementary School, Rantoul and Urbana, who will serve as future collaborative partners for murals and provide inspiration for art programs at the University of Illinois.

Finally, our 5th CCAHT mural was completed at Douglass Park on the basketball courts in May by Portland, Maine muralist Ryan Adams and his team. The mural titled “Unite, Do Right” is a colorful graphic style featuring embedded text pulled from a Frederick Douglass quote, “I would unite with anybody to do right, and with nobody to do wrong”. This mural was a collaboration between Experience Champaign-Urbana, 40 North, and the Champaign Park District. The mural was unveiled at this year’s Juneteenth celebration at Douglass Park.



## Out & About

### Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend

The 2025 Race Weekend in late April was a brilliant success. Over 12,000 runners participated in the various races throughout the weekend. Participants, along with their friends and families, enjoyed the 4th Mile and the Meijer 27th Mile Streetfests, operated by ECU. The streetfests featured seven local food trucks, Riggs Beer Company, Christie Clinic stretching zone, and live music. Throughout the week, we promoted the Wooden Nickel program, encouraging attendees to take advantage of discounts at 28 local stores and restaurants. A new record was set, with Mad Goat taking in 333 Wooden Nickels! Local hotels also partnered with ECU to provide rooms at discounted rates to runners.



### CU-FAA Collaboration

A joint community and university workshop was held in April at Gallery Art Bar, led by the Dean of College of Fine and Applied Arts, Jake Pinholster. Terri attended on behalf of ECU and was joined by several other community organizations including 40 North, United Way, Champaign-Urbana Schools Foundation, and festival organizers, among several others. The half-day event consisted of engaging roundtables focusing on topics where more collaboration is needed, or where collaboration may already exist but needs strengthening. The goal is to continue to meet as a group to see these ideas and ensure they are implemented.



### Illinois Junior Academy of Sciences

We partnered with the University of Illinois to host the IJAS conference in May at the State Farm Center and the Illini Union. Local science enthusiasts judged student projects, and attendees explored our community through curated field trips at Staerkel Planetarium, Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery, the Pollinatorium, and the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District.







## Juneteenth Celebrations

This year, multiple Juneteenth celebrations allowed us the opportunity to share information about the Heritage Trail. To kick off the festivities, we hosted a community tour where participants donated new shoes for foster children through The Family Room. We then participated at Champaign Park District's celebration at Douglass Park, where a ribbon cutting for the new mural took place. On Juneteenth, Estella shared information about the trail with the Urbana Park District and the City of Urbana at their event and community forum.

## Sales & Marketing Efforts

### Circle Wisconsin

Robert attended Circle Wisconsin in Dubuque, IA, a three-day Midwest-focused group tour conference. There, he met with over 40 tour operators and planners. Tour Illinois hosted a dinner and BINGO event that featured gifts and goodies from each participating DMO and provided additional opportunities to network with the tour operators. Robert returned with numerous leads to follow-up on for future business to our region.

### Sports Illinois Huddle

The annual Sports IL Huddle, was held in Peoria, where Robert met with 18 centralized Sports Rights holders over three days. This conference was deliberately small, featuring 13 Illinois DMOs, allowing for intimate and longer appointments and late-night lounge events. He made several strong leads, with a few tentative dates for already established events, and assisted some of our industry partners with various resources and best practices.

### Sports ETA

Robert attended Sports ETA, a four-day conference in Tulsa, OK, one of the industry's largest events. He attended 37 appointments and several education sessions including: Smarter, Faster, Better: How AI and Emerging Tech are Transforming Sports Events; Parks & Rec Community Session: Uniting Forces to Elevate Sports Tourism; and Empowering Small to Mid-Market Destinations Round Table. Sports Illinois hosted a successful rights holder event at the local ice rink, attended by approximately 15 rights holders and 12 Illinois DMOs.

### IDSS Tourism Academy

Gina had the opportunity to attend the 10th Annual Tourism Academy hosted by Tempest, in Minneapolis the last week of June 2025. The conference emphasized practical skills and actionable insights related to destination marketing, including CRM management, content strategy, SEO, and performance marketing. It also provided in-depth training sessions for iDSS, the digital marketing and sales platform the ECU team utilizes daily. It was a great opportunity to exchange ideas and success stories with industry peers from across North America as well as learn more about digital capabilities offered via the iDSS platform that ECU is not actively using.



## SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

4

leads

1

tentative

4

definite

## CONFERENCES

1

leads

4

tentative

10

definite

## GROUP TOUR

0

leads

0

tentative

3

definite

**LEAD:** A sales prospect with active client discussion. Could also be an active proposal where the RFP has yet to be submitted.

**TENTATIVE:** RFP or bid proposal has been submitted, waiting for feedback or confirmation from client.

**DEFINITE:** Event proposal is signed, hotel bid proposal(s) signed or pending.





## IHSA State Baseball

Due to a scheduling conflict in Peoria, ECU was able to host our third IHSA championship of the year in June—IHSA State Baseball, featuring 1A and 2A baseball team championships from across the state. Games took place at Illinois Field, and a pre-tournament banquet was hosted at the Savoy Recreation Center, sponsored by the Village of Savoy, with Michaels Catering.

## Beep Baseball

In partnership with the Village of Savoy and Champaign Lion's Club, we hosted the 4th annual Beep Baseball tournament for blind and visually-impaired athletes. This adaptive sport features a beeping ball and buzzing bases. Athletes from 3 Midwest teams competed at Savoy's Prairie Fields Park, and enjoyed lunch from Black Dog, sponsored by the Lion's Club. Next year's tournament is tentatively planned for July 11, 2026.

## Scouting America's Order of the Arrow Conference

We are excited to announce that Scouting America has chosen the University of Illinois and Champaign-Urbana as their host site for the next National Order of the Arrow Conference, July 26–31, 2027. In discussing their host site selection, Don Hough, Vice Chair of the OA National Committee, stated that "the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been evaluated alongside peer institutions through a comprehensive review process and demonstrated exceptional program capability and facility readiness. It offers a balanced mix of scale, infrastructure, enthusiasm, and economic value, making it a highly viable and attractive host for the 2027 NOAC." This event will bring more than 9,500 scouts and scouting leaders to our campus, utilizing University of Illinois dorms, dining services, theaters, classrooms, athletic venues, local hotels, and more. While we're still calculating the proposed economic impact for the community, this event will provide a significant economic boost for the community during the quieter summer months. It also gives our region a unique opportunity to showcase our BRILLANT destination and world-renowned university to potential students and residents.

## City Managers Conference Savor the Flavor

The ICMA hosted their annual summer conference at the I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center in early June. As the local hosts, the City of Champaign approached ECU about reviving our "Savor the Flavor" program, where we provide each conference attendee with two tickets to redeem for a special at participating downtown Champaign locations. We had a great response from our local restaurants—sixteen locations signed up to offer drink or dessert specials to the ILCMA attendees on June 4. While the weather that evening didn't cooperate, the ILCMA group still made their way downtown and spent over \$4,000 at the participating businesses that Wednesday evening. ECU looks forward to incorporating this engaging dine-around program into future conference itineraries, which allows our visitors to explore the diverse culinary options available in downtown Champaign.



## City Nation Americas & Role Call Summit

Along with Carly McCrory-McKay from the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation, Terri attended two tourism and economic development conferences. City Nation Americas, held in Ottawa in late May, is one of the top conferences that blends the two topics. Two days filled with intensive education provided insight into how communities large and small are working on funding, placemaking, and talent attraction.

In early June, Terri and Carly attended the Role Call Summit. This event focuses on talent attraction, and is hosted by the consultant that assists with our efforts. The duo presented on our local programs and the success we've seen and how it can be replicated in other communities. They also did a last-minute PechaKucha presentation on why you should live in Champaign-Urbana.

## Midwest Travel Network Conference

Three days of inspiration, connection, and Midwest pride were on display as Cristy attended the Midwest Travel Network Conference in Grand Island, Nebraska. Between keynote speeches, casual conversations, "speed networking" with content creators, and connecting with fellow DMOs, MTNC provided numerous opportunities to connect and learn. Cristy returned with several great content creators interested in visiting our region. Next year's host will be right here in Illinois—Naturally McHenry County!

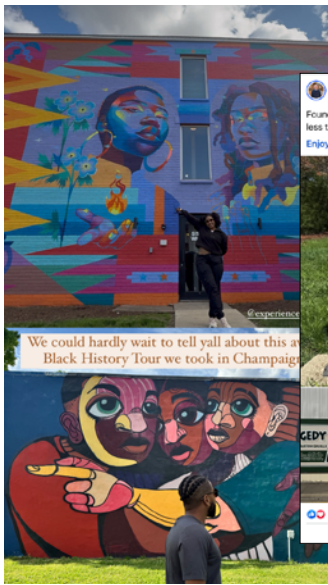


## Chili Finger Filming

The Champaign County Film Office partnered with Flyover Film Studios to host the filming of "Chili Finger" in June, featuring Bryan Cranston, John Goodman, Sean Astin, and Judy Greer. Local crew, background actors, and vendors played an integral role in the success of the production as they filmed in Monticello, Paxton, Rantoul, Mahomet, and Champaign. As seen across social media, the cast was visible throughout the community, enjoying the many amenities in the area. We received positive feedback from everyone involved, and we look forward to hosting future film productions in our region.







## Hosted Influencers

This spring, we hosted two influencers interested in very different topics. The first to visit our region was Bill on the Road. Based out of St. Louis, Bill is a regular contributor to the St. Louis media market while also hosting his own travel blog and social media pages. His interest is in small towns and unexpected gems. Bill visited our several of the communities in our area including Monticello, Arthur, and Arcola. While in Arcola, he visited the mural and bench with Raggedy Ann & Andy, which gained over 150,000 views on his social media channels. In late May, we hosted Chicago social media influencers, Black People Outside, as part of a paid sponsorship to promote the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. They have over 75K Instagram followers and are influential with Black travelers. They participated in a tour of the Trail and greatly enjoyed their experience. Several reels and posts went up throughout their visit, and paid posts are currently underway. Special thanks to Neil St. Blues for providing incredible nourishment before the tour for our guests!



## CU on the Trail Passport

Highlighting over 100 miles across 55 trails, the new CU on the Trail passport was launched in May, utilizing Bandwango. In a region that is often considered flat and is overlooked for its outdoor opportunities, this new passport will showcase the area for its outdoor destinations with seven forest preserves, dozens of parks, a rail-to-trail, Allerton Park and Retreat Center, and the state's only International Dark Sky Park. Those that visit over 20 trails will receive a free t-shirt designed by local artist, David Michael Moore, that highlights well-known stops in area parks and preserves. Since its launch, there have been 233 downloads and 374 check-ins!

## Social Media & Web Stats

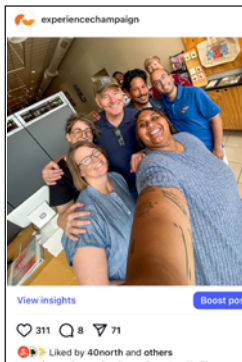


### Facebook

Bryan Cranston Visit  
36,151 reach  
516 reactions  
22 shares

**12,780**

Followers

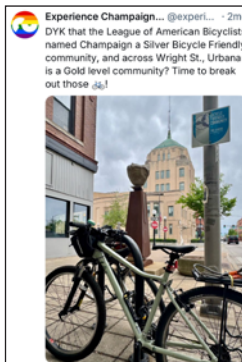


### Instagram

Bryan Cranston Visit  
7,853 views  
311 reactions  
71 shares

**9,373**

Followers



### BlueSky

League of American  
Bicyclists Rankings  
5 likes

**151**

Followers



### Instagram— CCAAHT

Ryan Adams Mural  
9,835 views  
398 reactions  
38 shares

**658**

Followers

## WEBSITE REPORT

81,499 Page Views  
3,959 Clicks on Page  
29,623 Total Users  
2.12 pages viewed per session

## TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events  
Food & Drink  
Music & Entertainment  
Outdoors  
Our Stories

**83%**

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

**38.9%**

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



# Lodging + Visitor Data

Reporting April-June 2025 | Data provided by Zartico  
Based on 19,578 credit cards and 26,438 mobile devices observed.

HOTELS   SHORT TERM VACATION RENTALS

	AVERAGE STAY VALUE	AVERAGE OCCUPANCY	AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY (in days)	DEMAND (in thousands)
Champaign	\$548.67	32%	3.7	19.7
	\$262.33	69%	1.8	110.4
Rockford	\$779.33	47%	5.5	13.5
	\$253.00	75%	1.9	108.0
Peoria	\$543.67	57%	5.5	13.0
	\$269.67	66%	2.2	135.4
Bloomington	\$588.33	43%	3.9	9.0
Normal	\$251.67	69%	1.9	124.7

VISITOR % OF TOTAL

28%

of all mobile devices  
observed that were visitors

VISITOR SPEND OF TOTAL

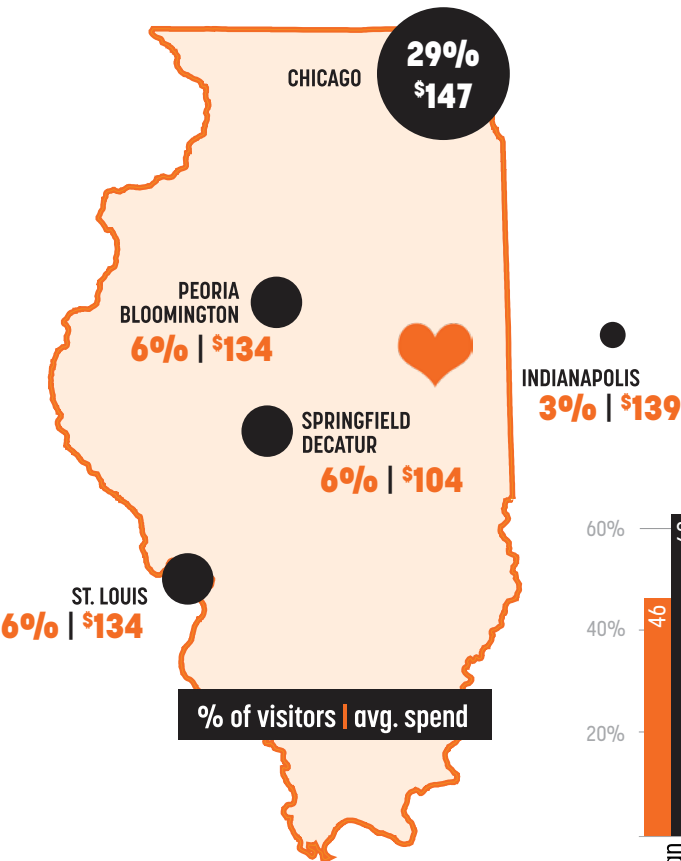
18%

of all spend came  
from visitors

% OF VISITOR SPEND  
towards local businesses

29%

50% of visitors were from  
out-of-state.



## VISITOR IMPACT



34%

visitor spend of total

\$76

avg. visitor spend



15%

visitor spend of total

\$101

avg. visitor spend



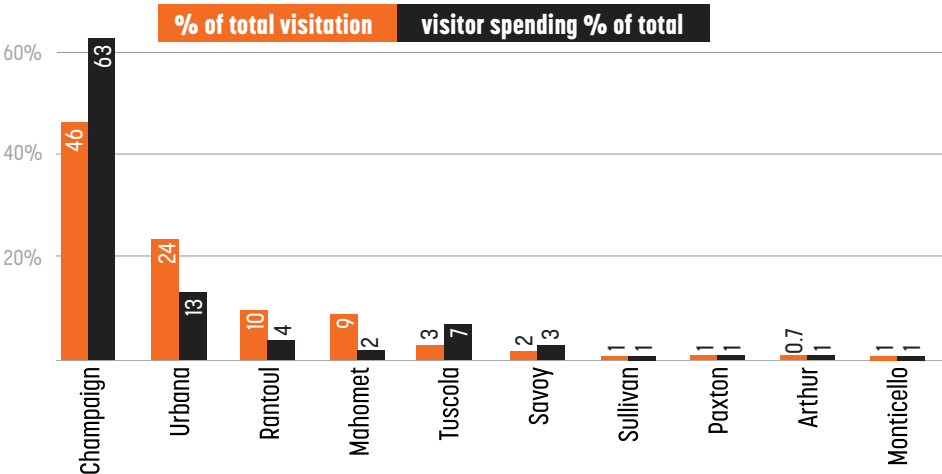
26%

visitor spend of total

\$33

avg. visitor spend

## VISITATION & SPENDING BY CITY



# 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 Urbana-Champaign

### DESTINATION LEADER

Busey :: Carle Health :: City of Urbana :: Village of Rantoul

### DESTINATION BUILDER

Champaign County :: Village of Savoy

### DESTINATION BACKER

Lynne & Dick Barnes :: Champaign County Forest Preserves  
Champaign Park District :: Farnsworth Group :: Gies College of Business :: Hickory Point Bank :: Hilton Garden Inn & Conference Center :: I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center :: Illinois American Water :: Lenschow Insurance & Financial Services :: Max & Betsy Mitchell :: Janet & Doug Nelson :: OSF Healthcare :: Parkland College :: Robeson Family Benefit Fund :: Tuscola Chamber & Tourism :: Urbana Park District :: Village of Mahomet :: Village of St. Joseph :: Heartland Coca-Cola

### REGIONAL PARTNERS

Arcola Chamber of Commerce :: Simply Arthur  
City of Tuscola :: Sullivan Chamber & Economic Development  
Make It Monticello :: City of Paxton

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

[experiencecu.org/partners](https://experiencecu.org/partners)



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**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 Destination Branding & Development  
**Gina Scarpetta**, Director of Sales & Development  
**Robert White**, Director of Group Sales & Partnerships  
**Mark Brown**, Director of Event Services & Film  
**Cristy Gillespie**, Director of Marketing  
**Marcus Flinn**, Digital Content Manager  
**Jan Troutt**, Director of Administration  
**Estella Samii**, Destination Experience Manager  
**Leslie Lundy**, Finance Manager (contracted)



2024-2025

Experience Champaign-Urbana  
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