



visit
columbusⁱⁿ

2025 ANNUAL REPORT





A Note from Misty Weisensteiner

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | COLUMBUS AREA VISITORS CENTER

Dear Friends, Partners, and Community Members,

As we look back on 2025, we're filled with gratitude and excitement. This was a year of real momentum for the Columbus Area Visitors Center. The work we began in 2024 came to life in meaningful ways, helping us tell our story more clearly, welcoming visitors more intentionally, and strengthening the role tourism plays in our community.

One of the highlights of the year was celebrating the 30th anniversary of our organization. It was such a joy to gather with partners and friends to mark that milestone and reflect on all we've built together.

We also reached an important turning point with the launch of our new brand and website in December. Together, they give us a stronger and more unified way to share what makes Columbus and Bartholomew County so special. Throughout the year, our marketing reached key drive markets, our newsletters continued to perform well, and our content helped visitors discover everything from architecture and the arts to events, dining, and family-friendly experiences.



Just as important, we saw the power of partnership at work again and again. Through collaboration with local hoteliers, event organizers, and community groups, we welcomed visitors through memorable experiences and continued to build awareness of Columbus as a place people want to visit, explore, and return to.

Most of all, 2025 reminded us that tourism is about more than promotion. It is about hospitality, stewardship, and creating meaningful experiences for everyone who comes to our community. Thank you to our board, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters for helping make this year possible. We are proud of all we accomplished together, and we're excited for what's ahead.

With gratitude,
Misty G. Weisensteiner, CDME
Executive Director

OUR
Mission

To inspire residents and visitors to experience Columbus and Bartholomew County as an ideal destination for leisure, sports, and travel while sharing the unique character of our community to create memorable and meaningful experiences.

AND
Vision

Building a stronger future for Bartholomew County through the power of tourism and the visitor economy.



AN INDEPENDENT AUDIT OF
Our Finances

An independent audit of the 2025 financial statements was conducted by Blue & Co., LLC. The financial statements reported total revenue of **\$2,107,357**, with \$1,530,291 coming from Innkeeper's Tax. The remaining revenue was generated through **gift shop sales, tour revenue, grants, and donations.**

Expenses in 2025 totaled **\$2,072,012** and included \$1,135,331 in **promotions**, \$455,592 in **hosting and gift shop operations**, \$206,600 in **tours**, and \$274,489 in **administration.**

Strong Partners, Strong Community

THE VISITORS CENTER PROVIDED **\$209,612** OF SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN 2025

**EVENT SUPPORT:
\$109,500**

6th Street Arts Alley Parklet
Columbus Area Arts Council

Aviation Day
Atterbury-Bakalar Air Museum

Bicycle Boogie
IU Alumni Association

Cabaret at The Commons
Columbus Indiana Philharmonic

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Mill Race Theatre Company

Christian Music Concert
Ecumenical Assembly of Bartholomew County

Chuck Taylor Day
Bartholomew County Historical Society

Columbus Oktoberfest
The Office of Downtown Development

Columbus On Tap
The Office of Downtown Development

Columbus Robotics
Columbus Robotics

Comic-Con
Ivy Tech Foundation

Community Christmas Concert
Good Shepherd Radio, Inc.

Déjà Vu Art and Fine Craft Show
Lincoln-Central Neighborhood Family Center

Fall Aviation Events (2)
Atterbury-Bakalar Air Museum

Festival of Lights
Red Arch Community Events

Fiesta Latina
Su Casa Columbus

A Gathering of Quilts
Columbus Star Quilters

Glow Golf
IU Foundation

Gospel Concert
Good Shepherd Radio, Inc.

Hope Community Easter Hunt
Heritage of Hope

20th Anniversary Celebration
kidscommons

Legends & Lawnchairs Tribute Concert
Women's Enhancement Center of the Americas

Lion, Witch, and Wardrobe
Mill Race Theatre Company

Pride Festival
Columbus IN Pride, Inc.

Scottish Festival
Columbus Scottish Festival, Inc.

S.E.A.R.S. Winter Market
Columbus Area Arts Council

Swadotsav
Hindu Society of Southern Indiana

**Talking Tombstones and
Talking Tombstones TWO**
Bartholomew County Historical Society

Wine-A-Ree
Boy Scouts of America

Worship Night in Columbus
Good Shepherd Radio, Inc.

**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT:
\$17,500**

Yellow Trail Museum
Hope Welcome Center

Bartholomew County Historical Society
Dancing C Mural

**MARKETING SUPPORT:
\$66,767**

Cabaret at the Commons
Columbus Indiana Philharmonic

Carnivale
kidscommons

Exhibit Columbus
Landmark Columbus Foundation

Yes Film Festival
Lincoln Central Neighborhood Family Center

**COMMUNITY SPORTS
SPONSORSHIP: \$15,845**

Columbus Community Cup
Columbus Express Soccer

Columbus Invitational
Lincoln Center Skate Club

Columbus Rugby Field Work
Columbus Rugby Football Club

Discover Columbus Pickleball Tournament
CERA Sports Corporation

Epson Tour
Otter Creek Golf Course

NSA Hall of Fame
Indiana NSA HOF



VISIT COLUMBUS Highlights

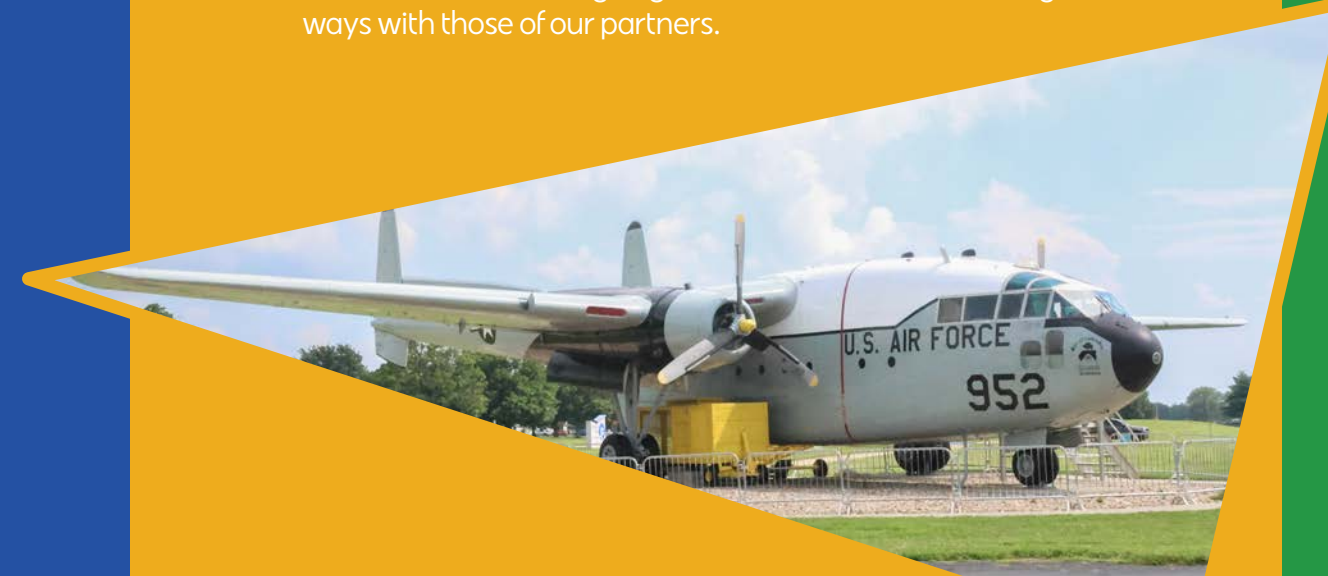


VISIT COLUMBUS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Our community came out in a big way to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Columbus Area Visitors Center. It was both meaningful and gratifying to reflect on how far we have come from our humble beginnings. We were especially honored to have Laura Miller share remarks, standing in the very same spot where her grandmother, Xenia Miller, dedicated our building 30 years ago.

DESTINATION MASTER PLAN

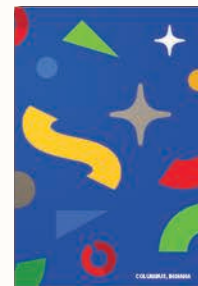
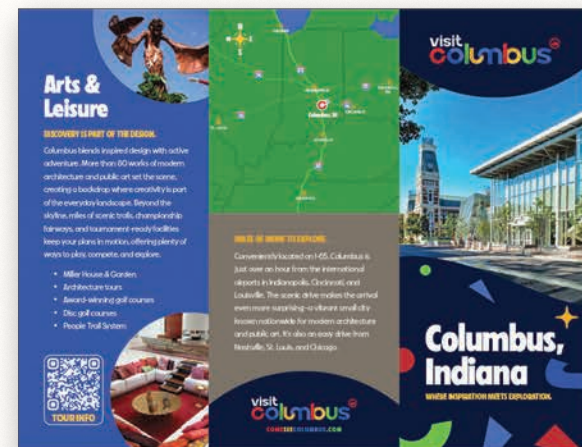
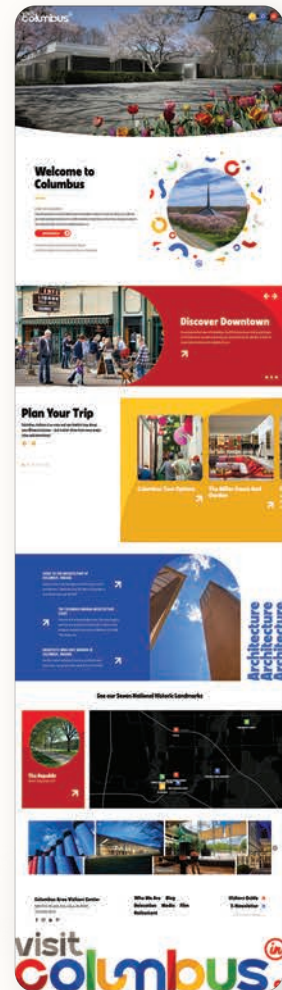
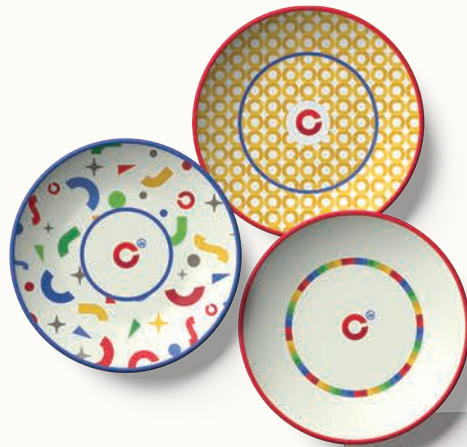
The Visit Columbus Destination Master Plan envisions the future of tourism in Bartholomew County and provides a clear roadmap for success. It refocuses our tourism efforts while identifying the partnerships and collaborative relationships needed to strengthen and organize our visitor economy. The plan is built around five pillars: Visitor and Partner Engagement, Community Engagement, Marketing and Outreach, Destination Development, and Organizational Advancement. This guiding document helps shape our work and ensures we are aligning our efforts in the most strategic ways with those of our partners.



BRAND LAUNCH & NEW WEBSITE

Columbus is built on a design legacy that continues to evolve, shaped by what came before and defined by what comes next. Developed by Indianapolis based creative agency The Basement the new Visit Columbus brand becomes part of that lasting foundation, built to carry the community forward while staying rooted in the distinct identity that has long defined it. Paired with a new website experience, the launch marked a major step forward in how the destination welcomes travelers and communicates the many reasons there is more to see, do, and discover in Columbus.

New Brand Applications



BIG EVENTS

Big Impact

Events play a major role in Bartholomew County's visitor economy and are often what bring first-time visitors to Columbus. They introduce people to the character of our community, support local businesses, and create experiences that inspire return visits. We are thankful for the many partners who organize and host these events, helping showcase all that makes our community special. The following events were among those that made a meaningful economic impact this year, making an **economic impact over \$3 million dollars.**

- Columbus on Tap**
- Smoke on the Square**
- Tough Mudder**
- Exhibit Columbus**
- Columbus Pride Festival**
- Fiesta Latina**
- Columbus Scottish Festival**
- Hot Rods & Rock n Roll**
- Mill Race Marathon**
- Hope Heritage Days**
- Ethnic Expo**
- Déjà Vu**
- Festival of Lights Parade**



Destination Marketing



2025 WEBSITE ACQUISITIONS:

Paid Social: 139,769 **Organic Social:** 94,317 **Direct:** 53,068
Referral: 27,545 **Paid Search:** 26,663 **Paid Other:** 18,075

PAID DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS:

Facebook	Google	StackAdapt	YouTube	Grand Total
6,090,422 impressions 260,522 clicks	162,642 impressions 25,395 clicks	3,587,623 impressions 19,759 clicks	738,515 impressions 9,559 clicks	10,579,202 impressions 315,235 clicks

NEWSLETTER DATA

	Emails Sent	Open Rate*	Click Rate
2025	242,798	47%	3%
2024	134,314	46%	4%
2023	58,336	49%	4%

WEBSITE TRAFFIC

	Sessions	Users
2025	644,405**	395,719**
2024	640,046	423,067
2023	297,292	217,442

*industry average is 17%

**Website analytics unavailable for October–November 2025 due to a tracking error.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

	Facebook	Instagram
2025	16,155 (up 32%)	5,984 (up 30%)
2024	12,166 (up 84%)	4,605 (up 42%)
2023	6,604	3,239

SOCIAL MEDIA INSIGHTS

FACEBOOK

2025 Total Views **6,912,107**

INSTAGRAM

2025 Total Views **342,702**

2025 Total Reach **151,860**

PAID PARTNERSHIP with Joe Himali at Best Address

Joe Himali is an influencer focused on preservation, design, architecture, and history. He is based in Washington DC but travels the world, sharing his passion. His moto: History Shared is History Saved.

Views **71,926** Likes **3,490** Reach **51,880** Comments **125**



PUBLIC RELATIONS &

Earned Media

In 2025, Columbus gained meaningful media visibility through strategic public relations, strong storytelling, and collaboration with community partners. From press releases and influencer hosting to television features and national design coverage tied to Exhibit Columbus, we helped generate attention in outlets including:

EXHIBIT COLUMBUS COVERAGE:

Great Day TV with Patty Spittler
Inside Indiana Business

In partnership with Landmark Columbus Foundation we hosted five national design journalists resulting in the following coverage:

The Architect's Newspaper
Wallpaper*
Architectural Record
Dezeen
STIRworld

OTHER NOTABLE MEDIA:

We also helped coordinate a four-page feature in *Wildsam Magazine* and supported placement of *The New York Times* story "25 Gardens You Must See," which featured Miller House and Garden.

TELEVISION COVERAGE:

WTIU's *Journey Indiana* featured Zaharakos, Architecture Tours, and artist Bob Pulley, while WKRC Cincinnati's *Travel Tuesday* highlighted Columbus in a broader tourism segment. Together, these stories introduced new audiences to the design, culture, and character that make our community special.





RADICAL PRACTICE

Presented in partnership with the J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program and Columbus Municipal Airport, *Radical Practice* featured the design for the new Air Traffic Control Tower in Columbus by Marlon Blackwell Architects. The exhibition highlighted the creative vision behind this important local project and connected visitors to a new chapter in the community's design story.

In the Gallery

In 2025, the Visitors Center hosted three gallery exhibitions, each offering visitors a different perspective on design, art, and culture.

CHEAP OPULENCE

Created by Sara Yourest and Ana Meza, faculty members in the J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program, *Cheap Opulence* explored the intersection of painting and emerging technology. The exhibition combined traditional artistic expression with 3D printing, offering a fresh and imaginative look at contemporary design practice.

CULTURAL PROGRAMS

In 2025, we hosted 11 public events at the Visitors Center, including artist talks, book signings, and lectures. These gatherings invited people into our space to engage with the cultural experiences and conversations that help bring the Columbus story to life.

CRÈCHES FROM THE XENIA S. MILLER COLLECTION

Presented in partnership with Miller House and Garden and the Bartholomew County Historical Society, this exhibition showcased nativity scenes from around the world collected by Xenia S. Miller. The display offered visitors a glimpse into Miller's love of global art and culture while celebrating the beauty and diversity of this treasured collection.



Sports

We tracked 94 sporting events in 2025, showcasing our community's growing reputation as a hub for athletic competitions. Some of the standout events included:

- CERA Park's Tough Mudder**
- Mill Race Marathon**
- USSSA Fastpitch State Tournament**
- USSSA Baseball State Tournament**
- NSA Slowpitch 35 and Over World Series**
- USSSA Slowpitch Spring Nationals**
- Columbus Express Columbus Cup**
- ISA Slowpitch Senior Worlds**
- IN Girls State Wrestling: War of the Roses**
- Epson Tour**
- Folkstyle Wrestling State Championship**
- H3 Athletix Elite 7evens Jamboree & Invite**
- BMX State Race**

ECONOMIC IMPACT (EI):

According to data from the Destinations International Event Impact Calculator, the city's 94 sporting events attracted **213,350 visitors**, generating an estimated **\$21,548,127 in economic impact**.

INVESTMENT BY

Visit Columbus

In 2025, Visit Columbus invested \$101,108 in hosting fees to support nine organizations and their events. Those events generated an estimated \$17,814,614 in economic impact, benefiting local hotels, restaurants, retailers, and other businesses throughout the community. This investment reflects the powerful role sports tourism plays in driving visitation and supporting continued economic growth. These events included:

State Baseball Tournament

Indiana USSSA Baseball | \$944,906 (EI)

Senior Men's World Championships

Independent Softball Association | \$755,942 (EI)

35 and Over Worlds, Slowpitch

National Softball Association | 477,609 (EI)

GTU 6 Taekwondo

United Taekwondo Association | \$98,444 (EI)

4 NSA Fastpitch Events

National Softball Association | \$301,964 (EI)

27 USSSA Fastpitch Events

United States Specialty Sports Assc. | \$5,329,839 (EI)

35 Ohio Valley Sports Events

\$8,024,951 (Econmic Impact)

7evens Jamboree & Invite

H3 Athletix | \$819,382 (EI)

War of the Roses

USA Women's Wrestling | \$1,061,577 (EI)

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF Tourism

Tourism continued to make a strong impact in Bartholomew County in 2024*. **Visitor spending grew 1.5%**, supporting 4.4% of all county jobs and reinforcing tourism as the 6th largest industry locally, or 5th excluding government. Businesses that directly serve visitors generated \$94 million in value added, up 4.1% from 2023, while visitor activity also generated significant revenue for federal, state, and local governments.

Without tourism, each of Bartholomew County's 32,984 households would need to pay an additional \$687 per year to maintain current levels of state and local government services.

Visitor Spending

226M

Economic Impact

127M

Jobs Supported

2,690

Taxes Generated

22.6M





Tour Data

Public Guided Tours

Miller House Tour	3849	3633	3730	3502	2661
Highlights by Shuttle	2009	2036	2051	1822	1124
Iconic Walking Tour	397	432	371	407	595
Inn at Irwin Gardens	6	106	283	267	427
Zaharakos Tour	0	0	0	0	63

Public Tours Total

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Public Tours Total	6261	6207	6435	5998	4870

Private & Group Tours

Miller House Tour	559	672	702	353	692
Architecture Tour	1253	879	1005	596	721

Private Tours Total

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Private Tours Total	1812	1551	1707	949	1413

Total Tour Attendees

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Total Tour Attendees	8073	7758	8142	6947	6283

NOTABLE REVIEWS &

Testimonials

Amazing architecture, informed guides, and warm welcomes

We took the architecture guided tour and the Miller House tour. Both were excellent. Our guides were knowledgeable and congenial. The transport was comfortable and provided great window views. The examples of midcentury and postmodern architecture were outstanding. The opportunity to enter two churches was moving. Columbus is a wonderful small town to visit.

Mark C | December 2025

Great curated tour of world-renowned architecture & history

I took the shuttle tour, and the Miller House tours the one full day I was in Columbus. It was a really good decision - both experiences were outstanding! Henry, our guide talked about the architecture, interiors & landscape designs, and history of the city in a way that everyone could learn and appreciate! I'm an architect with 25+ years of experience, and I learned quite a lot! Highly recommend!

Ana G | September 2025

Knowledgeable docents, enjoyable adventure.

Enjoyed the city tour in the morning and the afternoon tour of the Miller house. Both were enjoyable. The docent for the Miller House was especially knowledgeable and enjoyable, though both were good. We had purchased tickets for last year but were unable to use them due to illness. It was nice to have a year to return and do these tours. I am a fan of Eero Saarinen, especially his TWA structure at JFK, so appreciated being able to see more of his work.

Lyn | March 2025

Amazing Columbus

It was amazing to discover Columbus and how many important architects designed amazing buildings in the city. Great tour by our guide Mary, who was outstanding. The shuttle driver is also super friendly. We loved the gift shop! Muchas gracias from Spain!

Juan | April 2025

Both Tours are a MUST!

We signed up for both the bus tour and Miller House tour. Both were absolutely marvelous. The tour guides were well versed in the historic technical information but also had some very interesting stories. Both were great. The Center Gift Shop is excellent too.

Daydream2789 | June 2025

Superb Tour

Superb architectural tour of the city, full of outstanding buildings by world class designers; Henry is a remarkably well prepared and knowledgeable tour guide. Hard to imagine there are any other places of comparable size with a higher density of remarkable buildings.

Ronald O | February 2025

A Great Introduction to Columbus

The 90-minute (closer to two hour) Iconic Columbus Walking Tour led by John was simply fantastic. As a retired second-generation Cummins employee whose daughter now works for them, he had a wonderful perspective on the city and its art and architecture. There wasn't a single question from our group that he couldn't answer, and his insights were particularly enlightening. In addition, getting into First Christian Church was great because it would have been locked while we were in town. Although it is not an everyday occurrence, we also had a real treat in that Jean Tinguely's "Chaos I" sculpture was turned on...such a difference over the static nature that it's usually in. What was especially helpful though were the headphones and receivers that were given to us when we checked in. These ensured we could always hear John even if we were hanging back to get more photos of the buildings and sculptures. Cannot recommend this tour highly enough!

NorthshorePA | May 2025



WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

Looking Ahead

As we look to the future, Visit Columbus remains firmly rooted in the vision established by our Destination Master Plan, a roadmap built to elevate Columbus and Bartholomew County as a destination for visitors, residents, and investors alike. Every initiative we pursue, from expanding tour offerings and growing sports tourism to deepening community partnerships and strengthening our internal systems, is guided by intention and a shared commitment to this community's long-term success.

The road ahead is filled with exciting possibilities. We will push our new brand into spaces and markets we have never reached before, connect with the thousands of families coming to Bartholomew County for sports, and engage more deeply with the people who call this place home, establishing our community calendar as the go-to resource for local happenings and showing up at the events that make this county such a special place to live, work, and visit. We are confident in what Columbus has to offer, and we look forward to sharing it with the world.





FULL-TIME STAFF:

Misty Weisensteiner
Executive Director

Erin Hawkins
Director of Strategic Partnerships
and Communications

Aurora Harvey
Digital Marketing Manager

Lisa Westmark
Tour Program Manager

Kate Todd
Sport Development and Sales Manager

Robin Gray
Operations Manager

Sami Harvey
Guest Services Manager

Dana George
Guest Services Specialist

VISITORS CENTER STAFF AND TOUR DRIVERS:

Caroline Adress | Intern

Chloe LaVelle | Intern

Lois Guest | Guest Services

Elizabeth Pike | Guest Services

Jerry Simo | Guest Services

Brynn Stewart | Guest Services

Michael Black | Tour Driver

Gary Dismore | Tour Driver

Danny Green | Custodial

Tracy Grider | Tour Driver

Carman Jessup | Tour Driver

Derek Johnson | Tour Driver

Ishmel Johnson-Bey | Tour Driver

Bob St. Henry | Tour Driver

CONVENTION, RECREATION, AND VISITOR PROMOTION COMMISSION:

Sandy Allman | Secretary

Julie Del Genio | President

Cindy Frey

Candi Hester

Sarla Kalsi | Vice President

Diana Mann

Mary Ann Patterson

Denise Pence

Shirley Robertson

Nicholas Sprague | Treasurer

VOLUNTEER VISITORS CENTER TOUR GUIDES:

Willis Bahnsen

Jan Banister

Ricky Berkey

Bonnie Boatwright

Bob Bolner

Rhonda Bolner

Britt Brewer

Linda Brown

Linda Chui

John Crofts

Sheila Dean

Matt Franklin

Gary Goshorn

Dale Guse

Steve Jasper

Marsha Kanable

Mary Kendrick

Henry Kuehn

Sally Madge

Nancy Morris

S. Nelson

Gretchen Newell

Cliff Putterill

Carole Rice

Kerry Richmond

Donna Sasse

Jim Scarborough

Mike Stretchberry

Marianne Wohlford

Linda Young

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Pete King
Vice President & Tourism
Development Chair

Brian Payne
Secretary/Treasurer & Finance Chair

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Jim Kreutzjans
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Kiley Broad

Brittany Gray

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Tyler Hodge

Amy Kaiser

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Jim Kreutzjans

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Zach McClellan

Dave Glass

Rich Day

Mark Elwood

Dave Bush

Angie May

Jeremy Foster

Jody Littrell

Mickey Kim

Nikki Murphy

Ty Smith

Ike DeClue

THERE'S MORE TO



SCAN HERE TO DISCOVER.

