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DESTINATION CLEVELAND ASKS RESIDENTS TO BE ACTIVE ADVOCATES FOR CITY

Organization reports on visitor experience and marketing initiatives at 2024 annual meeting

Producer/Editor Note: *The videos shown at today's annual meeting can be viewed [here](#).*

CLEVELAND (June 11, 2024) – At its annual meeting today, [Destination Cleveland](#) updated its community partners on the organization's work to enhance visitor experiences, change perceptions of Cleveland, drive more visitation to and attract new talent to Cleveland. More than 450 people attended the event, including representatives from hospitality businesses and community organizations as well as local government leaders.

"Destination Cleveland continued to build momentum for the tourism industry in 2023. It was a year that yielded strong results across the organization," said Jon Pinney, chair of Destination Cleveland's Board of Directors. "Our sales and marketing teams were busier than ever, and sales leads increased significantly. Our destination management and organization management teams also worked at full speed."

ENGAGING RESIDENTS

As part of its work to change perceptions and attract visitors to Cleveland, Destination Cleveland shared several initiatives that will allow Clevelanders to share their love of The Land and contribute to the city's growth. When last measured in 2022, 80% of residents indicated a willingness to recommend Cleveland as a visitor destination.

"We are focused on working with instead of just for the community," said David Gilbert, president and CEO of Destination Cleveland. "When it comes to Cleveland's growth as a visitor destination, residents have been a significant and important contributor. Our continued success in changing perceptions to attract visitors and now to attract residents depends on all Clevelanders sharing a common story. Locals are more important than ever."

Among the opportunities to get involved is Destination Cleveland's [Local Advocate Group](#). Since last fall, more than 500 residents have joined the effort to showcase Cleveland to family and friends who live here and around the country.

A smaller group of residents is part of the Cleveland Talent Alliance's [Cleveland Ambassador](#) program, representing a variety of lived experiences in Cleveland and serving as a conduit to attract new talent to Cleveland. The group is directly connected with potential residents who want to learn more about living and working in Cleveland and represents just one of the many ways the Cleveland Talent Alliance is working to engage locals in its work. Destination Cleveland also continues to make updates to its [Move to Cleveland](#) page to help educate potential residents.

For residents interested in creating memorable experiences for meeting and convention attendees, Destination Cleveland will launch an updated volunteer program soon.

Residents can learn more about these opportunities at [ThisisCleveland.com/GetInvolved](https://thisiscleveland.com/GetInvolved). And to stay informed about events happening across the region, new updates on development projects and volunteer opportunities, residents can sign up for the new [The Land for Life e-newsletter](#).

ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The organization reported on several projects that will enhance the visitor experience and show off community assets:

- **Illuminate CLE and streetscape elements:** An initial phase of [Illuminate CLE](#), the lighting installation on and around Public Square that was announced at the organization's 2023 annual meeting, will first be lit in August during the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Association Executives. Additional previews of the fixed lighting will take place during the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction weekend and Downtown Cleveland's WinterLand celebration. The full scope of the project will be unveiled next spring, including lighting onto Public Square from surrounding buildings and a designed "show" for visitors to the Square. The project is made possible thanks to support from the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, the Cleveland Foundation, KeyBank, Sherwin-Williams, PNC, KJK, TurnDev and Huntington Bank.

As part of the public project, three newly installed badge sculptures are now in place, creating visual interest and connecting Downtown districts. The sculptures, which play music and light up when a crank is turned, are inspired by elements of the Cleveland brand and serve as a photo opportunity for visitors and residents. Also recently installed is a new polygon sculpture near the corner of West Mall Drive and Rockwell, serving as a landmark on the pedestrian path from the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland to Public Square.

- **Murals Across the City:** Destination Cleveland also shared an update on the [Murals Across the City](#) program, introduced at last year's Annual Meeting. Five of the six murals, which provide photo-ready, branded walls for residents and visitors to share their love of The Land, are now installed in Detroit Shoreway, Slavic Village, Old Brooklyn, West Park and at the intersection of the St. Clair Superior and AsiaTown neighborhoods. The final mural will be installed in the Lee-Harvard neighborhood by the end of the summer.

BOLD AND INNOVATIVE MARKETING

Destination Cleveland shared results of its recent "Dog's Day Off" [ad campaign](#), which debuted during the 2024 Puppy Bowl. It represented the organization's national advertising debut after 10 years of regional advertising. Post-campaign research found that the campaign effectiveness was three times greater than the industry benchmark, which indicates change in consideration of Cleveland as a place to visit among people who were exposed to the campaign.ⁱ

The organization also shared results from recent research conducted by Longwoods International, which measured the effect of Cleveland's brand advertising and of visitation on enhancing perceptions of Cleveland as a place to live, start a business or start a career. The Longwoods International Destination Cleveland 2024 Halo Effect Research study found that people who saw Destination Cleveland advertising in 2023 rated Cleveland two times higher across these 3 economic development categories than those who did not. The study also outlined the impact on perceptions when consumers were both exposed to Destination Cleveland's paid advertising and have visited Cleveland. Those survey respondents rated Cleveland more than 3 times higher across economic development categories than consumers who had neither seen the advertising nor visited.ⁱⁱ

"These results illustrate the importance of our visitor economy to our city's greater future," said Gilbert. "We must keep working together to attract more visitors because every visit is a date with our great city – and without these dates, our ability to grow our population is infinitely more difficult."

ATTRACTING MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS

Destination Cleveland continues to see strong and sustained interest as a host city for meetings and conventions. The organization's sales team is already booking events as far out as 2031. Contributing to the team's success is the nearly complete renovation of the Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland, which has

allowed Cleveland to bid on events that would have previously been turned down due to space constraints. As of May 2024, business secured because of the expanded space will generate more than \$1.7 million in county taxes, with more events in the pipeline.

One of the big wins for Cleveland due in part to the expansion is the hosting of the 2025 [National Urban League](#) annual meeting, which is estimated to bring about 4,000 visitors to Cleveland and generate an economic impact of \$5 million.

MEASURING PROGRESS: 2023-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Destination Cleveland also shared its progress toward the four objectives of its [2023-2025 strategic plan](#). The organization reported on the key performance indicator goals it set for 2023. The organization attained nearly all its goals.

- An increase in meetings & conventions room nights secured for future years and the number of meetings & conventions hosted in 2023, achieving increases of 21% and 29% respectively over 2022.
- Maintaining a 6/10 rating among talent for Cleveland as a place to live and work.
- 40% of past visitors agreed or strongly agreed that Cleveland’s visitor experience is inclusive. This fell short of the 60% goal.
- 77% of visitors were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall visitor experience in Cleveland, surpassing the goal of 65%.
- 92% of local hospitality and corporate partners and organizations Destination Cleveland collaborates with have high confidence in the organization’s work.
- Since 2021, the willingness of talent in target markets to relocate to Cleveland if offered a job has increased from 34% to 42%.

Held at the headquarters of [CrossCountry Mortgage](#) in Downtown Cleveland’s Superior Arts district, guests enjoyed live entertainment from the [Burning River Boys Barbershop Quartet](#), [CLE Music Group](#) trumpeter Wave Magnetik (Donald Malloy) and acoustic duo Marina Strah and Sami Butler. The meeting was made possible in part through sponsorship from [United for Business](#).

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: *Destination Cleveland is Cleveland’s destination marketing and management organization. The private, non-profit organization’s mission is to stimulate economic growth by attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland’s diversity, creativity and contagious passion. In 2022, visitation increased 12% over the year prior to 17.9 million visits. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com.*

ⁱ Nexsen Destination Cleveland 2024 Brand Lift Study

ⁱⁱ Longwoods International Destination Cleveland 2024 Halo Effect Research