



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DESTINATION CLEVELAND SHOWS CONTINUED PROGRESS IN REFRAMING
AREA'S NATIONAL REPUTATION AS A PLACE TO VISIT**
VISITORS BUREAU ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 2015 SUCCESSES

CLEVELAND (March 14, 2016) – [Destination Cleveland](http://DestinationCleveland.com), the convention and visitors bureau (CVB) for Cuyahoga County, announced today outcomes of several 2015 organizational goals that have contributed to continued success in changing Cleveland's narrative. The achievements were shared at the visitors bureau's annual meeting.

Destination Cleveland President and CEO David Gilbert also discussed how growing the travel and tourism industry by attracting both leisure travelers and conventions can benefit more than just the visitor-related economy. Citing research released last year by Oxford Economics, Cleveland's visitor brand can positively impact the overall brand of a city, help increase the number of new residents and influence site selectors looking to move businesses to Cleveland. Statistics showed that 32 percent of new residents first visited their new community as a leisure visitor and 37 percent of site selectors visited as a business traveler prior to considering new cities for businesses.

"Events like the 2016 Republican National Convention are such significant contributors to driving widespread economic impact," said Gilbert. "It gives us the opportunity to not only create a lasting impression on visitors, but we can also reframe our national reputation and generate greater employment and economic growth as a whole, well beyond just the travel and tourism realm."

2015 ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

The mission of Destination Cleveland is to increase the economic impact to the region by growing the number of leisure and business travelers. Within the organization, each department helps to deliver on this mission by achieving key metrics in its specific area.

MARKETING

Destination Cleveland's Marketing team works to improve Cleveland's narrative among both local and visitor audiences. Using a comprehensive approach across print, digital, broadcast and social platforms, the team garnered significant results by engaging audiences with positive messaging about Cleveland as a place for world-class art, culture, and rock and roll.

- Ten digital ad campaigns generated 105 million impressions, an increase over the 98 million impressions garnered in 2014.

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- The #ThisisCLE mobile tour continued throughout the region, visiting 31 events and interacting with nearly 9,500 individuals. The tour was launched to help address the need to increase resident recommendation, which sat at 34 percent in 2012 and rose to 54 percent in 2015.
- Page views of www.thisiscleveland.com were up more than 18 percent in 2015 to a total of 3.25 million surpassing 2.8 million in 2014 and the 2015 goal of 2.9 million. Unique users were up more than 25 percent. Data does not include the time surrounding the announcement of LeBron James' return to Cleveland as host of the Republican National Convention.
- Social media interactions continued to increase as well. Facebook engagement grew by 20 percent to 67,400 likes and Twitter increased by 25 percent to 52,300 followers, exceeding the goal of a more than 10 percent increase. The group's signature local social movement, #ThisisCLE, saw nearly 730 million timeline deliveries.
- The PR team earned 1.6 billion impressions in 2015 through close to 1,000 articles in local, national and meeting planner-focused media, yielding a 65 percent increase in impressions.

CONVENTION SALES AND SERVICES

Destination Cleveland's Convention Sales and Services team saw significant increases in volume throughout the meetings and convention industry.

- In 2015, the team achieved a record year of hosting City Wide meetings, an event in which three or more hotels are used, with 16 major groups, up 60 percent from 2014.
- For the third consecutive year, lead volume/demand grew significantly reaching 910 leads vs. 559 in 2014. The average pipeline for room nights also grew to 465,000 in 2015 from 325,000 in 2014.
- The Convention Sales team brought in more than 100 new customers to visit the city for future convention opportunities vs. only 82 in 2014.
- The Convention Services team provided exceptional customer service and received an average survey score of 4.7 satisfaction on a 5.0 scale according to 45 clients surveyed.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

The Destination Development and Community Affairs team continued to enhance the visitor experience through a variety of initiatives focused on wayfinding and frontline training.

- The department continued the second phase of its Seamless Cleveland Wayfinding Master Plan, which details a comprehensive approach to connecting the city in a way that supports visitors along their journey. Following the installation of [four prototype pedestrian wayfinding signs](#) in 2014, 27 additional signs were added throughout Downtown Cleveland in 2015; 28 more will be installed before the Republican National Convention in July.

With the goal of improving the visitor experience, Destination Cleveland opened its newly designed Cleveland Visitors Center in April 2015. The interior and exterior redesign improved the space's functionality and more appropriately conveyed Cleveland's destination brand depicting the city's world-class arts, culture, and rock and roll.

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- The [CLE Travelbackers](#) program was relaunched in 2015. While continuing to provide Cleveland's hospitality community with education about Cleveland as a visitor destination and best-in-class service, the format was restructured to incorporate the following benefits:
 - **Less time away from work:** In place of two separate two-hour workshops, the CLE Travelbackers program will consist of one, three-hour workshop.
 - **Less financial commitment:** Partner organizations pay a reduced rate of \$25 per person; non-partner organizations pay a reduced rate of \$35 per person.
 - **New RNC Convention-related content:** Curriculum includes information to help prepare for one of the biggest events this city has hosted.

More than 400 new participants were trained as CLE Travelbackers this past year bringing the number to 1,600 trained since 2013 and nearly 200 participated in nine unique Discovery Events at valued partner destinations. Thanks to the team at [BakerHostetler LLP](#), 150 people participated in the 2015 program free of charge.

PARTNERSHIP

Destination Cleveland's Partnership team welcomed 107 new partners in 2015 and continues to work with more than 700 organizations to support one another in growing the travel and tourism industry and the community.

- The team received positive feedback from its partners, with 93 percent indicating that, overall, they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their partnership, the highest results to date.

AWARD RECIPIENTS

Also at today's annual meeting, Destination Cleveland recognized two individuals for their contributions to the travel and tourism industry.

- The [Cleveland Champions Award](#), which recognizes an individual for his or her effort to bring meetings and conventions to Cleveland, was awarded to Carolyn Williams. With the assistance of Williams' leadership, Cleveland hosted the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives last April and will host Sigma Gamma Rho's 56th Biennial Boule in July of this year. Jointly, these two conventions will bring in \$1.26 million into Cleveland's economy with an estimated 2,500 room nights utilized.
- The [Hospitality Star Award](#), which is given to a frontline staff member who is recognized by his or her peers as going above and beyond to provide excellent customer service and true hospitality to Cleveland visitors, was awarded to Patrick Lewis of Thrifty Car Rental Cleveland. Lewis was nominated twice for executing his role of ambassador by accompanying two guests on the RTA in the early morning hours after their arrival. In addition to familiarizing them with Cleveland hotspots, he escorted them to their hotel.

The meeting also featured an appearance by Al Roker, NBC's Today Show weatherman and former Cleveland weathercaster, who discussed the exciting change in Cleveland's reputation and shared his thoughts on the opportunity to forge a great future beyond the historic 2016 Republican National Convention. Following the meeting, guests enjoyed a cocktail reception and a performance by the Public Squares.

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The organization is appreciative of the support of all its partners, particularly those who worked together to put on today's event. Destination Cleveland would like to thank [PNC Bank](#) for serving as the presenting sponsor of the annual meeting and also appreciates the support of its event sponsors: [Angstrom Graphics](#), [AT&T](#), [Crain's Cleveland Business](#), [Enterprise/National Rent-A-Car](#), [Fern Exposition and Event Services](#), [MVP Valet Parking Services](#), [United Airlines](#) and [Event Source](#).

To learn more about Destination Cleveland or to keep up-to-date on new developments and activities, please visit www.thisiscleveland.com or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: *Destination Cleveland is Cleveland's convention and visitors bureau. This private non-profit organization's mission is to drive economic impact and stimulate community vitality for Greater Cleveland through leisure and business travel. Cleveland welcomes nearly 17 million visitors annually. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com.*