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DESTINATION CLEVELAND SHOWS SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN CHANGING PERCEPTION OF CLEVELAND

VISITORS BUREAU ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS 2014 SUCCESSES

CLEVELAND (March 16, 2015) – Today, [Destination Cleveland](http://DestinationCleveland.com), the convention and visitors bureau (CVB) for Cleveland, announced the outcomes of significant research demonstrating the impact of travel and tourism on the broader economy, an increase in the changing perception of Cleveland and several organizational accomplishments.

2014 OXFORD ECONOMICS STUDY

[Destination Cleveland](http://DestinationCleveland.com), along with six other destination marketing organizations (DMOs) participated in a study led by Oxford Economics, a world leader in global forecasting and quantitative research, which concluded that growth in the travel and tourism industry causes growth in the broader economy.

With regard to employment, the study projects that for every 100 visitor-related jobs, 15 new jobs in unrelated business sectors are created over a two-year period. In addition, destinations that attract a greater number of leisure visitors grew in population and employment on average 2 percent faster over a ten year period.

The findings also concluded that those cities which prioritize destination promotion efforts experience an increase in economic development through non-tourism channels while creating a lasting impression on visitors. From a residential perspective, 32 percent of new residents to an area first visited their community as tourists. On the business side, 37 percent of site selection business executives state that their perceptions of whether or not to move their business to a destination were influenced by business travel.

“Traditionally the economic impact of the travel and tourism industry has been measured by the direct spending of visitors and job creation within the sector,” said David Gilbert, president and CEO, Destination Cleveland. “What this study proves is that destinations which place a high priority on marketing their city and amenities realize significantly greater employment and economic growth as a whole, well beyond just the travel and tourism realm.”

The methodology used to conduct the research involved the statistical analysis of 200 cities over the past 23 years and in-depth qualitative research of the seven partner cities, their DMOs, and their economic development organizations (EDOs). Other participating DMOs included Asheville, Denver,

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Louisiana, Visit California, Choose Chicago and Visit Phoenix.

“With the perception gap of what people think about Cleveland before and after they visit being so wide, Cleveland stands to gain much more than other cities through destination promotion,” said Gilbert. “We know we don’t have a product gap, we have a communications gap; and changing that perception through destination promotion will ultimately help to change the narrative of Cleveland and drive economic development within the region.”

CHANGING PERCEPTION OF CLEVELAND

Also during today’s annual meeting, Destination Cleveland announced the findings from another piece of research that was conducted to quantify the perception of Cleveland both here at home and abroad.

The 2015 study, conducted by TNS Global, concluded that the number of residents who would recommend Cleveland as a visitor destination significantly increased from 34 percent in 2013 to 54 percent in 2015.

From an external perspective, the same research also noted that visitors who are definitely open to visiting Cleveland increased from 15 percent in 2012 to 22 percent in 2015. In addition, the 2014 Watkins Research Study, which evaluates perceptions among meeting planners ranked Cleveland in the Top Ten Client Advocate Score, which means that those who held their meetings in Cleveland would highly recommend their peers do the same.

Destination Cleveland’s ability to help secure large events, such as the [2016 Republican National Convention](#) and the [2017 American Bus Association Marketplace](#), helped validate Cleveland as a meeting destination. In fact, more than 8,000 articles about Cleveland were generated after the RNC selected the city over Dallas. From the leisure travel perspective, Cleveland also has been listed as one of the top travel destinations for 2015 in multiple travel industry-leading resources including [Travel & Leisure](#), [Fodor’s Travel](#), [L.A. Times](#), [New York Times](#) and [Buzzfeed](#).

2014 ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES

Also at today’s annual meeting, Destination Cleveland highlighted several organizational achievements which included:

MARKETING AND PR/COMMUNICATIONS

In March 2014, the CVB unveiled its new destination brand, which depicts Cleveland as a mix of world-class art, culture and rock and roll -- one that doesn’t take itself too seriously and is always fun, irreverent and unmistakably Cleveland.

- Since its launch, the number of visits to the organization’s website, www.thisiscleveland.com, increased by 30 percent over 2013.
- In Feb., 2014, the CVB launched the [#ThisisCLE](#) social media movement that encourages residents to post their favorite unmistakable Cleveland images on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook tagging them [#ThisisCLE](#). Since then, [#ThisisCLE](#) reached more than 39 million social network users, with nearly 40,000 unique contributors tagging approximately 75,000 photos on Instagram and more than 113,000 tagged tweets. [#ThisisCLE](#) was also delivered to nearly 270 million timelines.

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- To close out its inaugural year, the new destination brand was chosen from 1,200 worldwide submissions as the [Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International \(HSMAI\) 2014 Best of Show for Advertising award](#), beating out the Booking.com and Hilton Worldwide campaigns.
- The PR/Communications team earned more than 1,000 articles with 900 million impressions locally, nationally and among meeting planners, a 65 percent increase in impressions and 32 percent increase in publicity value from 2013.

CONVENTION SALES AND SERVICES

Destination Cleveland's Convention Sales and Services team saw a 23 percent increase in convention lead volume and a 73 percent increase in the average pipeline of room nights, growing from 260,000 in 2013 to 450,000 in 2014. The team also hosted 82 meeting planners throughout the year and serviced 536 groups, a 32 percent increase over the previous year.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

- The organization also executed one of the first phases of its Seamless Cleveland Wayfinding Master Plan, which proposes connecting the city in a way that supports visitors along their journey. This first iteration included installation of [four prototype pedestrian wayfinding signs](#) in Downtown Cleveland that direct pedestrians from Public Square down Euclid Avenue to East 4th Street and over to Prospect Avenue. The project continues into 2015 with the complete rollout throughout Downtown Cleveland of 50-60 signs that will be updated based on feedback received on the prototypes.
- In August 2014, the organization implemented its first [Curb Appeal](#) improvement project to visually enhance the pedestrian experience and better connect Downtown districts and attractions. The beautification effort included 11 colorful planters along Prospect Avenue to add greenery, two public art mural installations to celebrate Cleveland's vibrant arts community, and two parkmobiles to create vibrant spaces to gather.
- [CLE Travelbackers](#), the city's frontline hospitality training program, welcomed and trained more than 300 new participants this past year and hosted 10 Discovery Events, which provided participants with a continuing education opportunity to experience Cleveland's dynamic attractions. Since its inception in 2013, [CLE Travelbackers](#) has trained more than 1,200 participants and provided Cleveland's valued hospitality community with the knowledge and tools to enhance visitor experiences. The 2015 program is enhanced to offer participants the same information in a shortened three-hour session for a lower cost and includes a new curriculum to help the community prepare for the 2016 Republican National Convention. Thanks to the team at [BakerHostetler LLP](#), 150 people will be participating in this year's program free of charge.
- Destination Cleveland hosted more than 150 young professionals for its first-ever [YP CLE Ambassador Summit](#) as a way to increase the number of local residents who would recommend Cleveland as a visitor destination. Following this summit, three advisory committees were formed and will focus on launching pilot initiatives in 2015 centered on three outcomes: creating a better local experience, sharing content created by locals and creating useful technology tools for locals.

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- The CLE Concierge team enhanced the experiences of more than 21,000 Cleveland visitors before, during and after their visit in person, over the phone or via live chat. The team also educated and engaged nearly 600 additional local residents as volunteers and dedicated CLE Ambassadors.
- Destination Cleveland began construction on its 1,100 square foot Cleveland Visitors Center, which includes a redesign of the interior space and the exterior storefront. The objective of the project is to improve the space's functionality, enhance the visitor experience and convey the essence of Cleveland's new destination brand. The project will be completed in April 2015.

PARTNERSHIP

Destination Cleveland's Partnership team continues to work with nearly 700 organizations to support one another in growing the travel and tourism industry and the community. The team received significant feedback from its partners, with 90 percent indicating that, overall, they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their partnership.

In turn, the organization is thankful for the support of all its partners, particularly those who worked together to put on today's event. Destination Cleveland would like to thank [The Huntington National Bank](#) for serving as the presenting sponsor of the annual meeting, and also is appreciative of 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](#), [Quicken Loans Arena](#), [L'Nique](#), [Event Source](#) and [Hughie's Audio Visual](#).

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 Feza H. Remzi, MD, Chairman of the Department of Colorectal Surgery in the Digestive Disease Institute at the Cleveland Clinic and a Professor of Surgery in the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine.
- 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 Joseph Fredrickson, director of operations, Society Lounge.

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 16 million visitors annually. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com.*