

macon
GEORGIA

VISIT MACON

FY24

annual report

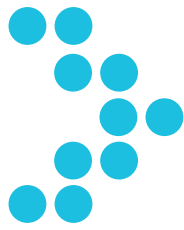
Macon GEORGIA

OUR MISSION

THE MISSION OF VISIT MACON IS TO UNIFY AND LEAD OUR COMMUNITY IN MARKETING THE MACON-BIBB COUNTY AREA AS A SUPERIOR VISITOR AND MEETING DESTINATION.

WE DO THIS BY PROMOTING MACON, GEORGIA TO TRAVEL WRITERS, MEETING PLANNERS, GROUP TOUR OPERATORS AND LEISURE TRAVELERS IN AN EFFORT TO BRING PEOPLE AND REVENUE INTO THE COMMUNITY AND AREA BUSINESSES.





LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO



Looking back over our Fiscal Year 2024, I am appreciative of the opportunity to lead Visit Macon. I am also excited about our overall results, as well as, the future of tourism in Macon-Bibb County. Our hospitality industry in Macon supports over **4,700 jobs** and generates **over \$12 million in local taxes**. Hotel-motel taxes in 2023 set a record for the **3rd-consecutive year!**

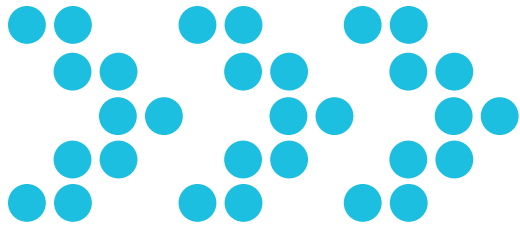
Macon saw the opening of two new tourism attractions in FY24: the **Rhythm and Rally Sports and Events Center** and the **Atrium Health Amphitheater!** Rhythm and Rally, the *world's largest indoor pickleball facility*, immediately became the **Center of the Pickleverse™** with regional and national tournaments competing weekly. The Atrium Health Amphitheater's lineup of inaugural shows impacted the hotel market in Macon with double-digit growth during show nights. These new additions compliment the amazing events and attractions already drawing thousands of visitors each year.

The Visitor Services' team did an amazing job refreshing the look in our downtown Visitor Information Center creating an interactive, immersive experience for all our guests. Visit Macon also completed new Macon welcome signs when entering the county and in the downtown core.

As we "**set the pace**" in FY25, we look forward to the implementation of new street signs reflecting the Muscogee (Creek) Nation language (a vital preservation of their culture), as well as, the designation of *America's newest National Park* in Ocmulgee Mounds. And, we will continue to target our visitor's interests throughout the year when launching new brand initiatives, such as *Macon Beyond*, *Lights Music Macon*, *Paint Macon Pink* and more!

I am grateful to Macon-Bibb County, the Visit Macon Board of Directors, our Visit Macon team and all our wonderful partners for creating a destination for the future in Macon... and for Georgia!

GARY WHEAT



ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$6,190,970.18

**RECORD
HOTEL-MOTEL
TAX COLLECTION**



2.7%

**INCREASE
OVER LAST
YEAR**

\$458.3M

**TOTAL VISITOR
SPENDING IN 2023**

UP 2.1% FROM 2022

4,759

**TOURISM
RELATED JOBS**

\$583

**HOUSEHOLD
TAX SAVINGS**



**TAKING AWAY THE
VISITOR ECONOMY
WOULD COST
EACH HOUSEHOLD
\$7,705 MORE
PER YEAR**

**TOP 5
VISITOR
MARKETS
BY CITY**

- 1 ATLANTA
- 2 ALBANY
- 3 SAVANNAH
- 4 TAMPA/ST. PETE
- 5 ORLANDO/DAYTONA

**TOP 5
VISITOR
MARKETS
BY STATE**



**FOR EVERY \$1 THAT
VISITORS SPEND AT A
HOTEL PROPERTY**

\$4.13

**IS SPENT IN
OUR COMMUNITY**



FILM

2

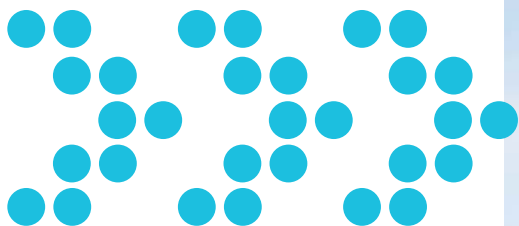
**MAJOR
PRODUCTIONS**



3,000

**ROOM
NIGHTS**





IN THE PRESS

68



PIECES OF
COVERAGE

SOCIAL

Generated a **28% increase of followers** across all social media channels, as well as over **13 million impressions** and **engaged/interacted with over 933,893 potential visitors** across Meta (Facebook, Instagram, Threads), Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest and TikTok.

933,893
INTERACTIONS



Produced three short-form video series, including **Macon Music** (music heritage), **Macon PlayList** (attractions), and the new **OrderUp!** (food/restaurant), resulting in:

 **OVER 1M**
STREAMS



Awarded **U.S. Travel Association's Destiny Award** for **Best Video** at the 2024 ESTO Conference.

Awarded 2024 **Platinum Hermes Award** for **Strategic Campaigns/Marketing** for the **Macon Music Video Series** and a 2024 **Gold Hermes Award** for **Media/Video** for the **Macon Music "Grant's Lounge"** episode.



MENTIONS IN AARP \ AFAR \ AJC
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST \ BOSTON GLOBE FIFTY
GRANDE \ FORBES \ FOX NEWS
GARDEN & GUN \ GOOD GRIT \ LIVABILITY
LONELY PLANET \ MATADOR NETWORK
OBSERVER \ OKRA \ ROLLING STONE
SIERRA CLUB \ SOUTHERN LIVING
THE DINK \ THE SOCIAL \ THRILLIST
TRAVEL+LEISURE \ TRAVEL CURATOR \ VARIETY
COVER: USA TODAY NATIONAL PARKS GUIDE

\$7.04M

AD VALUE
EQUIVALENCY

931M

POTENTIAL
REACH





MARKETING



WEBSITE Launched a new website VisitMacon.org which resulted in **287.4% increase in users** and the **active engagement time has increased 76%**.

VisitMacon.org saw **over 1 Million sessions** on our website. The AI Chatbot fielded **1,926 conversations** saving 57 customer service hours. And the new in-website hotel booking solution produced 52 reservations generating \$11,044.03 in revenue.

APP Added more trail experiences to the Tour Macon app available within the Apple and GooglePlay app stores which has been **downloaded 2,413 times** this year. In addition to the Macon Music Trail, the Black Heritage Trail of Macon (with a Black Business directory within), the Pink Provisions Trail, Macon Photo Spots and the Lights on Macon Trail, we've added the Macon Bacon Trail, a Film Macon Trail, the Macon Art Tour and the Then & Now Tour in partnership with the Historic Macon Foundation.

DESTINATION EVENTS Continued to enhance existing community-based events that appeal to visitors including highly targeted geofencing. This resulted in an increase of visitation for the **2024 Cherry Blossom Festival** with **34.7% of attendees from outside 50+ mile target radius**. This resulted in **\$6.1 million-dollar economic impact**. As well as the estimated attendance of the **2023 Christmas Light Extravaganza** increased from 790K to **850K. 33% of visitors were from outside 50+ mile target radius and market-wide spending went up 15.2% from the previous year.**

EVENT MARKETING Visit Macon hosted its first sanctioned event for Cherry Blossom with the "Pink Provisions Preview Party." The event **sold 9,412 food tickets** and brought 22 local businesses out to a food & beverage event in the Macon Terminal Station. The event team also helped build a Little Richard Birthday Celebration, assisted the InTown Macon Neighborhood District in launching an outdoor concert series and powered The Great Macon Baking Week.



visitmacon.org



LISTEN UP!



Visit Macon's podcast, **"Talkin' Macon"** debuted during National Travel & Tourism Week. The podcast features conversations with people who are connected to Macon and interesting stories about our community. Season 1 featured 20 episodes, plus bonus episodes, and guests included **Robert McDuffie, Newton Collier, Dr. Ilyon Woo, Michael O'Leary, Steve Moretti, Lisa Love, Seth Clark and Emily Hopkins**. Season 2 episodes will release in January.

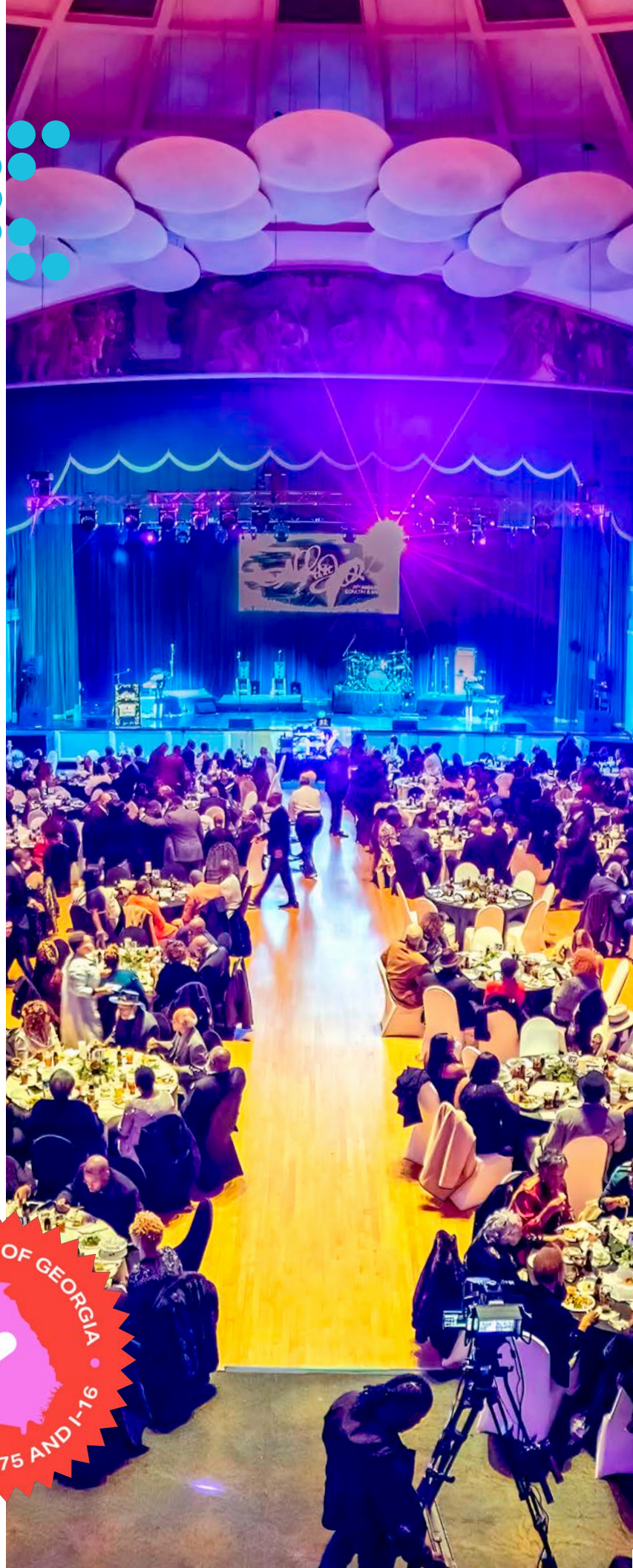
CONVENTION SALES

12%

**OVER GOAL
DEFINITE ROOM NIGHTS**



- Achieved all sales goals for the year and exceeded our definite room night target by 12%.
- Hosted 2 weekends of the Jehovah's Witness Congregations, generating an economic impact of **over \$3.8 million.**
- Continued partnership with the Future Farmers of America, hosting their 2024 Annual State Convention that generated **over \$2.2 million in economic impact**
- Hosted the Georgia Department of Public Safety's Annual Awards Ceremony, generating **over \$170K in economic impact**
- Coordinated the GA Airports Association Board of Directors Meeting and secured their annual meeting for 2025
- Hosted the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grande Lodge of GA's Mid-year and Annual Conventions
- Continued Hosting Southeast Tourism Society's Annual Marketing College
- Attended **4 event planner sales conferences** to represent Macon and generate new business
- Film Macon hosted a Georgia Entertainment Unscripted Roadshow in conjunction with the Macon Film Festival, and a Georgia Film Office Camera-Ready Liaison training workshop





SPORTS

- Maintained partnership with GHSA to host their Cheer, Dance, Wrestling, and Basketball State Championships, generating a total of over **\$4.2 million in economic impact**
- Supported MATA and MyAd to host **16 tennis tournaments**
- Since its opening on January 1st, Rhythm and Rally has held 18 Pickleball Tournaments and generated **over \$2 million in economic impact**.
- Hired new Sports Development Manager, Alex Wood

Winning Contributions



\$4.2M+
ECONOMIC
IMPACT

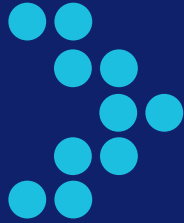


16
TENNIS
TOURNAMENTS



\$2M+
ECONOMIC
IMPACT





DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

INTERCITY TOUR TO TULSA & OKMULGEE, OKLAHOMA

Visit Macon partnered with NewTown Macon to plan and execute the annual trip for Macon's leaders to visit Tulsa and Okmulgee to forge relationships with the Muscogee Creek Nation, learn best practices from our Tulsa counterparts, and network amongst Macon peers.

PREFERRED PARTNER PROGRAM

When tourism business came to an abrupt halt during the pandemic, Visit Macon took a break from collecting funds for "membership". When travel resumed, we revived what we now call the Preferred Partner Program and currently have about 70 Preferred Partners.

COLUMBUS, GA VISITS MACON

Leadership from Columbus, GA wanted to learn about Macon's development of our music tourism product. I coordinated their entire agenda with the key players and locations: a panel presentation and lunch at Mercer Music at Capricorn hearing from Gary Wheat, Larry Brumley and Jessica Walden, along with the Mayor and Keith Moffett. A visit to the Otis Redding Foundation, a Rock Candy Tour, and a visit to the Big House.

ROCKDALE COUNTY'S LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Leaders from Rockdale Co. chose Macon for their leadership retreat. I coordinated their entire agenda which included visits to Rhythm & Rally hearing from Alex Morrison, a tour of Atrium Health Amphitheater with David Aiello, a downtown development tour with Josh Rogers, and a presentation from Mayor Miller and Gary Wheat at Visit Macon.

KNIGHT FOUNDATION BOARD MEETING

Visit Macon and NewTown Macon were hired as onsite planners for all logistics of the Knight Foundation Board meeting in September. We provided logistical assistance and direction for all of their activities which included meetings and gatherings at a variety of Macon locations: private homes, Tubman Museum, Capricorn, a Community Dinner with all of Macon's leadership at the Macon City Auditorium, bus tours through Beall's Hill and Ocmulgee Mounds, ribbon cuttings and the Board of Trustees Meeting at NewTown Macon.

SOUTHEAST TOURISM SOCIETY'S MARKETING COLLEGE

For the fifth year in a row, Macon has hosted this continuing education experience for tourism professionals from 14 different states across the Southeast. STS creates the curriculum, and classes take place at Mercer University. Attendees have the option of dorm accommodations or hotels. Visit Macon's role is to provide local logistics expertise, venue, catering and entertainment assistance.

YKK 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Visit Macon worked with YKK on a customized tour for YKK's American and Japanese leaders while they were in Macon for the 50th anniversary celebration.

AJC'S POLITICALLY GEORGIA

Macon was selected as a city to host a live podcast taping of *Politically Georgia*.

GEORGIA VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER MANAGERS RETREAT

Visit Macon hosted the managers of the State Visitor Information Centers for their annual retreat. Their itinerary included tours to Ocmulgee Mounds, the Atrium Health Amphitheater, Rhythm & Rally, a Rock Candy tour, and Mercer Music at Capricorn.



Visit Macon partnered with Zaxby's, founded in Georgia, when Tombras (Zaxby's creative agency) explored Macon's newly revamped website supported by the Knight Foundation and were inspired to create a unique "milkshake tourism" campaign which included a temporary website takeover or ...'shakeover!' The innovative campaign is a great example of our local creativity.

During the 10-day period of the campaign, we saw a 727% percent increase of accounts reached, a 42.9% growth of followers on Facebook, and a 221.5% growth on Instagram, as well as, an 82.6% growth from previous week on profile visits from Facebook and 337.1% growth on profile visits from Instagram.



VISITOR SERVICES

The leisure department set a stride in mobile tourism events, Visitor Center interactions, motorcoach tours, and retail. Staff on all teams have built cohesion, and we expect to close the gap in service positions.

The new community and tourism outreach strategy with our Mobile Tourism Team is a rolling success with many community events and a regional push for visitors.

Our rebranding efforts are well underway. The center now boasts aesthetically pleasing reclaimed flooring and an interactive screen for visitors to access the complimentary

website. These additions are a testament to our commitment to improving the visitor experience.

Another goal for the Visitor Center was additional equity and neuro-diversity inclusion around the Visitor Center. We are continuing this effort with staff annual training using VisitAble, a disability inclusion training platform.

We are still discussing an ADA-friendly checkout and information desk and investigating ways to assist people with visual impairments.

RETAIL

We surpassed our retail sales goal of \$25,000 and finished the year at **\$38,693.89**. This year's goal will remain the same, and our plans to achieve this goal include:

- Partnership with marketing for additional merch designs
- Continued work with local artisans
- Continuing relationships with Muscogee artists
- Implementing seasonal retail goals for staff



GROUP TOURS

We focused on increasing our van tours and motorcoach group tours this year. Our van tours increased from 41 bookings in FY23 to 150 bookings in FY24, and our motorcoach tours increased from 17 motorcoaches in FY23 to 38 in FY24. We accomplished this by:

- Recruiting field trips in the education segment, such as schools
- Developing Spanish-speaking tour options
- Diversifying our Specialty Tour options
- Advertising for Custom Group Tours
- Promoting the Visitor Center as a Gift Shop & Tourism Attraction
- Sending our Mobile Team into the community and into other markets
- Attended several group conferences, including Southeast Tourism Society, National Tour Association, American Bus Association, the Georgia Convention & Visitors Bureau, Destination International's IPW Conference, the Mvskoke Art Fest, and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Spring Celebration.
- Hosted and escorted FAM tours for guests of honor and media

38

MOTORCOACHES



150

VAN TOURS



MOBILE TEAM

We interacted with individuals at different events to share information about Macon. This is still a new strategy, and we are finding a place for our team at various events. Our plans include:

- Attending one national event per quarter with large attendee numbers and two statewide events per quarter.
- Participate in weekly community events at attractions, markets, and festivals in surrounding areas

We continue partnering with local attractions, and scouting out festivals and markets all around the region. We partnered with local events to promote visibility and enhance Macon as a whole. These include: Historic Macon Sidney's Salon, Black Expo, Napier Heights, Poplar Street Market, First Friday's, Ocmulgee Indigenous Celebration and much more.



9183

INTERACTIONS

VISIT MACON

Board of Directors

MACON-BIBB COUNTY REPRESENTATIVE:

Mayor Pro Tem Seth Clark

HOTELIERS:

Kathy Martin, Macon Marriott City Center

Nancy Lott, TownePlace Suites

ATTRACTIONS:

Emily Hopkins, NewTown Macon / MainStreet

Justin Andrews, Otis Redding Foundation

TOURISM ENTITY (INCLUDING RESTAURANTS, RETAIL, ETC.):

Tina Dickson, Ingleside Village Pizza

COMMUNITY LEADERS:

Patty Gibbs, Ronald McDonald House

Charities of Central Georgia

David Thompson, Piedmont Construction Group

Rosetta Boatright, Anderson Conference Center

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Justin Andrews, **Chair**

Emily Hopkins, **Vice Chair**

Tina Dickson, **Treasurer**

Patty Gibbs, **Past Chair**

EX-OFFICIO/ NON-VOTING MEMBERS:

David Aiello, Oak View Group

Gary Wheat, Visit Macon President & CEO

Renita Patterson, Greater Macon Chamber
of Commerce

Stacy Moore, International Cherry Blossom Festival

Ryan Logan, Director of Marketing & Tourism
at Muscogee (Creek) Nation



**Redding
Richard
Allman
Aldean**

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