

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



**A YEAR  
UNLIKE ANY  
OTHER**





## OUR CEO'S STATEMENT

Beloit – a place where everybody belongs. That message resonates now more than ever.

No one in the travel and tourism industry could have predicted what a devastating effect a global pandemic could inflict. The COVID-19 virus continues to create havoc and disruption within the hospitality and tourism industry. While we acknowledge the effect of the pandemic on the organization, I continue to reflect on the positives and on the resilience that continues to be demonstrated by our partners.

Our tourism-related businesses have continued to go above and beyond to ensure visitors have a safe travel experience. It will be the same businesses that will continue to be at the forefront of

the economic renaissance our region has been experiencing within the last twenty years.

As we recover, it is my firm belief that our industry will not only continue advancing growth, but will serve as a source of inspiration for people to fall in love with Beloit.

This region has tons of stories to share and at Visit Beloit we take great pride in sharing the positivity that exudes from our residents and businesses. Tourism is more than the jobs, revenues, and the businesses that compose it. Tourism is about the people, the togetherness, and the sense of place. The pandemic may have dampened the spirit, but it has not halted what tourism is about. Tourism is ultimately about being in a place where everybody wants to be, where everyone belongs. That is Beloit and that is the story we strive to tell.

- Celestino Ruffini, CEO



# CHAIR REPORT

- SPENCER WAITE

# PAST CHAIR REPORT

- ANN SITRICK JOYCE

As I think about 2020 and all the changes that the pandemic forced everyone into, it makes you appreciate what we were so accustomed to! Who would have ever thought that we would have been forced to shut down so many crucial services that our neighbors, friends, and families rely on, but what stands out in my mind is how creative, and resourceful we can be!

As so many small businesses were drastically affected, including Visit Beloit, I am extremely proud of how we handled the cards that were dealt and were able to continue to support our partners throughout the year. We pushed forward each day and continued to believe in our mission to the Stateline area. The leadership team of Visit Beloit never wavered and that is evident in the renovation of our new building coming to fruition on the Rock River. This capital investment project will not only refurbish and reuse an iconic building, but will lend itself to our continued growth into the future! Here's to 2021 and a bright new future for Visit Beloit and our tourism partners!

What did we learn from the challenges of 2020? For Visit Beloit, three words come to mind: determined; creative; resilient.

Our hospitality and tourism partners were decimated by mandated lockdowns, closures, and service limitations imposed on staffing levels and occupancy requirements. Visit Beloit's board and staff were determined to assist them by promoting the changes our partners made to provide services and safety for their customers and our visitors. By creatively promoting changing hours, services, carry-outs, and curbside pickups online, in weekly e-mails, partner updates, and videos, Visit Beloit served as a reliable source of information for safety and support for both our partners and the Stateline area. Additionally, as plans to renovate and move into our new home in the former Angel Museum were delayed and revised, Visit Beloit remained resilient. We will move in March 2021!

# MISSION & VISION

**M: We are Greater Beloit's tourism champion using our expertise to generate positive economic impact and to create a vibrant community for residents and visitors.**

**V: Continuing to transform the Greater Beloit area as an extraordinary place to live and as a preferred travel destination in the Midwest.**

# HOW WE OPERATE

Visit Beloit, Inc. is a private, non-profit 501(c)(6) organization. We have been in existence since 1987 working directly with the city of Beloit, WI as their official tourism entity. Since then, our organization has grown, both in capacity and purpose, to serve the entire Stateline region. In addition to the city of Beloit, we currently represent the city of South Beloit, IL, town of Beloit, WI, and the village of Rockton, IL. The majority of our funding is generated through room tax collections collected from individuals staying in any of our 15 local lodging properties. It is paid by lodging owners on behalf of visitors to the city of Beloit, which then distributes 80% of the revenues to our organization.

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Erica Daniels, Beloit College

Patricia Diduch, Village of Rockton

Seth Frisbee, TRICOR Insurance

Jeff Gray, Beloit Snappers

Jen Hall, Greater Beloit Economic Development Corp.

Jackie Jackson, Blackhawk Technical College

Lori Curtis Luther, City of Beloit

Jennifer Kodl, Friends of RiverFront

Mark Preuschl, City Council of Beloit

Ted Rehl, City of South Beloit

Jessica Santillan, Blackhawk Technical College

Ann Sitrick Joyce, Retired

Aimee Thurner, Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce

Spencer Waite, City of Beloit

Jonathan Webster, Geronimo Hospitality Group

Jeff Vohs, SENB

*As of January 2021*



# THE VISITOR

## E-Newsletter Subscribers

In 2020, 8,319 new subscribers began receiving our monthly e-newsletters with news about our tourism-related partners and ideas for traveling safely to the Greater Beloit region.

## Target Audience

The Beloit Brand Perception Research was conducted again in 2020 among a professionally managed panel of travelers living within a 300 mile radius of the area. Respondents had strong aided brand awareness, as nearly three quarters of area travelers are familiar with Beloit as a leisure destination. About one in five travelers have heard people talking about the Beloit area, and travelers seem to believe Beloit is headed in the right direction.

## Inspiration Guide

In 2020, 4,862 inspiration guides were distributed to the area hotels, shipped to visitor information centers throughout Wisconsin, and mailed to leads received via advertising, direct requests that came in through [visitbeloit.com](http://visitbeloit.com), phone calls, and relocation packets.

## Welcome Center

More than 20,000 individuals made a stop at the Beloit Travel Wisconsin Welcome Center in 2020. Our Welcome Center at Beloit Rest Area #22 continues to be a leading destination in the state for delivering information to inbound visitors. Our Travel Information Specialists distributed 51,106 pieces of information to visitors last year, even with being closed for several months due to the pandemic and Rest Area parking lot reconstruction.

## Business Representation

Currently, Visit Beloit promotes more than 400 tourism-related businesses in these categories: Accommodations (15), Arts & Culture (23), Eat & Drink (168), Meetings (39), Outdoors (59), Shopping (53), Sports & Recreation (23), Sport Venues (2), Services (21), and Weddings (15).

# PROFIT & LOSS STATEMENT

Unaudited financials as of 12/31/2020

REVENUES	2020	2019	% CHANGE
Hotel/Motel Tax [Beloit & South Beloit]	\$615,482	\$944,830	(34.86)%
Grants	\$354,785	\$66,975	429.73%
Welcome Center Sponsorships	\$22,373	\$22,143	1.04%
Other Income	\$13,860	\$52,132	(73.41)%
Interest	\$613	\$559	9.66%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,007,113</b>	<b>\$1,086,639</b>	<b>(7.32)%</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Program Services	\$666,565	\$782,947	
Management and General Supporting Services	\$222,188	\$260,982	
Capital Expenditures	\$175,447	\$0	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,064,200</b>	<b>\$1,043,929</b>	<b>1.94%</b>

The organization received a substantially greater amount of grant revenue in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the prior year. Learn more about our organization's transparency efforts at [www.visitbeloit.com/transparency](http://www.visitbeloit.com/transparency).

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOCAL LODGING

### City of Beloit Lodging Data

		% change from 2019
Rooms Available	767	+14%
Occupancy	38.2%	-22.8%
Average Daily Rate	\$88.76	-\$13.62
Room Nights Sold	106,189	-26.9%
Lodging Revenue	\$9,708,250	-36%

### City of Beloit Hotel Tax Data

		% change from 2019
First Quarter	\$237,148	8.18%
Second Quarter	\$114,656	(64.86)%
Third Quarter	\$229,113	(33.74)%
Fourth Quarter	\$138,402	(47.39)%
Total Room Tax Revenue	\$719,319	(37.69)%



# MARKETING & SALES

When the year started, we were off to a record start. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic caused havoc on our ability to attract leisure visitors and generate future group bookings.

Staff quickly pivoted the promotion of events to communicate cancelled or revised plans to visitors and residents. We outreached to our tourism-related businesses that were changing their operating hours, carryout procedures, and special promotions. Internally, the change of normal routines provided time to create expanded content on our website focusing on everything from unique holidays to outdoor recreation ideas.

As our plans changed, so did the methods consumers used to discover information. Our social media channels became outlets for us to share news about COVID-19 policies, as well as explaining the need to travel cautiously locally and regionally. We continued to share our messaging via radio, television, and newspaper interviews frequently.

Sales efforts were focused on building events for 2021 and beyond. For example, a collaboration was formed with six cities and the Baseball Players Association for a youth tournament dubbed the Dairyland Series, slated to launch in 2021. Another event was a partnership with the American Cornhole Organization for the inaugural major event in January 2021.

Additionally, we applied for and received two grants from the State of Wisconsin Department of Tourism for the first time; Meetings Mean Business and Ready, Set, Go Grants which allows us to host new events locally. Projects such as completing the Sports Tourism Index to quantify our destination's strengths and gauge our facilities against cities we compete against and creating documents and plans to prepare for a future Ho-Chunk Nation casino resort allowed us to continue dreaming big.

As the months went on and the signs of a pandemic ending never occurred, we moved into what our recovery strategy would be for the destination. It was a unique year for the Visit Beloit team and all of our tourism-related partners.

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# 2020 HIGHLIGHTS



- Purchased property for the first time at 656 Pleasant St., Beloit
- Delivered monthly COVID-19 data to elected officials and city of Beloit staff
- Launched the Beloit and Beyond Craft Beer Trail
- Utilized CARES Act funding to promote safe travel to the region
- Premiered an episode of "Discover Wisconsin" during the Beloit International Film Festival
- Edited and/or published all tourism-related businesses on TravelWisconsin.com
- Launched efforts to grow hospitality curriculum with Blackhawk Technical College
- Conducted weekly conference calls with local lodging partners
- Formed a 501(c)(6) organization to manage our day-to-day operations
- Created a new room tax ordinance and services agreement with the town of Beloit
- Received Meetings Mean Business and Ready, Set, Go grants for the first time from Travel Wisconsin for events that will be hosted by Visit Beloit
- Partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation on facility renovations and parking lot expansions at the Beloit Travel Wisconsin Welcome Center
- Finalized our Destination Marketing Accreditation Program application



# CONCLUSION

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The journey is only as good as the one you embark on. As curators of experiences in the Greater Beloit region, we could not be prouder of the stories we get to tell. Beloit made its founders proud and continues to impose its boldness upon those of us that call this city home. In the 1980s, a vision was created to transform our industrial landscape. That transformation continues today in magnificent ways.

Construction is underway on the ABC Supply Stadium, future home of a Miami Marlins affiliate, for the continuation of professional baseball in Beloit since 1982. The commitment of many to make this project happen solidifies our legacy in baseball, as well as provides a new backdrop to year-round programming and events downtown.

Restaurants, both chic and trusty standbys, continue to evolve and open their doors. Retailers continue to pave new ways of attracting both visitors and residents through their doors. Our lodging properties are always staying on top of innovative trends. Ultimately, the positive experiences that visitors have continue to grow the word-of-mouth awareness of our trendy destination.

Lastly, we must mention the biggest project that our organization has ever embarked on. In January 2020, we finalized the purchase of 656 Pleasant Street. The property, which last served as the Angel Museum, reopened on March 1, 2021 as our permanent home and we will open our own events venue in the future within the complex. We have invested ourselves into Beloit's transformation by preserving this historic structure, hopefully for another 100 years, and excitedly welcome you to come visit.

Thanks for all that you do. Let us continue to embark on some exciting journeys.



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