

ROSS-CHILLICOTHE CONVENTION &
VISITORS BUREAU

TOURISM REPORT 2023



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**

Chief Glenna Wallace, *East Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma*
Hopewell Culture National Historical Park
World Heritage Commemoration
©Tom Engberg, NPS

Introduction

The Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau is a 501(c)(6) organization that markets Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio as a tourism destination. The Bureau is fully funded through lodging tax revenue that is collected through overnight visitors that stay at local hotels, cabins, and other short-term rental properties. Ross County collects a 3% lodging tax on these room nights which is given to the Bureau for marketing and operations. The City of Chillicothe also receives 3% lodging tax on these room nights and provides the Bureau with an annual investment to support its marketing efforts.

Tourism in Ross County supports many industries that directly benefit from travelers such as lodging, food & beverage, and entertainment for a few examples. The entire community benefits indirectly as these industries create supplier demand and jobs in these sectors. Additionally, residents benefit as tourism saves each household \$525 in taxes annually.

CVB Staff

Melody Young, *Executive Director*
Gene Betts, *Communication Assistant*
Christy Simmons, *Office Manager*

State

Tourism Ohio
Ohio Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus
Ohio Travel Association
Ohio History Connection
Ohio Traveler
Ohio Appalachian Country (Appalachian Ohio)

Mission

The mission of the Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau is the growth and prosperity of area economic development through tourism. The Bureau's primary focus is to assist, attract, and educate residents, travelers, and partners. It will function as an economic driver of the hospitality industry in general through promotion of extended or overnight visits to the areas of Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio.

Board of Directors

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: Brandon Smith (The Scioto Society)
Vice-President: Curt McAllister (CP Management)
Treasurer: Eric Woodworth (Hampton Inn & Suites)
Past-President: Nancy Ames (Community, At-Large)
Patti Cavender (Frankfort Sunflower Festival)
At-Large: David Polk (Community, At-Large)
At-Large: Kathy Styer (Adena Mansion & Gardens)

DIRECTORS

Dwight Garrett (Ross County Commissioner)
Chris Alford (Hopewell Culture NHP)
Darren Baker (Ross County Historical Society)
Beth Harrison (Bainbridge)
Dr. Allison Henderson (City Council)
Nancy Schaffer (Hillside Haven)
Mike Throne (Chamber of Commerce)
Bryan Wickline (Chillicothe Paints)

Memberships & Affiliations

Local

Adena Mansion & Gardens
Chillicothe Kiwanis Club
Chillicothe Paints
Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce
Friends of Hopewell
Friends of Lucy Hayes Heritage Center
Pump House Center for the Arts
Ross County Genealogical Society
Ross County Historical Society
"Tecumseh!" Outdoor Drama

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW



MELODY YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Bureau continued to uphold its mission to further tourism in Ross County. This was completed through an expanded reach in marketing to target a broader audience, staff worked within the community to assist partners and events, and took on several projects. The year brought some challenges for attractions that are weather dependent such as "Tecumseh!" Outdoor Drama whose attendance was affected, where some indoor attractions experienced an increase in attendance.

Two major milestones to spotlight for 2023 was a new record-setting year for lodging tax revenue and UNESCO's inscription of the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks as a World Heritage site. Both reflect the strength and importance of tourism in Chillicothe and Ross County.

10%

Lodging Tax received by the Bureau increased in 2023.

69%

Short-term lodging facilities dramatically increased in 2023

40%

Visitation increased at Hopewell Culture NHP after World Heritage Inscription

Lodging Tax

The Bureau broke a record in lodging tax receipts in 2023 when it received a total of \$522,671.07. This achieved through the receipt of \$472,691.07 from the County's portion of lodging tax revenue and an increased investment by the City of Chillicothe of \$50,000 which resulted in a 10% increase year-over-year. This KPI (Key Performance Indicator) is essential in measuring the effectiveness of the Bureau's marketing efforts and the results generated from overnight tourism in Ross County.

Marketing

The Bureau executed its marketing plan with great success. The plan contained expansion of the market to reach a broader audience. This was showcased with advertising in Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario, which also reached individuals in the Northeastern United States. Other printed and digital platforms in which the Bureau advertised included the *Ohio Travel Guide*, *Ohio Magazine*, *Long Weekends Magazine*, *Ohio Traveler*, *Roadrunner Magazine*, *Global Heroes*, and numerous visitor guides in select markets. It also partnered with Tourism Ohio's annual Co-Op Marketing plan to further its reach.

Staff represented Chillicothe and Ross County at travel shows again in 2023, with a new show being included to showcase outdoor recreation and the mountain bike trails in Ross County at the Cincinnati Off Road Alliance (CORA) Expo.

World Heritage

After nearly two decades of effort, the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks was officially designated a UNESCO World Heritage site on September 19, 2023. This achievement marked a significant milestone as it is the first such site in Ohio and only the 25th in the United States. The community celebrated this achievement on October 14, 2023 with a commemoration event hosted by the National Park Service. Chief Glenna Wallace of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma was the keynote speaker at this event. The UNESCO inscription will offer further protection and preservation to these sites that showcase the ingenuity of early Native Americans.

Community Involvement

The Bureau supported eight organizations in 2023 through its annual Promotional Grant Assistance Program (GAP) and awarded \$20,000 in grant funding. Organizations that received funding included Buckeye Off Road Expo, Downtown Chillicothe's Sands in the Streets, the First Capital Brews Cruze (pedal pub), the Pump House Center for the Arts' Juneteenth Program, the Ross County Agriculture's Labor Day Music Festival, Smash It Demolition Derby's Bash for Cash, the Southern Ohio Forest Rally, and the Buck Fifty.

Additionally, staff members worked with many organizations to assist with their community events. These efforts included the National Park Service's World Heritage Commemoration event, the Chillicothe Ross Community Foundation's Columbus Symphony event, and Kenworth's Truck Parade to name a few.

Demographics

In 2023, the top three demographic categories made up 70% of all households that visited Ross County. Furthermore, these three categories, as well as several others, continued to demonstrate steady growth on an annual basis.

Families in Motion

This category is dominated by young families living in small towns in the eastern half of the country. The majority of households are married couples between 25-45 years old with two or more children. Most of these individuals work in construction, manufacturing, and the trades.

Thrifty Habits

This category consists of households with older single and divorced individuals with an age range of 45-75 years of age from the south and Midwest who live in isolated towns and cities. The majority work in entry-level jobs in health care, fast food, and retail trades.

Autumn Years

This category are mostly retired, mature couples that are generally 65+ years old with grown children. These individuals live in suburban and rural communities throughout the nation. They have enough money from investments and stocks that they are able to splurge on trips.

Attractions

Using a service, the Bureau collected data on visitor activity in Ross County in 2023. This valuable information helped to measure attendance at local attractions throughout the year.

Inclement weather did have a significant impact on outdoor activities with "Tecumseh!" Outdoor Drama suffering the largest decrease. However indoor activities fared better. Adena Mansion & Gardens saw nearly a 24% increase, the Genealogical Society had nearly 5% increase, and the Ross County Heritage Center maintained their attendance.

Wayfinding

The Bureau took the lead to create a comprehensive wayfinding system in Ross County. This began in 2022, when Corbin Designs were contracted to develop and design the plan. In 2023, the Bureau, Ross County Commissioners, and the City of Chillicothe invested into the implementation of the wayfinding signage. Image Manufacturing Group (IMG) was contracted to construct and install the signs.

There were unexpected delays in the project's progress when Ohio Department of Transportation District 9 denied thirty-two of the signs in the package. Despite many lengthy discussions, this determination could not be resolved. Together, the investors agreed to pursue the installation of the other two-thirds of signage that had been approved to avoid additional delays in the project. The approved signs are expected to be installed in early-2024. To finish the project, the investors planned to work with local and state leaders to seek approval of the the final thirty-two signs within the package.



Monument on St. Rt. 159 (left), directional signs in county & city (middle), Bridge spanning St. Rt. 104 (right)

Rebranding

The Bureau has introduced a new branding strategy and utilized the color scheme from their wayfinding signs to create a modern logo, which was crafted by the talented team at Westwood Creative.



The old Bureau logo was retired (top) on December 31, 2023. The new brand begins on January 1, 2024 (right).

Plans for 2024

The Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau has established its marketing plan for 2024 with aim of expanding their reach and influence on the tourism industry. The Bureau has numerous initiatives and projects planned for the year, including the roll-out of the "World Heritage Messenger" Training Program for frontline staff, an updated county resolution on lodging tax and the oversight of collections for short-term rentals, and collaborating with Great Lakes Publishing on the new edition of the *Official Ross County Visitors Guide*. The Bureau will continue to host its annual Tourism Banquet & Pineapple Awards and support partners through its Promotional Grant Assistance Program.

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