

Independence Tourism Commission



INDEPENDENCE
★ MISSOURI ★

A GREAT AMERICAN STORY



INDEPENDENCE
★ PARKS ★ RECREATION ★ TOURISM ★

9th Transient Guest Tax Program Report
October 26, 2020

Executive Summary

The Independence Tourism Advisory Board was established by Ordinance in 1997. The Board became a Commission in the summer of 2016. The Commission's primary mission is to serve as an advocate for the tourism industry in Independence, provide avenues for tourism attractions and sites to communicate form partnerships and recommend policies and programs that will benefit tourism in Independence. The Commission also serves as the Transient Guest Sales Tax Oversight Committee.

It is the opinion of the members of the Independence Tourism Commission that the activities, initiatives, and projects funded by the Transient Guest Sales Tax are in keeping with the sales tax program's intent, and that the sales tax program is critical in supporting the work of the Department to preserve our city owned historic sites and attract visitors to our community.

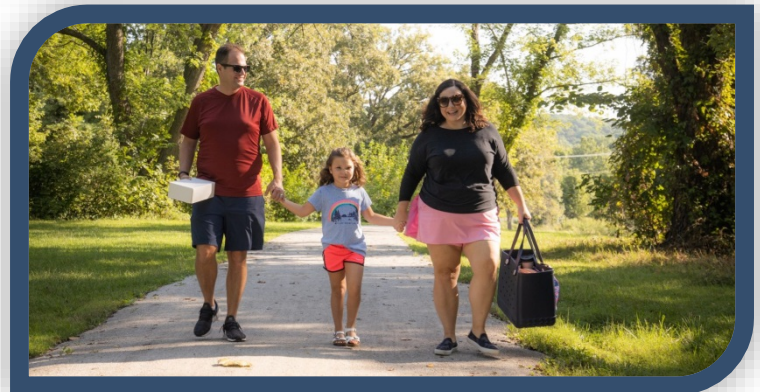


Vaile Mansion



Farmer's Market at Uptown Market

Social Media Influencers Touring
Independence following City & County
COVID-19 Guidelines



Waterfall Park

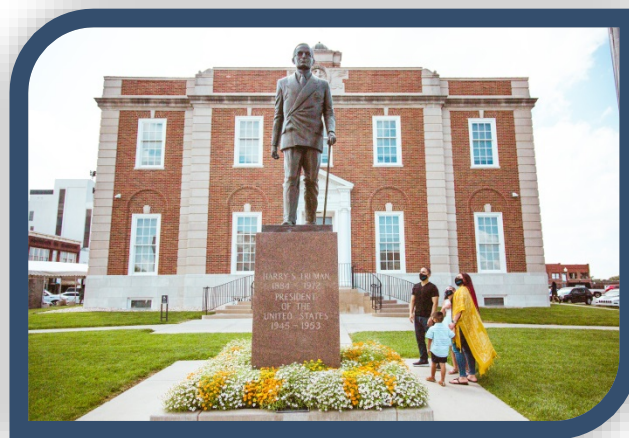
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Transient Guest Tax Review

The original Transient Guest Tax was approved in 1970. Voters at that time approved a 4% gross receipt tax for hotel stays. The tax was increased to 5% in 1979, and later increased to 6.5% by voter approval in 2002. The tax remains at this rate today and typically generates approximately \$1.9 million for Tourism promotion and Tourism related activities.

With the onset of COVID19, revenue from the Tax was drastically reduced when travel restrictions were put in place across the country. From March through June 2020, the tax was down 56% (as compared to the previous year). For July 2020 the tax was down 63% (compared to the previous year) but bounced back in August to 26%, for a combined overall July/August reduction of 32% (as compared to the previous year). Given these reductions in revenue, a decision was made to keep the National Frontier Trails Museum as well as the Historic Sites closed in order to reduce expenses and also help limit exposure to COVID19 for staff and visitors.



Historic Jackson County Courthouse

Current Commissioners

The Tourism Commission is currently comprised of 9 voting members, all appointed by the City Council. Current members of the Tourism Commission include: Chairperson Sam Rushay, Vice Chair Kris Zerr, Secretary (vacant), Steve Kohn, Russ Cannon, Jodi Krantz, Michelle Shanahan-DeMoss, John Thornton, and Jen Vitela.

Current Operating Status

Under the Parks/Recreation/Tourism Department, operational support and resources are shared by each Division, funding is not. The Transient Guest Tax is solely dedicated to supporting the promotion, operation and development of Tourism and can only be used for this purpose. The Tourism Commission continues to serve as the transient guest tax oversight committee and is responsible for submitting a committee report biannually to City Council.



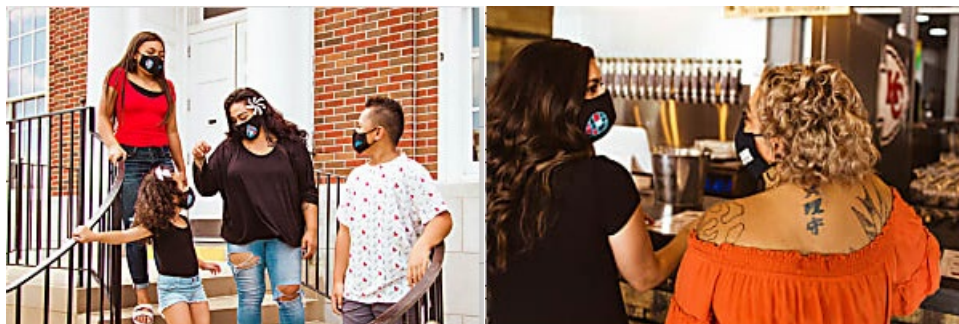
Due to the COVID19 Pandemic, Historic Sites and the National Frontier Trails Museum remain closed in compliance with the City and Jackson County COVID19 operational protocols.

Marketing and Promotions:

All direct marketing was paused in April as we assessed the impact of travel due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. A lot of time and research went into developing a strategy to determine when and how to effectively market to potential travelers. It was determined to slowly start marketing to local visitors first, then to potential regional visitors that fall into the 'drive market' category. Targeted marketing was developed and released in mid-June.

There were three focused campaigns: Outdoors, General and History. Throughout the messaging the mask ordinance, social distancing and general Covid-19 guidelines were included.

Please see examples:



Walk in the footsteps of former President Truman. Don't forget to bring your mask when you... [Learn More](#)

Discover endless adventure just outside KC. We are keeping our visitors safe in Independence with a mask ordinance. [Learn More](#)

Find your Independence just outside Kansas City! Stay safe with social distancing and plenty of wide-open spaces to explore. [Learn More](#)

Walk in the footsteps of brave pioneers. Feel closer than ever to history in Independence... [Learn More](#)

Visit Independence

In July Governor Parson announced the Show Me Strong Destination Marketing Organization Program, which provided \$15 million dollars in grant funding under the CARES Act. There were two-rounds of applications from which the City of Independence was able to secure over \$1 million dollars for pre-approved tourism-related marketing focused on the resumption of activities and the implementation of safety protocols.

With the funds secured from the Show Me Strong program Independence Tourism was able to utilize marketing platforms previously not available due to limited marketing budgets. Examples of these new platforms are: YouTube, Hulu, Expedia, Pandora, and Podcast 'Midrolls' (In Bed with Megan & Nick, Literally with Rob Lowe, Bowery Boys, The Bellas, and Fantasy Footballers).



Other activities:

- Cancelled Royals Agreement for 2020
- Created National Tourism Week Videos
- Created COVID Recovery Video
- Deployed Outdoor campaign vs. Baseball for COVID marketing
- Developed an Independence Press Kit
- Set up YouTube Account (Zach)
- Put Social Links on Website
- Created new map for the Visitors Guide
- Finalized package with Group Tour Media
- Missouri Division of Tourism/Osborn Barr Paramore City Presentation
- Created new Landing Pages for VisitIndependence.com
 - Football
 - Historical Homes
 - Paranormal Path
 - Baseball (for use next year)
- CARES Funding Application (Round 1)
- Influencer Campaign/Photography
- CARES Funding Application (Round 2)
- Prepare and facilitate Round 2 Media Plan
- Kick off CARES Media
- Sent first eNewsletter with new format/outline

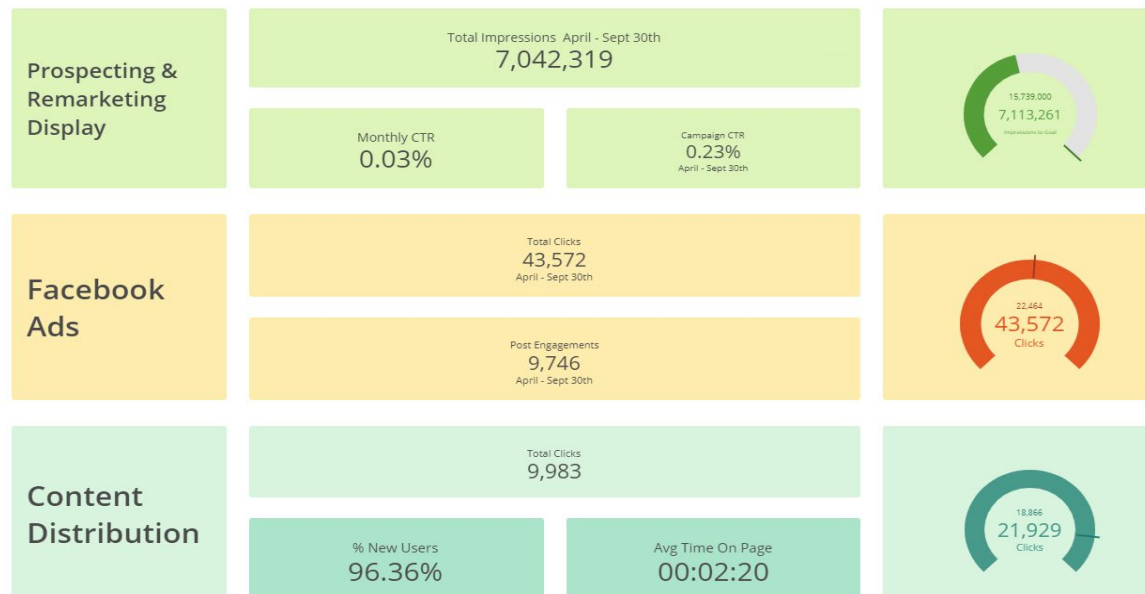
Social Media Activity:

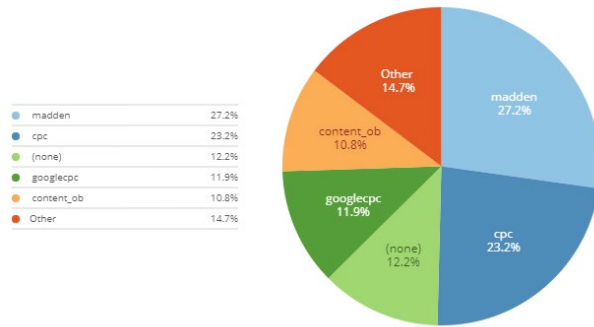
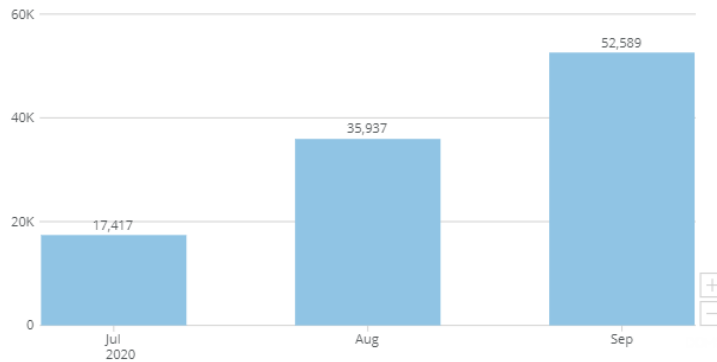
Social Media Paid Advertising Campaign Results (April – September 2020)

- Google Prospecting & Remarketing Display 5,659,221 Impressions
- Facebook Ads 22,676 clicks to VisitIndependence.com
- Native Content Distribution 9,983 clicks to VisitIndependence.com



Website Digital Marketing Results (April – September 2020)



Top traffic sources by sessionsCumulative sessions by Month**Tourism Sales and Services:**

The Tourism Sales & Services Team worked heavily on Mass Sheltering Preparedness related to COVID-19 in April and May. We worked with the Arena, Emergency Preparedness Team, Emergency Services Command staff, and hotels to secure hotel rooms in case hospitals needed overflow space. We also attended several virtual meetings with our team, hotels, and industry partners to educate, inform, and prepare during this time of uncertainty. We hosted Independence Hotel & Lodging Alliance Meetings (weekly for several months and recently turned monthly).

The team secured a proposal for Sunbeam United International car show that will generate 500+ room nights. The event will be held at Hilton Garden Inn in September 2021. This event includes a car show, autocross race, meetings, and tourism days for 200 guests. We also

worked on 6 proposals that included religious conferences, historical societies, travel groups, and sports groups. These groups could generate over 6,500 room nights total.



We continue to work with Visit KC and KC Sports Commission to bid on the US Figure Skating Tournament in 2022. This event would be held at Cable Dahmer Arena and generate 6,000 room nights for the City.

Although many conferences and tradeshow were cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19, we were able to attend two virtual conferences (Destinations International and Student Youth Travel Association). These conferences allowed us opportunities to network with industry leaders and peers while also providing educational sessions on Racism & Inclusion, Sustainable Tourism, Return of the Road Trip, Future of Meetings & Events, Meeting Planners Needs, and more.

The team also worked on several miscellaneous items over the last 6 months. We gave FAM tours to Madden Media's Senior Content Specialist and a Travel Writer from Nashville. This Travel Writer wrote a blog post specifically on Independence and will have a print article about a 6-day Missouri road trip later this year. We attended several sales webinars, travel webinars, racism webinars, and the Visit KC partnership call.

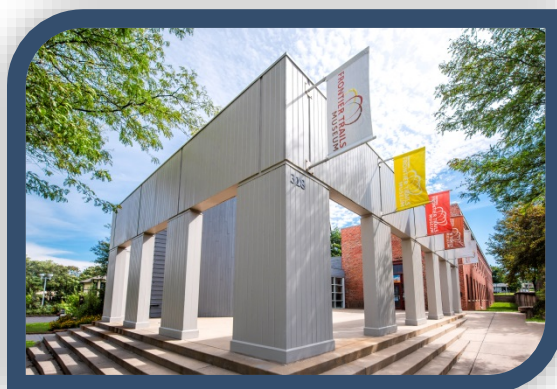
We forced on the local community with a promotion called "A Pocketful of Sunshine" to gain exposure and build relationships with community partners from the Independence Square, Independence Center, Cable Dahmer Arena, and Englewood Arts District.

Facility and Historic Site Operations:

The Historic Sites have remained closed this season due to the impacts of COVID - 19. Each Historic Site and the National Frontier Trails Museum have the current status information posted at their entrance as well as on the City' and Tourism's social media pages. The safety of our visitors and volunteers health and safety are important of utmost importance. Following the guidelines of the City's COVID -19 operation protocols they will remain closed until the Spring of 2021. We continue communication with our Tourism partners and Friends groups and volunteers, helping to keep them informed as changes arise. Staff will continuing monitor routine facility maintenance on each of the sites in hopes of being ready to go once we are given permission to reopen.

National Frontier Trails Museum

Facility remains closed due to COVID - 19.



October 26, 2020

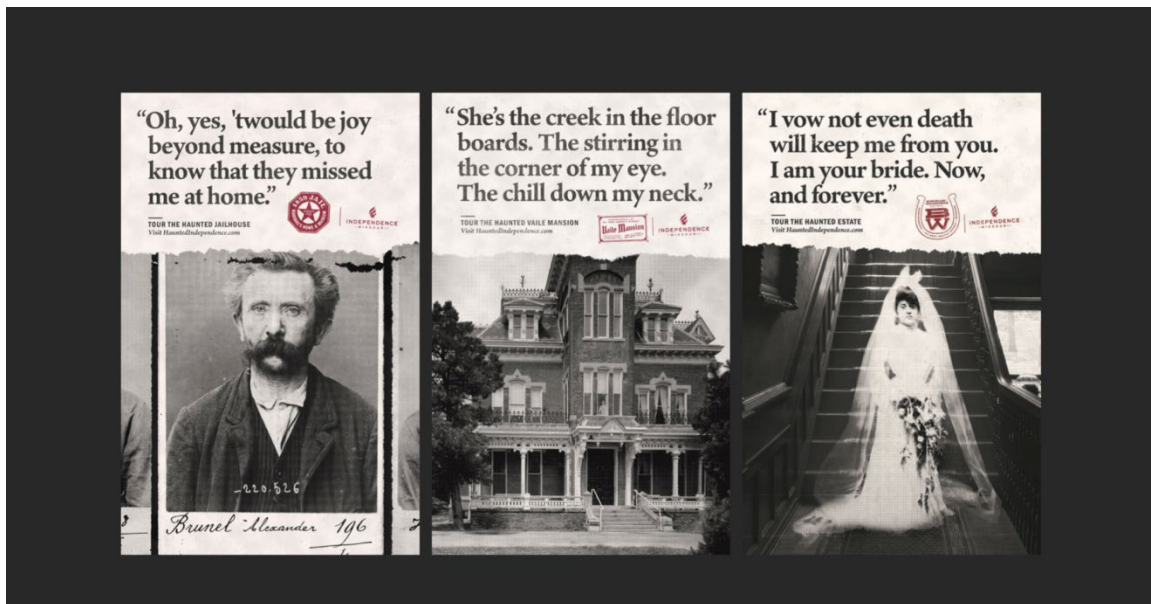
Historic Site Programs

Historic Sites remained closed to the public due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, the Bingham-Waggoner Estate and the Vaile Mansion did host private events. All private events exceeded City and County guidelines for COVID-19 safety protocols.

The Travel Channel's 'Tennessee Wraith Chasers' returned to the Vaile Mansion for a Private VIP Fan Event. It was a sold out event and it brought renewed interest and excitement for paranormal events at the Vaile Mansion as well as other historic locations. The first weekend in December the Cast from A&E's 'Ghost Hunters' show will host already sold out events at the Vaile Mansion and the Bingham-Waggoner Estate.



With the increased exposure and interest in paranormal events, Tourism Staff worked with the Apex Paranormal, Bingham-Waggoner Historical Society, Jackson County Historical Society and Vaile Victorian Society to develop a 'Paranormal Path'. Focusing on September and October, a marketing campaign was developed to promote controlled private events at the sites.



Site Maintenance

The tourism funded maintenance crew continues to make small repairs to the facilities and care for the historic site grounds. The budget currently covers maintenance and basic repair needs; however, as previously reported to the Council, the completed conditions assessments note millions of dollars of deferred maintenance and significant capital funding shortages. While the

efforts of maintenance and preservation staff can keep the sites open, larger repairs and capital improvements will continue to be deferred without more structured, dedicated funding sources.

A few of the more notable repair projects completed this past year include:

- Relocation and restoration of the Pioneer Spring Cabin
- Replacement of HVAC unit at Fire House #1

Projects in progress include the following:

- Investigation of the wall stabilization issue at the Museum
- Assessment of the Water Tower for structural integrity
- Truman Depot Restoration Project

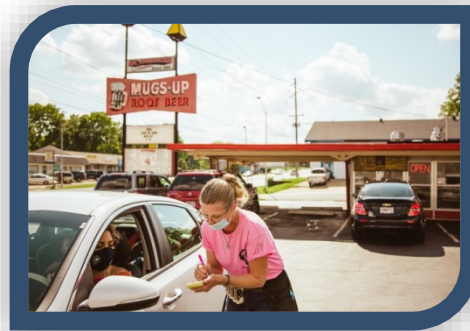
In Closing:

It is the opinion of the Tourism Commission that the activities, initiatives, and projects supported by the Transient Guest Tax are in keeping with the program's intent, and that the work of the Parks/ Recreation/Tourism Department continues to preserve our City-owned historic sites and attract visitors to our community.

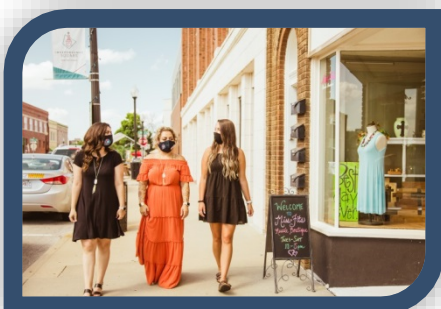
The members of the Independence Tourism Commission, on behalf of the residents of Independence and the many visitors to our town, express our gratitude and appreciation to the Mayor and City Council for their continued interest in, and support of, providing the best possible historic sites, attractions and programs for the people of Independence and visitors to enjoy.



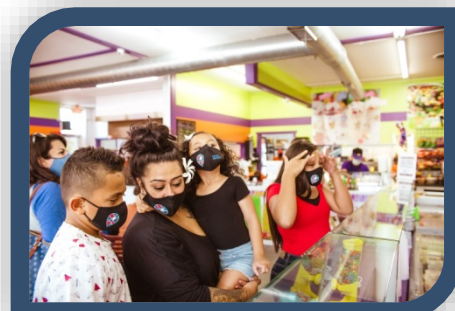
Cool Crest Family Center



Mugs-Up Drive In



Shopping on the Square



Palateria el Chavo

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