



# Annual Report

## Fiscal Year 2019





## A word from the president of our board of directors...

As a lifetime resident of Council Bluffs and a part of its tourism industry, it is my pleasure to be a part of the growth and achievements of the Council Bluffs Convention & Visitors Bureau (CBCVB) in this past fiscal year.

The tourism industry is critical to showing the rest of the world what Council Bluffs has to offer. The CBCVB works hard to do just that, enticing visitors and event planners to our community. This year, we've brought 35 events to town, received 1.1 million social media impressions, reached 90,059 people through our website, and generated \$27.34 million in economic impact for our community.

I know I speak for all of our board members when I say that we are excited to see where future years will take us and what type of impact can be made as the CBCVB continues to grow and change.



## our board of directors

PRESIDENT

**BILL VANDERPOOL**

HOLIDAY INN HOTEL & SUITES @ AMERISTAR

VICE PRESIDENT

**PATRICIA LABOUNTY**

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD MUSEUM

PAST PRESIDENT

**DEB BASS**

**BRYAN BIEDERMAN**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK

**JORDYN BOONIE**

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

**MATT JOHNSON**

BARLEY'S BAR & GRILL

**MARK SHOEMAKER / SAM STIVERS**

POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

## our staff

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**MARK ECKMAN**

DIRECTOR OF SALES

**ALICIA FRIEZE**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF CONTENT

**ASHLEY ENGLISH**



## A word from the executive director...

From beginning to end, fiscal year 2019 was the most consequential year of the Council Bluffs Convention and Visitors Bureau — that is saying something considering that the prior fiscal year laid claim to that same title, until now.

Our accomplishments clearly define what made it noteworthy. In October, the CBCVB closed on the purchase of a new office to serve as the bureau's new home and the city's visitor center. Area residents have long sought a community calendar, a hub to find out what's going on in Council Bluffs. Working with several partners, the bureau developed a community calendar on UNleashCB.com that featured 1,205 events in FY 19 compared to 675 the year before.

We also received good news from previous years' efforts. Hotel/motel tax collections grew 3.37 percent in FY 18 to more than \$2.77 million. The U.S. Travel Association released its annual economic impact of travel in Iowa counties for 2017: Travel expenditures in Pottawattamie County increased 3.5 percent for a total of \$312.9 million.

The Council Bluffs CVB remains committed to promoting all things local — local businesses, local government, and local residents. The bureau's focus is to import new customers for local businesses and new taxpayers for local government. Both of those come in the form of travelers, and together they deliver a benefit for all local residents.

The CBCVB appreciates the investment the City of Council Bluffs makes in our efforts. We strive every day to deliver value to you and all CB residents.



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## we moved

After five years of looking for just the right spot to call home, we have officially moved into our new location at 509 23rd Ave. The new office is just off I-80 and I-29, making it an ideal spot to welcome visitors and give them the information they need to properly explore all Council Bluffs has to offer. The new space will allow for in-house board meetings, space as we grow our staff, and a welcome center.

While this next year will involve a lot of set up as we finish getting the new space ready, we are thrilled to see the move completed and can't wait to begin assisting Council Bluffs' visitors in a better capacity.





# quarterly achievements

## *First Quarter: July - September 2018*

- **Grew hotel/motel taxes by 3.37 percent to \$2,770,278 during FY 18.**
- Engaged Hamilton Associates to conduct an audit of the FY 18 financials which revealed no issues and recommended no changes of the CBCVB's practices.
- Hired Ashley English on August 20, 2018 who has been promoted twice in ten months becoming the bureau's first associate director of content.
- Collaborated year-long with our tourism neighbors: Pottawattamie County Tourism Committee, Loess Hills Missouri River Region Parks to People, Loess Hills Alliance, Visit Omaha, and Sarpy County Tourism.
- Landed another **\$50,000 Sports Authority grant** from the Iowa Tourism Office, receiving one of only ten such grants funded statewide.
- Supported the 2018 Iowa League of Cities Annual Conference held in Council Bluffs September 12-14, 2018 with a \$15,000 sponsorship. This conference has been held in Council Bluffs twice in four years.

## *Second Quarter: October - December 2018*

- **Closed on the purchase of a new office** at 509 23rd Avenue a half-a-mile from I-80/29 to serve as both a visitor center and the bureau's permanent home.
- Stepped up the frequency of the UNleashCB Bulletin e-newsletter from bi-weekly to weekly promoting 1,205 events in Pottawattamie County over 12 months compared to 675 events the prior year. Grew subscribers to 2,881 by the end of the fiscal year.
- Learned that **travel expenditures in Pottawattamie County increased by 3.5 percent to \$312.9 million in 2017** according to the U.S. Travel Association, the seventh highest in the state. That was higher than the state average of 3.3 percent.
- Prepared and placed \$23,511.75 in advertising through the Iowa Tourism Cooperative Advertising Partnership with a combination of digital and print options.
- Embedded 36 360-degree images of attractions and venues on our website in cooperation with the Council Bluff Public Library to offer web users a digital glimpse of CB's amenities.
- Solicited bids for the new office renovation. HGM Associates estimated the cost to be \$130,000. **The low bid came from a CB contractor for half that expense.**



### *Third Quarter: January-March 2019*

- **Received 1.1 million impressions on social media** which was a **119 percent increase** over the prior year. Recruited 3,276 more social media followers in FY 19 while expanding into Pinterest, LinkedIn, and YouTube.
- Launched new, monthly e-newsletter, titled “UNdeniable,” to keep partners and stakeholders informed of the activities of the Council Bluffs CVB.
- Initiated a new, bi-weekly column in the Sunday edition of The Daily Nonpareil titled “Through New Eyes” written by Ashley English which highlights area events, activities, and amenities.
- Invited to participate on the boards of the Omaha Sports Commission, Metropolitan Hospitality Association, and Loess Hills Missouri River Region Parks to People.
- Assisted with the development and management of the Pottawattamie County Tourism Committee’s new website, **WattaWayIA.com**, which was recognized by the Iowa Tourism Office as **“Outstanding Website of the Year”** in February 2019.
- Appointed Sam Stivers to replace Mark Shoemaker as our county representative on the board of directors in spring.

### *Fourth Quarter: April - June 2019*

- Increased the usage of UNleashCB.com – in collaboration with the City of Council Bluffs and other local partners. **Page views, unique users, and sessions increased by 61, 83, and 102 percent, respectively, in FY 2019 compared to the prior year.**
- Organized the third annual Omaha Metropolitan Area Tourism Awards with Visit Omaha and Sarpy County Tourism which was hosted at the Mid-America Center. The event drew 347 registrations, the highest to date.
- Partnered with the Union Pacific Railroad Museum, The 712 Initiative, PACE, The 100 Block, and Iowa West Foundation to celebrate the transcontinental railroad 150th anniversary through the creation of a logo, microsite, blogs, and social media posts.
- Helped lead the efforts of the Hospitality, Publicity, and Web & Social Media RAGBRAI committees, supported the Long-Term Parking committee, sponsored CB’s RAGBRAI website, and managed its social media outlets.
- **Pursued 195 group prospects, an increase of 86 percent from FY 18. Events generated more than \$27.34 million in economic impact in FY 19.**
- **Moved from the Council Bluffs Public Library to the new office**, going from 600 square feet to 2,100 square feet.



# sales: meetings & sporting events

## Meetings & Conventions

	Events	Attendees	Economic Impact
<b>FY 19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12,192</b>	<b>\$5.04 million</b>
FY 18	18	8,115	\$4.5 million
FY 17	17	9,774	\$5.6 million
FY 16	24	11,921	\$3.2 million
FY 15	21	20,399	\$5.3 million
FY 14	34	9,640	\$2.5 million
FY 13	30	5,245	\$1.4 million
FY 12	24	4,757	\$1.2 million

## event sponsorships: FY 19

💰 **Mid-America Center: \$94,800**

💰 **CB Parks & Rec: \$24,000**

In FY 19, the CBCVB double-downed on its sales efforts. Alicia Frieze identified, qualified, and reached out to 195 group prospects compared to 105 in FY 18: an 86 percent increase. Venue leads shot up by 191 percent and accommodation leads grew by 44 percent. That growth was made possible by Alicia's knowledge of event planners, connections in the metro, and relentless due diligence.

## examples of wins in FY 19 include:

- 📅 **2019 Iowa League of Cities Annual Conference**
- 📅 **2019 Iowa County Treasurers Association Conference**
- 📅 **23rd Annual WHO Great Iowa Tractor Ride**
- 📅 **2021 Preserve Iowa Summit**
- 📅 **2022 Mid States Conference of the Nat'l Rural Letter Carriers Association**

## FY 19 vs. FY 18

🔍 **86% more prospects**

🔍 **191% more venue leads**

🔍 **44% more accommodation leads**

## Sporting Events

	Events	Attendees	Economic Impact
<b>FY 19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>45,672</b>	<b>\$22.3 million</b>
FY 18	20	52,783	\$30.4 million
FY 17	26	28,979	\$21.3 million
FY 16	14	48,033	\$13.0 million
FY 15	6	38,084	\$11.2 million
FY 14	6	30,340	\$7.9 million
FY 13	4	20,746	\$6.4 million
FY 12	4	18,320	\$4.1 million

## City of Council Bluffs Hotel/Motel Tax Receipts

<b>FY 18</b>	<b>2,770,278</b>
FY 17	2,679,841
FY 16	2,805,846
FY 15	2,873,339
FY 14	2,592,380
FY 13	2,576,254
FY 12	2,400,380





# website & social media

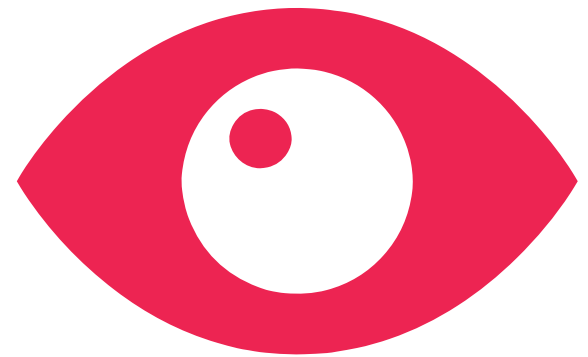
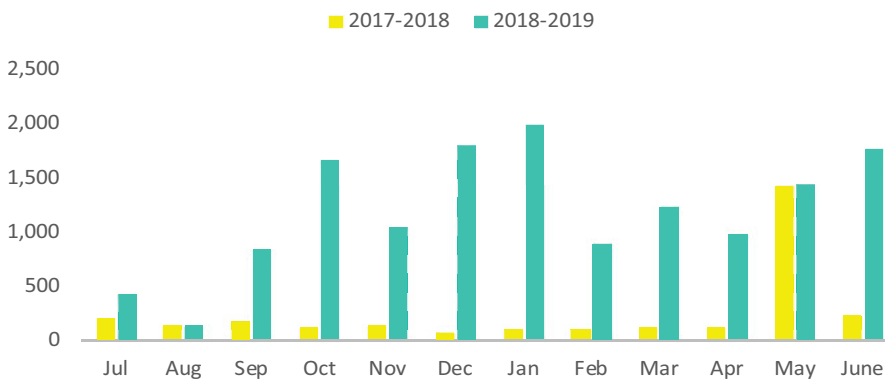
In FY 19, we continued to make improvements to the UNleashCB.com website by updating the website with fresh content a least once a week with blog posts promoting Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. We created 80 blog posts for the website in FY 19. These were also shared to social media where we saw a significant increase in traffic back to our website (see Social Media Clicks to Website graph below).



## most viewed FY 19 blogs:

- [Stir Concert Cove 2019 Calendar](#)
- [Your Guide to CB RAGBRAI](#)
- [10-Year RAGBRAI Rider Gives Advice](#)
- [Weekly Thursday Night Taco Rides](#)
- [The WHO Tractor Rides Comes to CB](#)

## Social Media Clicks to Website



**over one million**  
**impressions on**  
**social media**  
a 119% rise from FY 18

## Website Usage Comparison

	FY 15	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	Change (from FY 18)
Sessions	28,793	33,716	48,217	59,421	120,292	60,871 — Up 102%
Users	24,255	27,717	39,326	49,322	90,059	40,737 — Up 83%
Page Views	48,265	67,541	104,089	148,810	239,282	90,472 — Up 61%
Pages/Sessions	1.68	2	2.01	2.50	1.99	-0.51 — Down 20%
Avg. Session	1:04 min.	1:28 min.	1:42 min.	1:42 min.	1:29 min.	-13 sec — Down 13%

UNleashCB.com went live in May 2017



# advertising & promotions

## Iowa Tourism Co-Op Partnership

In FY 19, we partnered with the Iowa Tourism Office to promote Council Bluffs through digital ads via YouTube, TravelSpike, Pandora, Facebook, Google, and more. The ads received **3.6 million impressions**.



from paid promotions

### highest performing ads:

- **Google** (3,647 visitors)
- **Travel Spike\*** (1,193 visitors)
- **Facebook** (1,177 visitors)

\*Though we placed three ads (native, banner, and video) with Travel Spike, this is only including visitors from the high performing native ad.



## Mile Zero 150th Anniversary Promotions

In honor of the 150th anniversary of the completion of the nation's transcontinental railroad, we partnered with the Union Pacific Railroad Museum and the City of Council Bluffs to promote events occurring throughout 2019 and 2020 fiscal years by building out a microsite to house all anniversary events and details. In addition, we spent \$1,200 on Facebook and Instagram ads promoting individual events, the anniversary as a whole, and the annual Railroad Days event.



from organic and paid promotions



CONVENTION + VISITORS BUREAU