

# **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Who would have thought that we'd still be talking about COVID-19 almost two years later. COVID has had significant negative impacts on the tourism/hospitality industry worldwide – arguably the hardest hit by the pandemic. According to Dean Runyan Associates' Economic Impact of Travel in Nebraska (October 2021), the travel industry here experienced an estimated decline of 39.7% in travel spending in 2020, worse than the national average. In addition, visitor volume plummeted from 6.5 million to 4.6 million person trips, and direct employment experienced a loss of approximately 7,290 jobs across the state, representing an 18.1% decline in travel employment. Tax receipts generated by travel spending were also down 32.1% in 2020 compared to 2019.

Thankfully, the industry started to recover quickly in 2021, with leisure vacations leading the way. Business travel and meetings/conventions remain lagging with uncertainty surrounding these segments moving into the future.

The pent-up demand that frequently headlined media outlets throughout the pandemic actually came to fruition earlier this year in Nebraska resulting in some big, record-setting positives.

- Lodging tax revenue for calendar 2021 was the highest ever, topping \$6 million for the first time, up more than 55% over 2020 and eclipsing the former record set in 2019 by 8%.
- Overall visitor expenditures through October were nearly \$3.4 billion, 80% beyond 2020 and 13% above record-year 2019. It's very likely that 2021 will set an all-time record for visitor expenditures in Nebraska.

In addition to pent up demand helping to drive success in 2021, a number of other factors directly related to the continued and growing popularity of our "Honestly, it's not for everyone" campaign are moving things forward:

• We were able to again launch a marketing campaign in the Spring of 2021 to drive awareness, interest and visitation with record-setting results.



- Responding to our campaign, more people than ever before checked out VisitNebraska.com to learn about what there is to experience in the state. Nearly 920,000 people visited the website, a significant 40% increase over 2020 and the most ever.
- The Nebraska Passport Program had another recordbreaking year with 1,318 participants making it to all 70 stops its popularity is unbelievable!
- A grant from the federal Economic Development Administration CARES Act will enable us to increase our marketing efforts and grants to assist industry partners through 2023.
- American Rescue Plan Act (APRA) grant funds will be used to attract and create new events in communities across the state over the next few years, building the industry beyond where it has ever been before.

Even though the last couple of years were difficult to navigate at times, the tourism industry is again demonstrating its resilience. We will continue to welcome travelers and market Nebraska as a great destination to visit, one with wide open spaces, outdoor experiences, unique rural culture, less populated areas, a vibrant urban scene and so much more.

Maybe the best news is, Nebraska is no longer the least likely state in the country for people to visit on their vacations – and we're looking forward to an even more successful 2022!

John Ricks, Executive Director

Cover Photo Credit: Buck Christensen

# **FINANCIAL REPORT**

- •The Nebraska Tourism Commission's 2021 appropriation was \$7.4 million.
- •Lodging tax collections totaled \$6,046,411.33 for the 2021 calendar year (deposits).
- •\$340K+ was collected through Nebraska Tourism's Promotional Cash fund. This money is from advertising and merchandise sales.



# **NEBRASKA'S TRAVEL INDUSTRY ECONOMIC IMPACT**



Source: Dean Runyan Associates Study, NOTE: Economic Impact reports are always one year behind

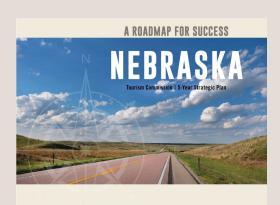
**Economic Impact Dashboard** 

See more and search county by county at

https://visitnebraska.com/nebraska-economic-impact-report-dashboard

# STRATEGIC PLAN

In October 2020, Nebraska Tourism released a new Strategic Plan, that provides specific goals and metrics key to growing tourism in the future. Read "A Roadmap for Success: Nebraska Tourism's 5-Year Strategic Plan" at <a href="https://visitnebraska.com/industry/annual-reports/5-year-strategic-plan.">https://visitnebraska.com/industry/annual-reports/5-year-strategic-plan.</a>



# **ADVERTISING**

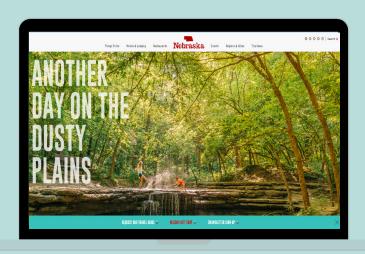
- Nebraska Tourism ran a mixed media Sandhill Cranes Campaign in February and March of 2021 in Denver, Des Moines, Kansas City & Sioux Falls. Overall website traffic increased by 36% year over year during that time.
- In summer 2021, Nebraska Tourism ran a \$2,145,252 mixed media campaign in the same cities, plus Minneapolis. That campaign garnered 166,612,110 impressions.



# NEBRASKA TOURISM PLACED 59 BILLBOARDS IN TARGET CITIES. THESE RECEIVED OVER 41 MILLION IMPRESSIONS ALONE.



# VISITNEBRASKA.COM



- •918,067 Users Up 39% from 2020
- •1,120,887 Sessions Up 35% from 2020



•13,036 new e-newsletter subscribers A 37.2% increase

# TRAVEL GUIDE



NEBRASKA TOURISM PRINTED 200,000 TRAVEL GUIDES IN 2021 TRAVEL GUIDES WERE REQUESTED FROM ALL 50 STATES AND MULTIPLE COUNTRIES

# **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Nebraska Tourism uses two primary social media channels, Facebook and Instagram. Both saw success in 2020.



Likes up 9% from 2020



Followers up 12% from 2020

Nebraska Tourism runs a Social Media Blitz program allowing tourism partners from across the state to use the Visit Nebraska Facebook page to spread the word to target audiences. The partners work with our social media specialist on a three day campaign highlighting their destination. Nebraska Tourism also did their own boosting, helping to drive a record amount of website visits to VisitNebraska.com in 2021!



# MEDIA VISITS & PUBLIC RELATIONS

# **NEBRASKA TOURISM COVERAGE** MEDIA VISITS TOTAL NUMBER 6 49 SYNDICATIONS 12

#### PR METRICS 2021

**IMPRESSIONS** 579,873,759

**TOP 100 ARTICLES** 

16

DESKSIDES

5

#### **2021 COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS**

**BUZZFEED-JANUARY 2021** 

"18 UNIQUE AND BIZARRE PLACES IN THE US EVERYONE SHOULD VISIT ONCE IN THEIR LIFETIME" IMPRESSIONS – 15,180,864

THE NEW YORK TIMES- FEBRUARY 2021 THE NEW LOOK OF SPRING BREAK

IMPRESSIONS - 43,264,806

THRILLIST- MARCH 2021

THIS PLAINS STATE IS ALL ABOUT DUNES, DINOS, AND VIEWS" IMPRESSIONS - 3.607.069

REALTOR.COM- APRIL 2021 "TOP 10 AFFORDABLE SMALL TOWNS WHERE YOU'D ACTUALLY WANT TO LIVE, 2021 EDITION" IMPRESSIONS – 16,429,509

FODOR'S TRAVEL - MAY 2021 "THESE 15 GORGEOUS OPEN-AIR BATHS ARE EVERY BATH-FLUENCER'S DREAM"

IMPRESSIONS - 4,746,829

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL-JUNE 2021

"SKIP THE DUDE RANCH. A HANDS-ON VACATION AT THESE WORKING RANCHES IS FAR MORE AUTHENTIC AND GRATIFYING." IMPRESSIONS - 11 576 446

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC- JULY 2021
"DARK SKY TOURISM IS ON THE RISE ACROSS THE U.S" IMPRESSIONS - 4,575,954

FORBES-AUGUST 2021

"FIVE ESSENTIAL CITIES TO VISIT IN NEBRASKA " IMPRESSIONS - 70.312.447

ALLRECIPES.COM- OCTOBER 2021

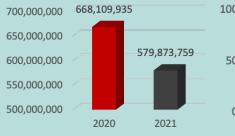
"THE BEST PUMPKIN PATCHES ACROSS THE U.S."

IMPRESSIONS - 41,726,811

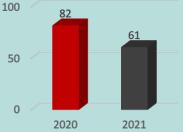
THE WASHINGTON POST – DECEMBER 2021
"HOW 'DARK SKY' DESIGNATIONS ARE GIVING COMMUNITIES NEW TOURISM APPEAL"

IMPRESSIONS - 57,702,469

#### YOY IMPRESSIONS



#### YOY NUMBER OF ARTICLES



# **FOWL LANGUAGE MAILER**

# PLENTY OF FISH IN VALENTINE



BECAUSE A VACCINE WAS NOT YET WIDESPREAD AND MANY JOURNALISTS WERE UNCOMFORTABLE TRAVELING, AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO A LARGER
CRANE MIGRATION PRESS TRIP WE CREATED A
FOWL LANGUAGE MUG MEDIA MAILER. THE MAILER
- SENT TO 13 TARGETED JOURNALISTS AT NATIONAL MORNING/LATE NIGHT BROADCAST SHOWS AND MEDIA WHO WERE UNABLE TO ATTEND The Migration in Person - included the

- CUSTOM DESIGNED NEBRASKA MUG COFFEE FROM NORMAL ROASTING CO. (LOCAL LINCOLN, NE COMPANY)
- LINGOLN, NE COMPANY)
  MATERIALS FROM PARTNERS (VIDEOS FROM
  WAYNE CHICKEN SHOW, NEBRASKA GAME &
  PARKS EXPLAINING THE BIRDS, NORTH PLATTE CRANE B-ROLL) AND NE TOURISM (MARSH Madness birding bracket, crane migration INFOGRAPHIC
- HANDWRITTEN (AND PAINTED!) PERSONALIZED

THE FOWL LANGUAGE MUGS TO INCLUDE THE SANDHILL CRANE BUT ALSO A BROADER REPRESENTATION OF BIRDS FOUND THROUGHOUT



(<152 cm)

HIGHLIGHTING FISHING AS A TRENDING HOBBY DURING THE PANDEMIC, AND NEBRASKA AS A TOP FISHING DESTINATION, WE WANTED TO MAKE A SPLASH AROUND NEWS OF NEBRASKA **GAME & PARK'S RECORD FISHING** LICENSE SALES IN A CREATIVE WAY. TO HOOK MEDIA ATTENTION, WE **COLLABORATED WITH DATING WEBSITE** PLENTY OF FISH TO CREATE A FAKE DATING PROFILE FOR A NORTHERN PIKE FISH ("MAC" MCCONAUGHY) FROM Valentine, NE.... Just in time for VALENTINE'S DAY.

MAC DIDN'T END UP FINDING LOVE, AND REMAINS THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY, BUT IT DID GIVE MEDIA A GOOD LAUGH AND **INCREASED AWARENESS OF NEBRASKA** FOR DIITHOOR RECREATION

In 2021, Nebraska Tourism also:

- Sent out 18 press releases
- Did 45 TV and radio interviews
- Garnered \$6.3 million in coverage from in-house press releases and story pitching that reached an estimated 198,946,302 people.

# **NEBRASKA PASSPORT**

### **2021 NEBRASKA PASSPORT STATISTICS:**

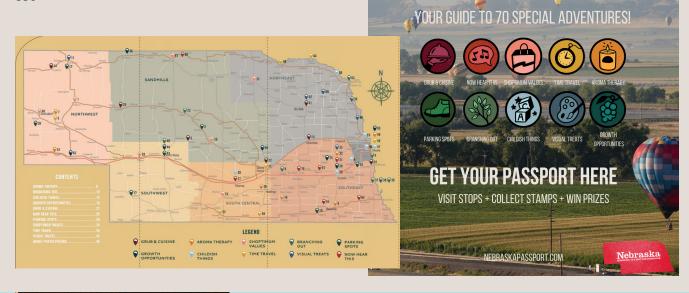
Participants Who Visited All Stops 1.319

Total Stamps Collected 195,441

States Represented 37

Nebraska Communities Represented 399

Number of stories submitted on NebraskaPassport.com 850





Passport Travelers named Smith Falls State Park near Valentine the 2021 Champions Choice winner. This is a best of show award voted on by those who traveled to all 70 Passport stops.

# **2021 NEBRASKA PASSPORT SPONSORS**



# **GRANTS**

Nebraska Tourism announced grant awards totaling \$494,833.65 in February 2021 in the combined application cycle of the Community Impact and Tourism Marketing Grant programs. The Commission received a total of 56 applications during the grant cycle requesting \$1,426,004.22 in funding.

#### **AWARDEES THIS GRANT CYCLE INCLUDE:**

- Lancaster Event Center
- Support Nebraska
- Omaha Equestrian Foundation
- Omaha Sports Commission
- North Platte/Lincoln County Visitors Bureau
- Kearney Visitors Bureau
- Columbus/Platte County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Falls City Chamber of Commerce
- Dawes County
- Lied Lodge & Arbor Day Farm
- Nebraska Flyway
- Fontenelle Forest
- Visit Omaha
- Kearney Area Community Foundation
- Golden Spike Tower
- McCook Economic Development Corporation
- Nebraska Craft Brewers Association
- Wayne Area Economic Development
- Valley County Tourism & Ord Area Chamber
- Harold Warp Pioneer Village Foundation
- Cherry County Tourism
- Red Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce
- Norfolk Area Visitors Bureau
- Sports Nebraska
- Gering Visitors Bureau
- Grand Island Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Keith County Visitors Committee
- Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway
- United States Golf Association
- Harlan County Tourism
- The Archway
- Old Market Association
- Village of Duncan
- Opera Omaha
- Nebraska City Tourism & Commerce

- Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition
- Friends of the State Museum
- Stuhr Museum
- Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce
- Tree Rush Adventures
- Oregon Trail Community Foundation
- Lincoln Arts Council
- Knox County Development Agency
- Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Friends of Lewis & Clark Bicentennial
- Burwell Area/Garfield County Visitors Bureau
- Boys Town



# **GROUP TRAVEL**

In 2021, Nebraska Tourism Commission's Group Travel Coordinator, Micheal Collins, hosted two tour operators on site visits.

Collins also met with operators at these annual meetings:

- American Bus Association (virtual)
- Travel Partners Alliance (virtual)
- IPW (Las Vegas)
- National Tour Association's 2021 Travel Exchange (Ohio)





A quote often misattributed to our famous author Willa Cather goes something like this: "Anyone can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie." Count us among the souls, because we

A quote often misattributed to our famous author Willa Cather goes something like this: "Anyone can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie." Count us among the souls, because we do love our prairies, and the quiet beauty that shapes the way we live and think. Not everyone can appreciate that. But if you're someone who can, go to **VisitNebraska.com** for a free Travel Guide.

And enjoy the incredible majesty of an unobstructed view.



# NEBRASKA TOURISM CONFERENCE

Back in person the 2021 Nebraska Tourism Conference was held in Grand Island this year!

The event took place October 19 – 21 at the Ramada Midtown. In total, 152 people attended. Attendees represented all regions of Nebraska and 13% of attendees were from out-of-state.

The Conference included bus tours to agritourism destinations (this was to make up for no Agritourism and Adventure Travel Workshop in 2021), keynotes from Jason Kotecki and Greg DeShields, breakout sessions (topics included: marketing, dark skies, events, farm to fork, etc.), the Taste & Feel of Nebraska event in downtown Grand Island and more.

Executive Director John Ricks also held a session sneak peaking new marketing material for 2023 (see page 9 for an example).

The event concluded with the Nebraska Tourism Industry Award Banquet held at The Liederkranz Club. The awards banquet honors the many great achievements made by individuals, businesses and associations across Nebraska to develop and support the state's expanding tourism industry.

Below are the 2021 awards and the respective winners:

**Outstanding Marketing Campaign** 2021 National High School Finals Rodeo

**Outstanding Tourism Attraction** 

**Edgerton Explorit Center** 

**Outstanding Agritourism or Eco-Tourism Entity** Fontenelle Forest

**Friend of Tourism** 

Steve White

Outstanding Event (pop. less than 9,999) Seward Nebraska Fourth of July Celebration Outstanding Event (pop. more than 9,999)

2021 National High School Finals Rodeo

The **2021 Henry Fonda Award**, the state's highest tourism award representing leadership, vision and dedication to the tourism industry, went to The Vala Family. Over the last 37 years, a trip to the iconic Vala's Pumpkin Patch in Gretna has become a tradition for many. It started out as an idea Tim Vala had, but as the business grew, every member of the Vala family contributed. Today, Vala's Pumpkin Patch has grown into a 400-acre operation with nearly 55 acres of pumpkins planted every year- a great example of an agritourism business in Nebraska that continues to get better.









THE 2022 NEBRASKA TOURISM CONFERENCE IS SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 25-27 IN SOUTH SIOUX CITY

# **MERCHANDISE**

## 2021 NEBRASKA MERCHANDISE STATISTICS:

- Nearly 1,700 items sold
   1,085 Shirts & Hoodies
   240+ Mugs
   360+ Magnets
- Merchandise was sold and sent to 29 US states and British Columbia



# WAITING FOR YOU SINCE Nebraska 12 MILLION B.C.



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Micheal Collins, Group Guy Group Tour Coordinator (402) 471-3795 micheal.collins@nebraska.gov



Jenn Gjerde, Marketing Goddess Marketing Manager (402) 471-3768 jenn.gjerde@nebraska.gov



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# **NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION STAFF**



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# **NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSION**

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# NEBRASKA TOURISM COMMISSIONERS

#### **DISTRICT 1 REPRESENTATIVE**

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#### **DISTRICT 2 REPRESENTATIVE**

John Chapo, President Emeritus of Lincoln Children's Zoo

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#### **DISTRICT 3 REPRESENTATIVE**

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#### **DISTRICT 4 REPRESENTATIVE**

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#### **DISTRICT 5 REPRESENTATIVE**

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#### **DISTRICT 6 REPRESENTATIVE**

**Deb Loseke** 

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# **DISTRICT BREAKDOWN BY COUNTIES**

**District 1** – Douglas

District 2 – Lancaster

District 3 – Richardson, Pawnee, Nemaha, Johnson, Otoe, Gage, Saline, Jefferson

District 4 - Cass, Sarpy

District 5 – Saunders, Washington, Dodge, Colfax, Stanton, Cuming, Burt, Thurston, Wayne, Cedar, Dixon, Dakota

District 6 - Butler, Polk, Platte, Merrick, Nance, Boone, Madison, Pierce, Antelope, Knox, Holt, Boyd

District 7 - Thayer, Nuckolls, Webster, Adams, Clay, Fillmore, Seward, York, Hamilton, Franklin, Harlan

District 8 - Kearney, Phelps, Hall, Howard, Greeley, Wheeler, Buffalo, Sherman, Valley, Garfield

District 9 - Lincoln, Keya Paha, Rock, Brown, Loup, Blaine, Custer, Logan, McPherson, Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Thomas, Cherry

District 10 - Furnas, Red Willow, Hitchcock, Dundy, Chase, Hayes, Frontier, Gosper, Dawson, Perkins, Keith

District 11 - Deuel, Garden, Sheridan, Cheyenne, Morrill, Box Butte, Dawes, Sioux, Scotts Bluff, Banner, Kimball

#### DISTRICT 7 REPRESENTATIVE

Ashley Olson, Executive Director of the Willa Cather Foundation

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#### DISTRICT 8 REPRESENTATIVE

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#### DISTRICT 9 REPRESENTATIVE

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#### **DISTRICT 10 REPRESENTATIVE**

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### **DISTRICT 11 REPRESENTATIVE**

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