



Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



2023 RECAP

It's a great day in Abilene!

This year, our theme was "maximize," and oh, did we live up to it! Abilene became the talk of the Midwest, and the proof was in the numerous awards and recognitions that adorned our achievements. Other states even invited us to visit and share about Abilene's success! We didn't just pursue opportunities; we maximized every single one, and the results surpassed our wildest dreams!

In this report, we focus on four types of marketing:

1. Earned – media, blogger, and influencer relations
2. Owned – website, blog, and content generated in-house
3. Shared – social media, word of mouth, and referrals
4. Paid – advertising

We also showcase new and continued projects, partnerships, visitation and the economic impact of tourism in Abilene.

As we reflect on this remarkable year, we eagerly anticipate building upon this foundation in 2024. The journey was extraordinary, and the best is yet to come!

#AbileneProud

Julie Roller Weeks

Julie Roller Weeks, director
Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau



2023

SUMMARY

This year, Abilene celebrated big wins and big projects!

- Top 10 True Western Town of the Year by *True West Magazine*
- #2 Best Historic Small Town by *USA TODAY*
- Best Promotion of a Historic Place by *True West Magazine*
- *Ingram's* 50 Kansans You Should Know
- Best U.S. Small Town by *TravelAwaits*
- Best Roadside Attraction by *TravelAwaits*
- Best Social Media Campaign by Midwest Travel Network
- Best Online Marketing, Best Print Marketing, Best Destination (Community Awareness Campaign and People's Choice Overall Winner - Travel Industry Association of Kansas)
- New Destination Guide and Cowboy Trail Rack Card
- Widespread publicity for the World's Largest Belt Buckle
- Gunsmoke Trail Partnership
- Re-skinned billboards
- Gravel Kansas routes and Little Town of Mansions website



PROMOTION EARNED

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau continues to capitalize on earned media by coordinating with media outlets, responding to inquiries, and positioning itself on journalists' radars.

Stories are available at
AbileneKansas.org/news



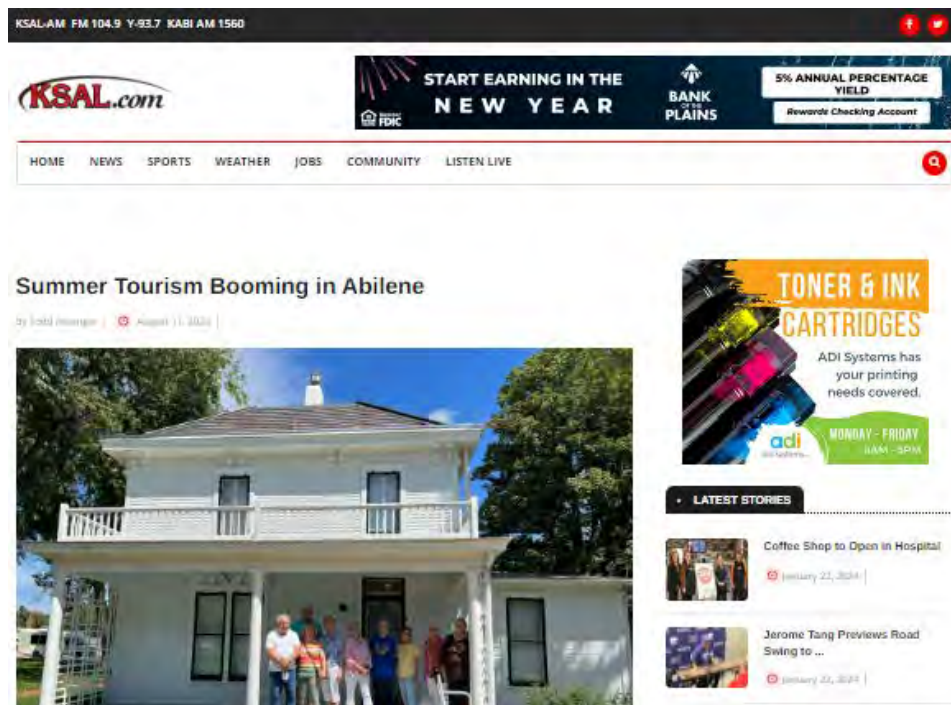
1. World's Largest Belt Buckle Abilene, Kansas

Abilene, Kansas, is home to quite possibly the newest roadside attraction, [The World's Largest Belt Buckle](#), nestled in Eisenhower Park, was unveiled on December 21, 2022. It measures 19 feet and 10.5 inches wide, and 13 feet and 11.25 inches tall. The buckle was funded by 100 people and businesses throughout Abilene, as well as the Kansas Tourism Attraction Development Grant.

- Top 10 True Western Town of the Year by *True West Magazine* (2023)
- #2 Best Historic Small Town by *USA TODAY* (2023)
- Best Promotion of a Historic Place by *True West Magazine* (2023)
- Best U.S. Small Town by *TravelAwaits* (2023)
- Best Roadside Attraction by *TravelAwaits* (2023)
- Best Social Media Campaign by Midwest Travel Network (2023)



PROMOTION EARNED



Television

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau shared stories, photos, and videos with Kansas television stations featuring Abilene stories, resulting in news stories on KSN, KSNT, WIBW, KWCH and KAKE.

Radio

The Abilene CVB shares press releases with all local radio stations for inclusion on air, their social media pages, and their e-newsletters. We also enjoyed several additional radio and podcast interviews thanks to the Kansas Media Event.

Newspaper

The CVB happily partners with area newspapers to promote Abilene to their readership, including press releases to feature stories, calendars, or photos.





PROMOTION PAID

Recognizing its budget limitations and the rising cost of traditional advertising, the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau strategically purchases ads.

2023 Ad Purchases

- Kansas Travel Guide (back cover) – 350,000 guides are distributed annually to people who request them, at rest stops, visitor centers, and events in and out of Kansas. The CVB also purchased 28 listings for Abilene attractions. The guide is also available for download on TravelKS.com.
- True West Magazine
- Travel Kansas
- KANSAS! Magazine
- Abilene event ads (print, digital, or radio) - Eisenhower Marathon, Abilene Downtown Antique Fest, Meadowlark Swap Meet, Holm Automotive Car Show, Oktoberfest, and Cowtown Christmas.





PROMOTION

PAID

Billboards

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains ten billboards along Kansas I-70 and one on Highway 15. In addition, our partnership with the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum increases Abilene's presence by an additional ten billboards.



In 2023, the Abilene CVB reskinned eight billboards.

According to 2022 data from the Kansas Department of Transportation, the daily traffic count for these locations ranges from 15,000 - 22,000 vehicles.

Visitors / Destination Guide

In 2023, the Abilene CVB launched a brand-new two-year visitors/destination guide. Inclusion in the guide is at no cost to tourism attractions.

The visitors guide is also available digitally on the CVB's website AbileneKansas.org/visitorsguide.





PROMOTION

PAID

Brochure Distribution

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau contracted with Central Brochure Distribution to place the Abilene Visitors Guide in distribution racks in hotels, restaurants, and gas stations.


The brochure is also available in Kansas's two welcome centers (Belle Plaine and Goodland) and other state-designated travel information centers throughout Kansas.

Digital Advertising

In 2023, the CVB partnered with the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum to increase its digital footprint by utilizing paid digital ads with Cohort Digital.

These campaigns started in May 2023. Their first month delivered a combined click-through rate (CTR) of 4.43% and ended the year with 23.30%, a 426% increase!

Sponsored

 [abilenekansas.org](https://www.abilenekansas.org)
<https://www.abilenekansas.org> › plan your › visit

Visit Abilene Kansas

Home of Historic Entrepreneurs — Ride the Rails on a 100-Year-old Steam Engine, Find Great Places to Eat, Stay and Shop Now. Whether you're Four or 104, **Abilene** has Something to Offer. Check out **Abilene**, Kansas Now.

[View Events](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [Things To Do](#) · [Stay And Shop](#) · [Request A Visitors Guide](#)



PROMOTION

OWNED

Abilene Tourism Advocate E-Newsletter

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau creates an electronic newsletter celebrating Abilene. The newsletter is sent to anyone who requests information about Abilene.

It is also shared on social media and on the CVB website at AbileneKansas.org/newsletter.



2023 Abilene Tourism Advocate

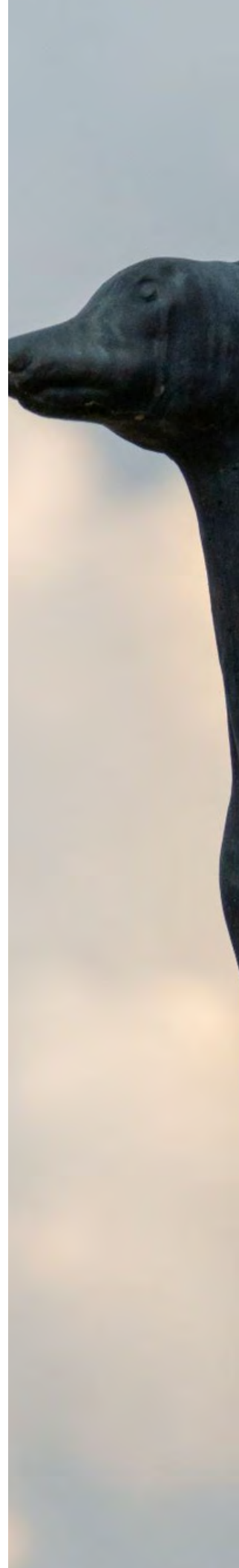
2023 editions sent: 51	Individual sends: 313,551
Total unique opens: 80,661	Total link clicks: 4,571

Brochure Requests

The Abilene CVB mails information about Abilene to anyone requesting information. In 2023, the CVB received nearly 300 inquiries via website requests. The CVB fulfilled additional telephone and email requests.

Visitor Bags

The Abilene CVB provides visitor bags for groups and events. The CVB fulfilled minimal requests for a total of 675 bags.





PROMOTION OWNED

Website

In 2020, the Abilene CVB launched its new website. This website is an incredible addition to our marketing efforts.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the CVB maintained a page noting which attractions and businesses were open. This page, AbileneKansas.org/travel-updates, provides visitors with the necessary information to help them plan their trips.

January 1 - December 31, 2023, Analytics

- Users: 85,000
- New Users: 84,000
- Sessions: 95,260
- Pageviews: 369,000
- Pages/Session: 4.32

Of note, the number of website users continues to increase from 2022.

Top cities where website visitors are located:

1. Kansas City
2. Abilene, KS
3. Dallas
4. Chicago
5. Denver
6. Wichita
7. Salina
8. Manhattan
9. Topeka
10. Moses Lake, WA



PROMOTION

OWNED

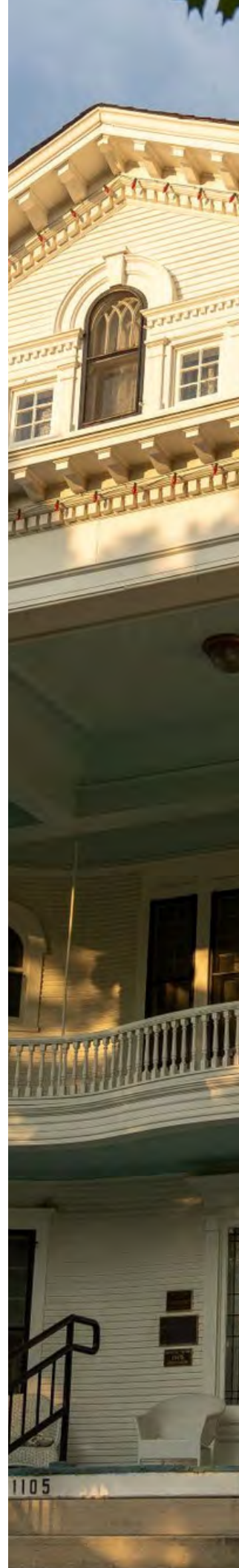
Blog

The CVB utilizes its blog to share unique stories about Abilene. In 2023, the CVB wrote 84 blog posts. These stories are shared on the website, social media, the Abilene Tourism Advocate e-newsletter, and the Abilene Reflector-Chronicle.

Top blogs include:

- We Like Ike and Golf, Too!
- Big Kansas Road Trip – 8 Wonders of Kansas in Abilene
- Follow the “Gunsmoke Trail” Through Kansas!
- Experience the Power of Music and History: Symphony at Sunset Annual D-Day Commemoration in Abilene, Kansas
- Great, Great Grandson of Abilene Founders Timothy and Eliza Hersey Returns for Wedding
- Make Abilene Your July 4th Destination!
- Experience the Thrills and Fun at the Central Kansas Free Fair and Wild Bill Hickok PRCA Rodeo in Abilene, Kansas!
- Experience Abilene’s History Up Close: Stay in These Charming Historic Properties
- 5 Must-Experience Gems in Abilene: A Thriving Small Town in the Heart of America
- Two-Day Itinerary to Abilene, Kansas
- Celebrating President Eisenhower’s Birthday in Abilene
- ‘Tis the Season at the Historic Seelye Mansion
- Unwrap the Wonder of Meredith Willson’s Miracle on 34th Street: The Musical in Abilene, Kansas
- Discover the Magic of Abilene: Insider Tips for the 46th Homes for the Holidays Tour
- Abilene, Kansas: The Best U.S. Small Town with a Hallmark Christmas Town Vibe

Read these stories at AbileneKansas.org/blog.





PROMOTION

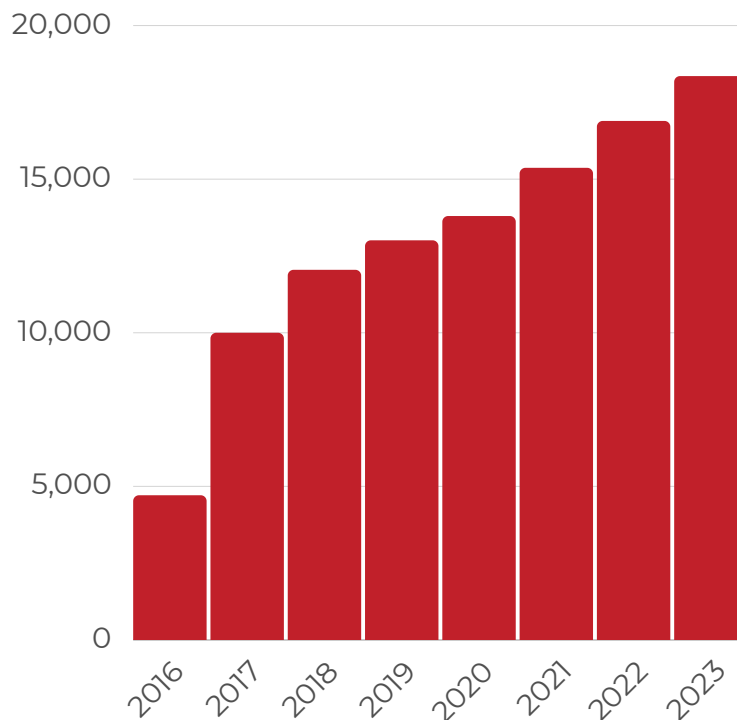
SHARED

Social Media

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau uses social media to reach new audiences, including Facebook Live to film and share special events.

Comparatively, the Visit Abilene, Kansas Facebook page has significantly more page likes and engagement than other Kansas communities.

Facebook Page Likes



Abilene is also on Instagram @AbileneKS and X @VisitAbilene. Videos are also shared on the @VisitAbilene YouTube Chan and Twitter @VisitAbilene. Videos are also shared on the @VisitAbilene YouTube Channel.



PROMOTION

SHARED

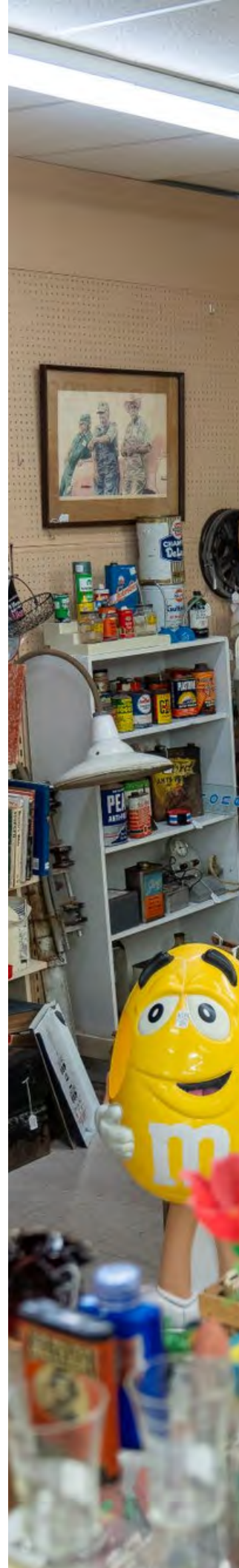


Videos

Abilene CVB continues to create short videos to reach new audiences on social media, including:

- 2023 Cowtown Christmas
- 2023 Homes for the Holiday Tours
- 2023 Eisenhower Marathon
- Discover the Charms of Abilene, Kansas: Your Best Small Town Getaway
- 2023 Central Kansas Free Fair & Wild Bill Hickok Rodeo
- Celebrate the Old West Along Abilene's Cowboy Art Trail

These videos are available on YouTube @VisitAbilene.





PROMOTION

PARTNERSHIPS

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is a member of organizations that help promote and advocate for the tourism industry.

- **Travel Industry Association of Kansas** (Abilene CVB director served as Past President of the Association in 2023) – The CVB director participated in U.S. Travel's Day on the Hill activities to share industry updates and updates about our individual communities. The CVB also sponsored Destination Statehouse and the Kansas Tourism Conference.
- **Kansas I-70 Association** (member) - The Association printed and distributed its brochure and hosted a room at the Goodland Travel Information Center and a showcase at the Belle Plaine Travel Information Center.
- **North Central Kansas Tourism Coalition** – The Abilene CVB participated in the NCKS Tourism booth at the Kansas Media Event and serves as a regional representative to Kansas Tourism's roundtable discussion.
- **Tour Kansas** – The Abilene CVB participated in Coop Advertising opportunities through Tour Kansas.
- **Kansas Association of Public Information Officers** – The Abilene CVB participated in their annual conference.
- **Flint Hills Tourism Coalition** – The CVB maintains listings on the Coalition's website via TravelKS.com.
- **Kansas Association of Public Information Officers (KAPIO)** - member.
- **Kansas Sampler Foundation** - Terry Tietjens, Seelye Mansion, received a WeKan! Award with a flash mob organized by the CVB.
- **Cowtown Showcase** - The Abilene CVB presented about the Cowboy Art Trail to this virtual meeting.



PROMOTION

PARTNERSHIPS

Presentations

The Abilene CVB shared its story at the Missouri Main Street Training, Iowa State Tourism Conference, Kansas FFA State Convention, Leadership Marshall County, and Midwest Travel Network Conference.



Community Support

The CVB wrote letters of support for community projects, including projects for the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad, Dickinson County Heritage Center, Eisenhower Foundation, and downtown businesses.

The CVB also continued to advocate for grant funding for the Abilene Industrial Park.

In addition, the CVB nominated the Eisenhower Foundation for the Kansas Department of Commerce's To the Stars Business Awards.

The CVB director also served on the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Community Philanthropy Innovation Network (CPIN) working group, supporting six new Abilene businesses and as Vice-Chair of Dickinson County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) program.





PROMOTION

PARTNERSHIPS

Kansas Department of Tourism

The Abilene CVB maintains listings on TravelKS.com for Abilene attractions and businesses at no cost on the TravelKS.com website. In 2023, these listings received 8,766 views and 3,953 clicks.





PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Hosted Travel Writers

In 2023, the Abilene CVB hosted:

- Moyer Memoirs - Empty Nest Travel Adventures
- Roadrunner Journeys
- Postcard Jar
- Texas Travel Talk
- Steven Kimmi / Midwest Explorer

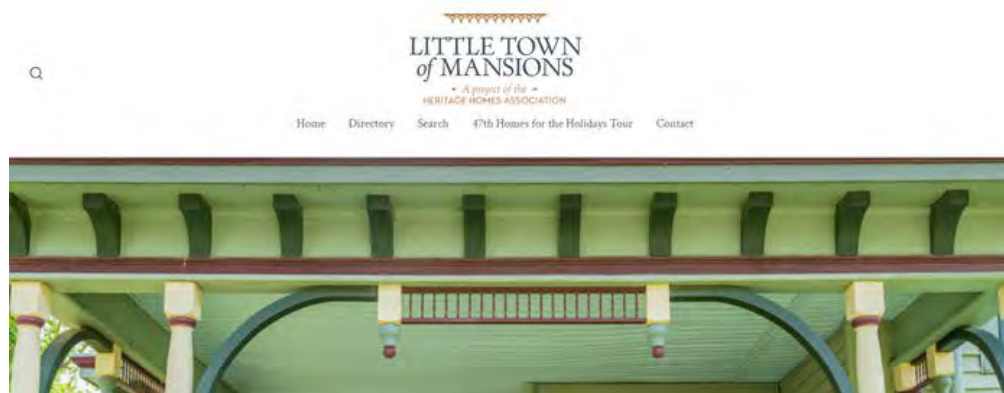
Stories are shared at AbileneKansas.org/news, on social media, and included in the Abilene Tourism Advocate e-newsletter.





PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Little Town of Mansions Website

In 2023, the CVB partnered with the Heritage Homes Association to develop a new website celebrating the community's architecture and historic homes.

Photo & B-Roll Library

The CVB continues to enhance its photo library. In 2023, the CVB hosted photographer David Mayes to capture photos of the World's Largest Belt Buckle, Cowboy Art Trail, Iron Horse Trail, Legacy Kansas, C.W. Parker Carousel, new murals and Abilene Oktoberfest. These photos are used on the CVB website, newsletter, and social media and shared with news outlets and writers.

In addition, a b-roll video was captured from around Abilene to share with the above-mentioned partners.



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Travel Show Booths

The return of events meant the return of targeted travel shows. The CVB hosted booths at Destination Statehouse in Topeka, the Midwest Travel Network Conference in Kansas City, and the Kansas Media Event in Wichita.

American Flags

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau coordinates a fundraising campaign to purchase 200 new American flags for Buckeye Avenue and 3rd Street each year. Learn more about this project at AbileneKansas.org/flags.



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Shop Small First – Pink Friday Campaign

The CVB coordinated Abilene's third annual Pink Friday event, complete with a social media campaign, a 3rd Street banner, t-shirts for participating businesses, and local and statewide publicity. Learn more about this event at AbileneKansas.org/pinkfriday.

Pink Friday encouraged shoppers to think local first. It encouraged them to support the businesses that support the community.

- Jamie Stroda, Aksent Boutique



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Cowtown Christmas

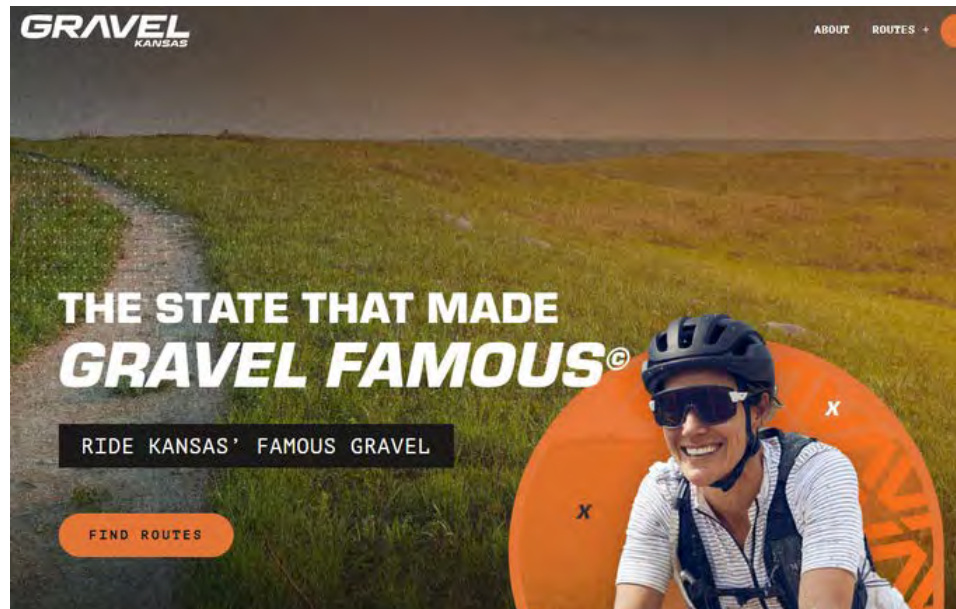
Thanks to the cooperation of Abilene tourism attractions, businesses, and organizations, the CVB assisted with marketing efforts for a Cowtown Christmas, which collectively marketed holiday activities during the first weekend in December. The CVB purchased radio, online and social media advertising, coordinated a social media campaign, created videos, and partnered with Kansas Tourism and media outlets to promote the events. Learn more at AbileneKansas.org/Christmas.





PROMOTION

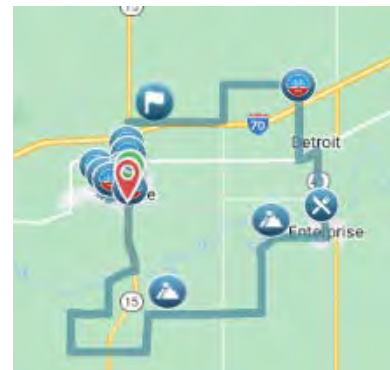
SPECIAL PROJECTS



Gravel Kansas

In 2023, the Abilene CVB partnered with Visit Emporia and Kansas Tourism to launch the Gravel Kansas website. The CVB coordinated two routes: I Like Ike! - 34 miles, 34th President, 34th State and One Greyt Ride on Ride Spot.

Learn more at www.GravelKS.com.



PROMOTION

SPECIAL PROJECTS



Cowboy Art Trail Brochure

In 2023, the Abilene CVB developed a Cowboy Art Trail brochure to promote the community's cowboy-themed art.

Petals at their Peak

The CVB assisted with branding a new event, Petals at their Peak, in Eisenhower Park and Rose Garden. The new logo and 3rd Street banner will be used for future events.





PROMOTION AWARDS



The Abilene CVB is an unprecedented number of marketing awards in 2023.

- Best Social Media Campaign - Midwest Travel Network
- Best Online Marketing - Travel Industry Association of Kansas
- Best Print Marketing - Travel Industry Association of Kansas
- Best Destination (Community Awareness Campaign)- Travel Industry Association of Kansas
- People's Choice Overall Winner - Travel Industry Association of Kansas



VISITATION



Travel Information Center (TIC)

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains a state-designated travel information center to serve visitors.

In 2023, 766 people signed the guest book in the Visitors Center. Visitors also used the CVB's outdoor digital kiosk 327 times, with an average of three screens per session and an average duration of 5 minutes.

Abilene Civic Center

The Abilene CVB is also responsible for Civic Center rentals and maintenance. In 2023, the Abilene City Commission approved a proposal from the Community Foundation of Dickinson County to renovate office space to accommodate their additional office space. The Foundation will pay for the project, and renovation is set to begin in January 2024.

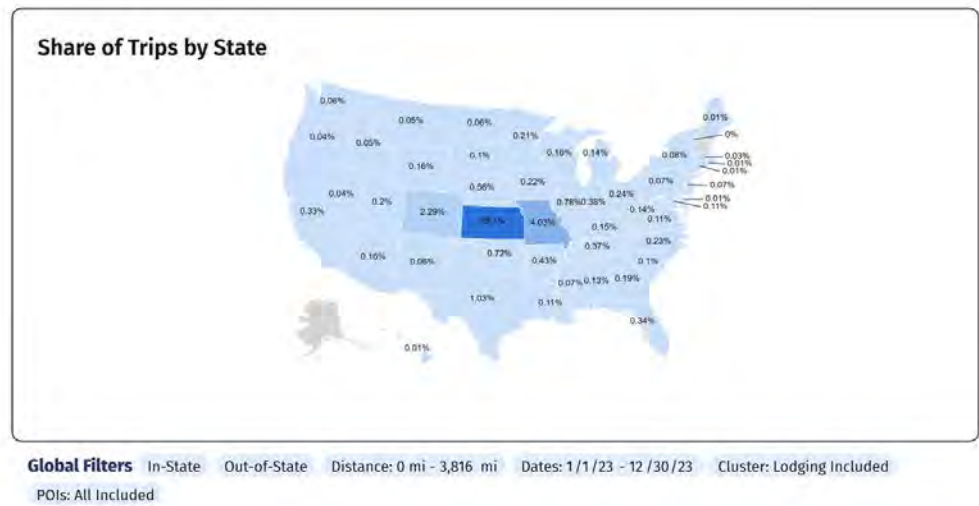




VISITATION

In 2023, the Abilene CVB participated in a Kansas Tourism coop with DATAFY to capture visitation data based on cell phone usage.

This (limited) data, paired with the information provided by tourism attractions, helps give us a complete picture of visitation in Abilene.

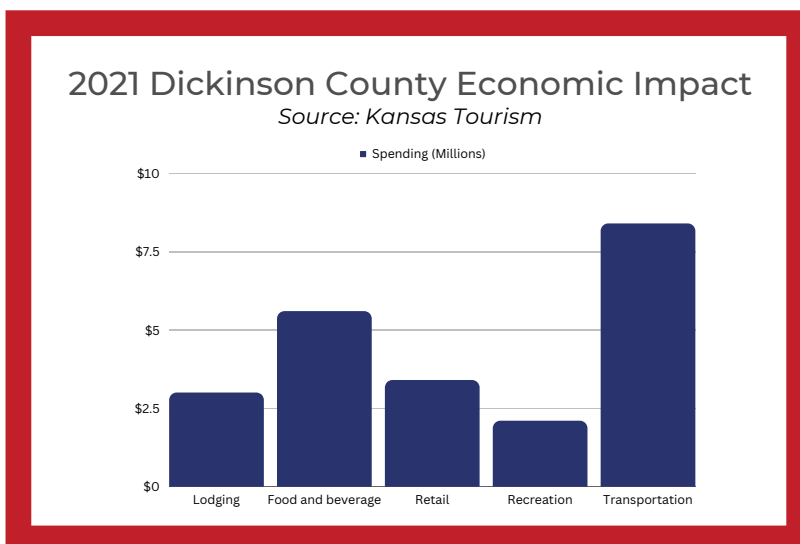




VISITATION

DATAFY Key Findings:

- 81.9% of visitors to Abilene are on day trips.
- January has the least visitation, with June, August and September being the busiest.
- Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday are the busiest days of the week.
- 85.1% of visitors are from Kansas, with Missouri and Colorado bringing in a combined 6.32%.
- 34% of visitors are between the ages of 45 and 64, 31.2% are between the ages of 25 and 44, and 19.5% are older than 65. These numbers changed slightly from 2022, showing a slightly younger crowd visiting Abilene.
- 32.2% of visitors earn less than \$50,000 annually, while 25.3% earn between \$50,000-\$75,000.
- The top Points of Interest include LOVE's Travel Stop, the area north of 14th Street (Interstate Travelers), 24/7, downtown and Eisenhower Presidential Library.
- Based on this data, the Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum is the top tourist attraction.



VISITATION



In 2023, the Abilene CVB assisted several groups with visits, including the Small Business Administration's 70th Anniversary, Heart of America Greyhound Gathering, Sunflower State Tours, bank travel clubs, car clubs and other group tours. The CVB assists with itineraries, reservations, welcome bags and other requests.

Attraction Visitation

Visitation to Abilene's tourist attractions continues to rebound post-pandemic.

- Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad: 12,038 riders (+3,525 from 2022)
- Dickinson County Heritage Center: 4,463 (-1,451 from 2022) 5,914
- Eisenhower Presidential Library *and* Museum: 100,000 (+55,940 from 2022)
- Great Plains Theatre: 5,198 (-255 from 2022)
- Greyhound Hall of Fame: 3,921 (-1,205 from 2022)
- Old Abilene Town: 3,700 + all ASVRR riders visit as well



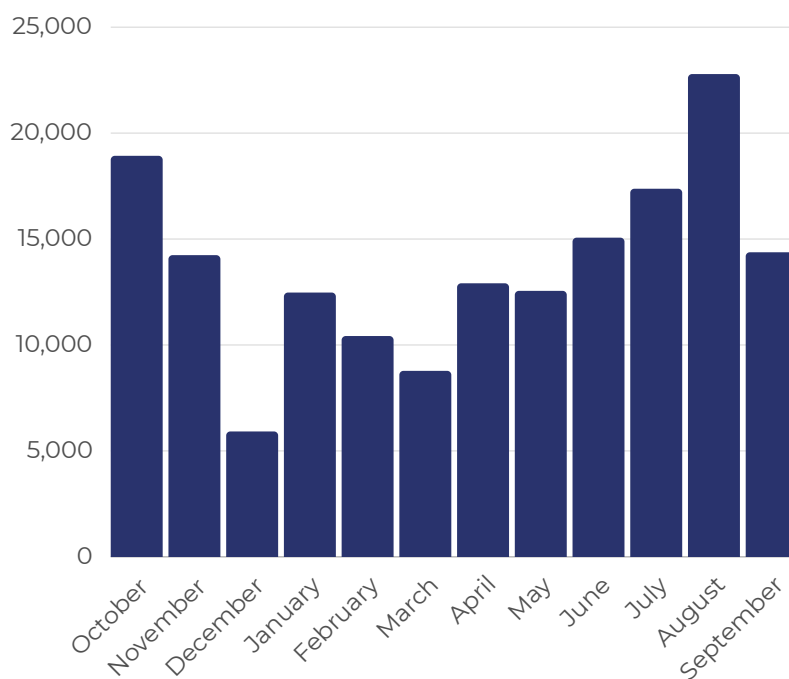
ECONOMIC IMPACT

Transient Guest Tax

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is predominately funded through Transient Guest Tax, a tax paid by travelers when staying in one of Abilene's hotels, motels, bed & breakfasts, or Airbnbs. The Kansas Department of Revenue collects this tax and passes it on to the City of Abilene. For example, fourth-quarter collections are received in January of the following year.

Collections totaled \$165,828.53 from \$2,072,856.63 in sales in 2023. This is a -2.02 decrease from 2022. In addition, the City of Abilene received \$15,546.42 in Sales Tax collections from rooms sold, and Dickinson County received \$31,092.85.

2023 Transient Guest Tax Collections

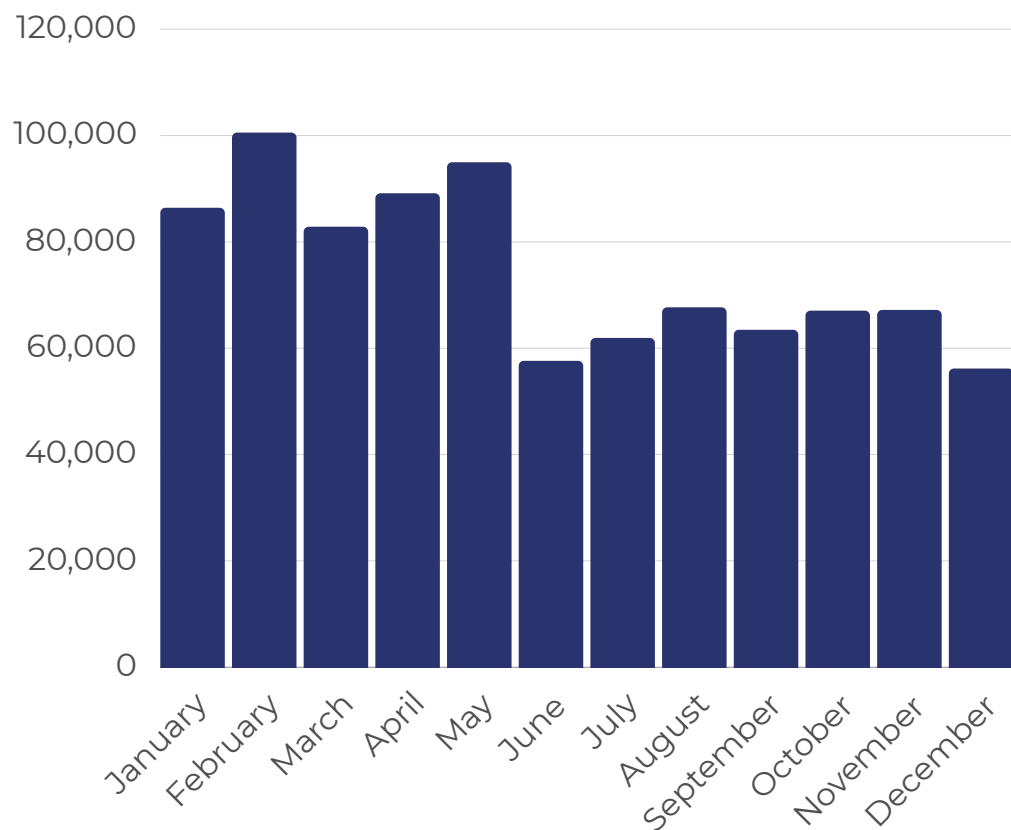




ECONOMIC IMPACT

Sales Tax

The City of Abilene's sales tax rate is 0.5%. According to the Kansas Department of Revenue, 2023 compensating use sales tax collections totaled \$895,147.22 from sales at Abilene businesses.





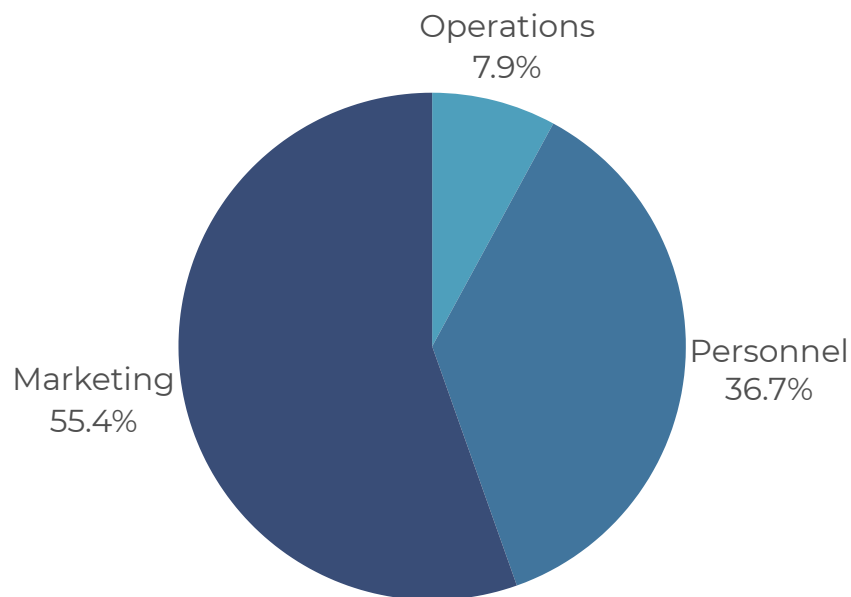
BUDGET

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau is predominately funded through Transient Guest Tax, a tax paid by travelers when staying in one of Abilene's hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts or Airbnbs. Additional revenue is generated from Civic Center rentals, gift shop sales, reimbursed advertising costs, and other initiatives.

- 2023 Cash Forward - \$96,126.00
- Revenue - \$232,727.70
- Expenses - \$286,723.26
- End of Year Balance - \$42,130.44

2023 Tourism Budget - Expenses

Note: Staff time spent creating marketing pieces in-house is listed as personnel.

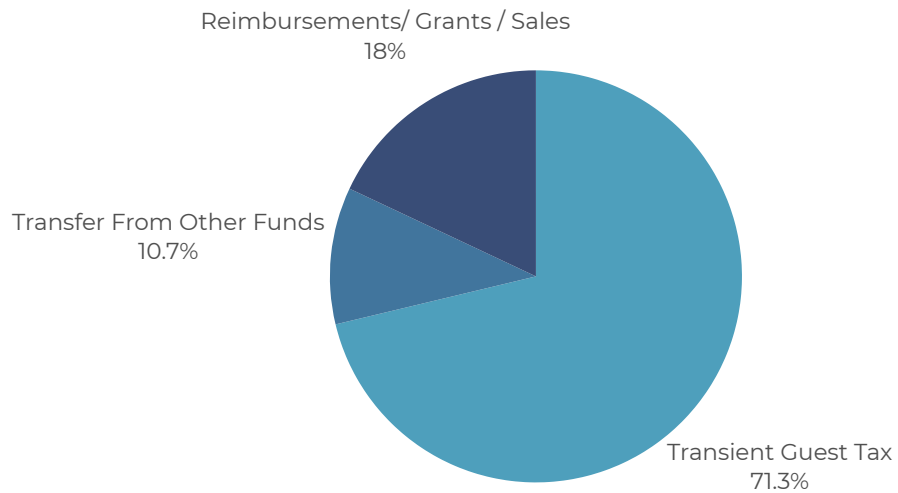




BUDGET

2023 Tourism Budget - Revenue

The CVB started 2023 with \$96,126 in cash carryover, which is not reflected in the chart below.





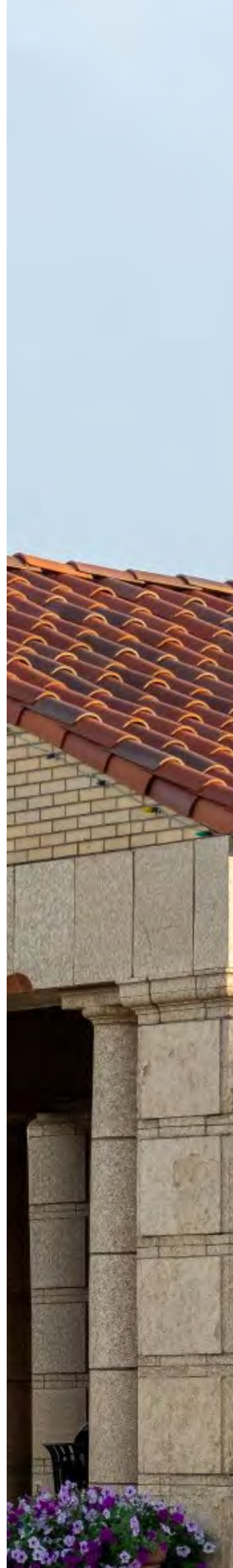
ABOUT US

Abilene CVB Staff

- Julie Roller Weeks, *director*
- Sharolyn Adams, *part-time tourism assistant*

Abilene CVB Advisory Board

- Sarah Anderson, *former Old Abilene Town board member, Oktoberfest volunteer*
- Mukul Ghosh Hajra, *Holiday Inn Express*
- Kim McDowell, *former Office Manager, Great Plains Theatre*
- Kimmy Phillips, *Last Chance Graphics*
- Samantha Pryor, *Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum*
- Elizabeth Weese, *Community Foundation of Dickinson County*





"The proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

Dwight D. Eisenhower
June 22, 1945

**ABILENE CONVENTION &
VISITORS BUREAU**

201 NW 2nd
Abilene, KS 67410
(785) 263-2231
Julie@AbileneCityHall.com
AbileneKansas.org



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