

Spencer County Visitors Bureau, Inc. 2020 Annual Report Highlights



Santa Claus
INDIANA



Lincoln's
Indiana Boyhood Home

Vision

To make Spencer County, Indiana, a leading year-round overnight destination for families.

Mission

To increase overnight visitation to Spencer County's lodging facilities by advertising and publicizing its natural, historical, and man-made attractions as a family destination.

Funding

The Spencer County Convention Recreation and Visitor Commission (SCCRVC) is funded through the Spencer County Innkeeper's Tax. The 5% tax is paid on overnight lodging at hotels, cabins, bed & breakfasts, vacation rentals, and rental RVs throughout Spencer County. The SCCRVC contracts with the nonprofit Spencer County Visitors Bureau, Inc. (SCVB) to operate the visitors bureau office and fulfill the marketing/communications initiatives that promote Spencer County as a destination.

In 2020, Spencer County Innkeeper's Tax collection totaled \$365,329. The 2020 collection is a decrease of 30% compared to 2019.

In the fall of 2020, the SCVB was eligible to apply for CARES funding through the Indiana Arts Commission and Indiana Destination Development Corporation. The SCVB received \$26,033.68 to assist with wages and office rent. In addition, the SCVB applied for and received an employee tax credit of \$14,830.00.

Tourism Grants

The SCVB continued its grant program to help jumpstart tourism events in Spencer County. \$8,000 was granted to three recipients in 2020. The tourism events granted funding include Spencer County 4-H Association New Event Grant, Corner House Bed & Breakfast New Event Grant, and Santa's TOYS New Event Grant Award. Due to the health situation of 2020, these events are tentatively planned for 2021.



Marketing

- **Digital Advertising Campaigns**

The SCVB budgeted more than \$130,000 in seasonal digital advertising campaigns to drive website traffic and destination awareness. In March, upon the state shutdown due to COVID-19, the SCVB opted not to start its ready-to-launch marketing campaign for the spring/summer season. Due to most events being canceled throughout Spencer County during the fall months, the SCVB did not implement a fall marketing campaign but instead, opted to boost organic social media content focused on outdoor recreation and safe travel.



The Christmas season was restricted by state mandates on crowd gathering sizes. The SCVB was able to help the nonprofit organization, America's Christmas Hometown, coordinate and promote safe activities such as a free fireworks display, outdoor visits with Santa, and more. The SCVB boosted organic content on social media to help promote the safe activities for regional families.

- **Indiana Tourism Resources**

The Indiana Office of Tourism Development hosts a website and produces the Indiana Travel Guide. The SCVB purchases online and print listings for every tourism business in Spencer County. Listings are valued at \$380; with a bulk purchase discount, the 2020 SCVB investment totaled \$17,400. Tourism events are also added to the state's website at no charge. In addition, the SCVB purchased two event ads in the 2020 Indiana Festival Guide.

- **Websites**

Two themed websites are used to promote Spencer County as a destination (*SantaClausInd.org* and *IndianasAbeLincoln.org*). Each website includes listings for 29 lodging properties, 49 attractions/parks, and 31 restaurants. Websites also include lodging packages, discounts/deals from tourism businesses, an interactive map to show how closely sites are located, restaurant menus, tourism events, the Bearded Blog with trip ideas, and more.

The most visited pages on both sites, excluding the homepages, were the Events and Monthly Hours pages.

In 2020, the combined pageviews for the websites reached 851,610. The Santa Claus themed site showed an increase of 6% in pageviews and the Lincoln themed site showed an outstanding 29% increase in pageviews compared to 2019.

Last year, 231,493 users visited *SantaClausInd.org*, resulting in a 5.7% increase compared to 2019. These visitors are coming from markets that include Atlanta, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Louisville. In addition, 24,938 users visited *IndianasAbeLincoln.org*, resulting in a 27% increase compared to the previous year. The top markets visitors to the Lincoln website are coming from include Indianapolis and a mixture of local areas such as Evansville, Tell City, and Jasper.



- **Destination Kiosks**

Three destination kiosks are available in Spencer County. In 2020, the kiosks were utilized in the lobby of Comfort Inn & Suites in Rockport, outside of Holiday Foods in Santa Claus, and at Santa's Lodge. The kiosks list the same information as websites plus include a photo booth.

- **Social Media**



Each destination theme (Santa Claus and Indiana's Abe) is represented on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube. In addition, the SCVB updates its profiles on LinkedIn and Trip Advisor and its listing on Google. Combined, the social platforms saw an average growth of 9.25% compared to 2019.



The Santa Claus, Indiana, Facebook page is consistently a top referring site for the *SantaClausInd.org* website.



The Bearded Blog features trip ideas, tourism business and event highlights, and promotes local tourism. Blogs are typically posted and emailed at least once a week. The Family Fun



Trip Planner is a bi-weekly e-newsletter sent to subscribers with more trip ideas, tourism features, event promotion, etc. Both consistently show above-average open and click rates.

- **Brochures & Information Resources**

Over 110,000 information pieces were professionally produced in 2020 to help visitors and potential visitors learn more about Spencer County. The SCVB produced 102,000 destination brochures to tout attractions throughout Spencer County along with lodging, restaurants, annual events, and general trip ideas.



12,500 rack cards were printed to promote Christmas events, activities, and packages throughout Spencer County. These rack cards were produced in January and distributed throughout all of 2020. In addition, 3,000 destination maps were updated and printed in 2020. Maps include a key for attractions, lodging, and restaurants. Brochures and maps are distributed to local partners, stocked at select Midwest rest areas and along interstate routes, mailed in information requests, and available at the visitor's bureau.

- **Eat Local**

In response to local restaurants forced to close or limit service to carry-out and delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions, the SCVB produced an Eat Local blog post touting area options. The blog post was shared frequently across the SCVB's social channels throughout March and April. Throughout the year, this page saw more than 1,600 pageviews. An accompanying "Eat Local" Facebook profile photo frame was also created and shared to urge support from the local community.

THANK YOU

During difficult times such as these, it's more important than ever for communities to pull together to support one another. We thank the area's restaurants for adjusting the way they normally do business and continuing to provide outstanding food and service to this area's residents. And we thank the community for doing their part to support these amazing local businesses.

- **Information Requests**

More than 2,050 information packets were mailed out in 2020. The SCVB purchases an ad for travelers to request the destination brochure in the Indiana Travel Guide (\$2,200) which includes brochure leads from the state tourism's website. In 2020, more than 1,750 requests came from the SCVB's partnership with the Indiana Destination Development Corporation.

- **Visual Assets**

The SCVB produced five videos and accompanying social media graphics featuring various partners to celebrate Travel and Tourism Week for social sharing. A behind-the-scenes video shot at the Santa Claus Land of Lights was also produced. And several Facebook Live videos were taken throughout the year, including the Christmas Fireworks video which has received more than 11,000 views. Professional seasonal photo and video shoots were put on hold for 2020 due to COVID-19/budgetary concerns.

- **Local Events Flyer**

For several years, the SCVB has budgeted and produced an Every Door Direct flyer to list fall and holiday events and mail to every Spencer County resident. Due to COVID-19, most tourism events were canceled in 2020 and this piece was not produced.

Media Relations

- **Media Assistance**

Throughout the year, the SCVB pitches story ideas, hosts media, assists with and fact checks articles, coordinates custom itineraries, and more. In 2020, the SCVB was able to host media that included Smarter Travel and INSIDER.com.

The SCVB worked closely with a team from the nationally syndicated HGTV network to film a 90-minute special in Santa Claus, Indiana. Between casting efforts, scouting logistics, and actual filming, the HGTV project was a top priority for the SCVB from March through December.

Other secured media included the Chicago Tribune, New York Daily News, NFL End Zone, Woman's Day, Insider, Budget Travel, Cincinnati Refined, Smarter Travel, Evansville Living, and more.



- **Midwest Travel Journalists Association**

As an associate member of the Midwest Travel Journalists Association, the SCVB has a relationship with many representatives of the Midwest travel industry. Typically, two media marketplaces are held each year that allow personal pitches to media for upcoming seasons. In 2020, coordinated virtual networking events took the place of in-person marketplaces. The SCVB was able to pitch socially safe travel ideas to writers throughout the Midwest, focusing on outdoor recreation and small group/family activities.

- **Local Stakeholders**

The SCVB typically hosts seasonal tourism partner meetings to help share updates and info from the visitors bureau and hear from partners. In 2020, the meetings were in person and virtual, providing a venue for updates, brainstorming, and future planning.

- **Spencer County Alliance**

The SCVB is part of the Spencer County Alliance, formed to help bring Spencer County organizations together to communicate and collaborate. As part of this alliance, the SCVB is a contributing partner in the Rural Economic Development Innovation (REDI) initiative, a grant awarded to Spencer County to help rural areas create and implement economic development plans. In addition, members of the SCVB staff and board are on the core committee of the alliance marketing group to help the county find a cohesive voice. This group will create a brand for enhanced communication and promotion of Spencer County as an excellent place to live, work, and play.

- **National Travel & Tourism Week / Visit Indiana Week**

The SCVB marked National Travel & Tourism Week and Visit Indiana Week in May with a weeklong spotlight on the area's hospitality workers. The visitors bureau used in-house resources to create three blog posts, five videos, and more than 25 graphics featuring participating partners; the content was shared across all social media channels.



Groups

- Groups ranging from motor coach trips to hobbyist retreats and family reunions are typically targeted throughout the year via trade shows and emails. SCVB coordinates special incentives, custom itineraries, etc. to help bring groups of various sizes to the destination. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on group gatherings, most group travel marketing efforts were put on hold for 2020.
- The SCVB typically attends trade shows throughout the year to network with tour operators, develop new contacts, and encourage group travel to the destination. In 2020, trade shows were mostly canceled due to COVID-19. The SCVB participated in Group Partner calls throughout the year to stay up to date with other DMOs, attraction operators, and tour operators.

Visitors Center

In the beginning of 2020, the SCVB began initial discussions with Universal Design to plan the vision for a Visitors Center in Spencer County. With visitor traffic from I-64 directed south on Highway 162, the purchased property is perfectly situated to welcome travelers to Spencer County. The intent of the potential visitors center is to provide a place for travelers to stop before visiting area attractions to learn about the many things Spencer County has to offer, to encourage a repeat trip, and to extend overnight visits. The vision for an exterior combines a rustic Lincoln look with a Bavarian Christmas vibe to provide an attractive resting stop right off the highway.

2020 Visitors Bureau Staff

- Executive Director – Melissa Arnold
- Office Manager – Julie Schnell resigned in May; Tyla Zellers started in June
- Marketing Coordinator – Karen Graybill

2020 Spencer County Convention Recreation and Visitor Commission & Spencer County Visitors Bureau, Inc. Board

- President – Dave Lovell, Lake Rudolph Campground & RV Resort
- Vice-President – Ashley Blankenbaker, Holiday World & Splashin' Safari
- Treasurer – Natalie Koch, Santa Claus Museum & Village
- Secretary – Cheyenne Knox, Lincoln State Park
- Member – Jenny Wilkerson, Corner House Bed & Breakfast
- Member – Faye Hedinger, Monkey Hollow Winery and Distillery
- Member – Nancy Kaiser, Lincoln Pioneer Village & Museum