Dear Partners,

FY 2021 was perhaps the most challenging year on record for the hospitality industry in St. Louis, and around the world. The start of the year, July 2020, was marked by optimism for the industry’s recovery as hospitality industry businesses worked within new protocols to re-open, and the nascent economic recovery showed promising signs as leisure travel began to resume. America’s Center hosted the filming of an entire season of American Ninja Warrior in The Dome in the month of July.

With the support of the Missouri Division of Tourism and a CARES Act grant to Destination Marketing Organizations in Missouri supported by Treasurer Fitzpatrick’s task force and Lt. Governor Kehoe, Explore St. Louis mounted a leisure recovery marketing campaign inviting both residents and visitors to re-Explore St. Louis responsibly. The same funding source was tapped to make public health safety enhancements to America’s Center including touchless entries, infrared cameras to scan temperatures and provision of the supplies necessary to operate during this time.

In October, St. Louis City’s Comptroller Darlene Green and the St. Louis Municipal Finance Corporation took the critical step of issuing bonds to support the joint investment with St. Louis County to expand and enhance America’s Center to compete nationally for conventions and events. St. Louis County allocated $15 million in funding to the project in advance of their later bond issue. With funds in place, a project oversight team assembled, and lead designers and engineers selected, work began on AC Next Gen at a fast pace.

By winter, optimism for travel was replaced with concern as cases rose sharply and safety protocols limited gatherings and discouraged travel. With the measures in place to keep patrons safe, including earning the coveted Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Facility Certification for sanitation, in late November America’s Center introduced Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel exhibit featuring photographic reproductions of the works of the renowned master in the America’s Ballroom. The show spanned 11 weeks, welcomed more than 15,000 visitors, and served as both a tourism catalyst and demonstration of safe operations. During the same time period, we introduced StreamStage, a hybrid meeting solution in our Ferrara Theater providing event organizers with a turn-key solution to connect stakeholders on-site, and on-line simultaneously.
With spring came declining COVID-19 case counts, new vaccines, and a steady stream of event activity at America’s Center, led by several Capital Sports volleyball tournaments approved by the City’s Public Health Director, which generated significant hotel activity for the first time in nearly a year. In April, FEMA established a mass vaccination site at The Dome administering nearly 45,000 life-saving doses over eight weeks. Other activities included NCAA Division II Wrestling, the St. Louis Auto Show, Inland Marine Expo, Monster Jam, Presbyterian Church of America, and the TransWorld’s Halloween & Attractions Show. Certainly, a highlight of the year was hosting the US Gymnastics Championship concurrently with the attendance record-breaking US Olympic Trials – Gymnastics.

Tourism and event activity was further buoyed by a grant awarded in January 2021 by the US Economic Development Agency (EDA) made possible by the support of several Partners including Lodging Hospitality Management (LHM), the Saint Louis Zoo, Six Flags St. Louis, Saint Louis Science Center, and the Gateway Arch National Park. The grant enabled a spring and summer 2021 campaign of broadcast and digital advertising in key feeder markets, and additional supplies and equipment to support safe operations at America’s Center.

In closing, I want to personally thank each and every one of you for all the support, friendship and collaboration you demonstrated during this crisis. Working together as we have this past year, St. Louis is poised for the exciting and vibrant hospitality future that you all deserve.

Best,

Kathleen M. Ratcliffe, President
WITH ADVERTISING FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE MISSOURI DIVISION OF TOURISM CARES ACT FUNDS AND A GRANT FROM THE EDA, A STRONG AND ONGOING MEDIA PRESENCE HAS BEEN IN PLACE IN TARGET MARKETS TO PROMOTE ST. LOUIS.

Seasonal Marketing Campaigns

Re-Explore St. Louis Responsibly – Summer/Fall FY21
As St. Louis City and County began re-opening businesses during late spring/early summer of 2020, an integrated advertising campaign was introduced that featured digital and social media, spot radio advertising and outdoor billboards to generate demand for leisure experiences available throughout the region. Digital ads served to browsers within a drive market radius of 300 miles highlighted the health safety protocols in place at attractions, restaurants and venues encouraging guests to re-Explore St. Louis Responsibly.

St. Louis Holiday Adventure Campaign – Holidays FY21
To create awareness of all the holiday offerings available to visitors and residents throughout the region and stimulate hotel bookings, a comprehensive content feature was displayed on explorestlouis.com. The “St. Louis Holiday Lights” roundup blog became the most visited page on the website. Digital marketing appeared in St. Louis and surrounding markets within a 200-mile radius using animated Facebook ads and Google keyword display ads to drive traffic to the landing page, which included hotel offers from around the region.

St. Louis Winter Classics – Winter FY21
After the holidays, the content team pivoted to Winter Classics, a landing page featuring indoor and outdoor winter activities and special hotel offers. A digital marketing campaign was also implemented using a combination of animated social media ads and Google products to maintain traffic during the challenging winter months.

Leisure Marketing Recovery Campaign – Spring FY21
A campaign consisting of TV and digital advertising commenced in the spring of FY21 and ran in key feeder markets through the calendar year to help facilitate the tourism industry’s recovery.
Commercials feature St. Louis celebrities including Sterling K. Brown, Jenna Fischer, John Goodman, Ozzie Smith and others speaking from their hearts about St. Louis attractions, food, music, culture and more. The multi-media campaign, which was made possible by an EDA grant and five St. Louis investment partners generated impressive increases in web traffic and leisure activity throughout the community. In June, an over-the-top (OTT) media component was added which allowed streaming of our commercials on more than 800 connected TV networks in feeder markets throughout the Midwest. In addition, our Chicago TV flight commenced mid-June and continued into FY22.

Meeting & Convention Marketing

Welcome to the Future of Meetings
To generate excitement around the improvements and enhancements taking place at America’s Center, an advertising campaign highlighting health safety measures such as touchless entry, enhanced ventilation and air filtration, GBAC STAR Facility Accreditation and Hybrid Meeting Broadcast Stage was launched last fall. The campaign appeared in industry outlets such as PCMA’s Convene, ASAE’s Associations Now, and MPI’s The Meeting Professional, among several others.

An application was approved by MDT to utilize co-op funds to support a winter/spring flight of digital and display advertising in national meeting/convention outlets. The goal of the flight was to build awareness of the AC Next Gen project using the creative assets developed and deployed during the final quarter of 2020. The campaign ran from February through June appearing in many of the same industry outlets listed above.

Explore St. Louis Virtual Holiday Event – Cookies and Cocktails
To share the holiday spirit with Meeting Professionals and Partners in a virtual environment, Explore St. Louis teamed up with Levy Restaurants and local restaurant, Blood & Sand for two StreamStage events in December featuring cookies and cocktails. The recipes for all the tasty treats demonstrated were posted online, along with a recording of the step-by-step instructions, and used as a holiday e-greeting from Explore St. Louis.

Public Relations
During FY21, Explore St. Louis secured $2.4 million of earned media coverage, over 19 million impressions and worked with over 40 outlets.

St. Louis was featured in several national consumer and meeting trade outlets including The Daily Beast, Reader's Digest, Fodor's, Meetings Today and Meetings & Conventions. Our national PR Partner, helped to identify and host journalists from leading outlets in order to tell our story. Resulting from these efforts, St. Louis was named a Top Spring Break Destination for Adults. In addition, we’ve had considerable coverage in the St. Louis region through our local PR outreach. Throughout the year, we’ve had positive broadcast coverage on Fox 2, KMOV, KSDK and KMOX, and print coverage in the St. Business Journal. These placements were mostly centered on the recovery of the hospitality industry, and event activity at America’s Center. For National Travel & Tourism Week from May 3-7, we partnered with Fox 2 and Tim Ezell and featured the 5 partners that were instrumental in securing the EDA grant.
Securing Convention Commitments
The year began with the tepid recovery from the abrupt stalling of event activity and associated future demand resulting from the pandemic and its unprecedented impact on meetings and conventions, both here in St. Louis and around the world. The rescheduling of previously postponed events resulted in a positive impact in the short term as our team worked with event organizers, hotel partners and America's Center operations to secure new dates to preserve as much contracted business as possible.

Sales team deployment has mirrored demand with each team member conducting a comprehensive review of their existing account base and setting action plans to uncover potential to impact pace gaps, and mining new customers for AC Next Gen, the expansion and enhancement of America's Center. The team analyzed a host of factors in creating a new and enhanced deployment structure including:

- Meetings and events matching the physical characteristics of AC Next Gen
- Booking windows and lead volume by peak night
- Vertical markets vs. geographical alignment
- Pace needs of both America’s Center and hotel partners

Implementing New CRM
A primary task for the team during the year was to fully transition to SimpleView, and VenueOps, allowing us to effectively expand research, track potential, and evaluate business potential through an integrated database. Additionally, the sales reach was expanded with the integration of MINT+ citywide database through Destinations International and reenlisting the Knowland reader board service. Using these tools and other prospecting methods, each sales manager prepared detailed action plans designed to impact their individual territories in a proactive and strategic fashion.

Improving Business Review Process
A critical analysis of our business review process including license agreements was conducted resulting in an enhanced and streamlined workflow critical to responding nimbly to customer inquiries. A key change in our business review process was embracing the concept of yield management with the emphasis on “total revenue contribution” understanding there are many ways an event may benefit the St. Louis hospitality community and America's Center. Our “ONE TEAM” approach by incorporating Meet St. Louis as part of the sales team allows us to provide a single solutions-based source for everything St. Louis offers to our customer base. Additionally, expanding customer centric resources such as Orchid & Event Connect group housing provide both customers and hotel partner services that enhance the event experience.

Meeting Responsibly
Our Meet St. Louis staff was responsible for ensuring the successful communication and coordination of health safety protocols in collaboration with event organizers, Explore St. Louis Partners and the America’s Center Event Management team. Detailed public health protocols were included in pre-event promotion and communications to reassure attendees of the measures in place for their safety. Maintaining strong customer relationships, in collaboration with our partners, was crucial to earning the trust of organizers during this challenging time.
THE AMERICA’S CENTER TEAM implemented a host of health safety measures to enable event activity to carry on during the pandemic including:

- Enhanced HVAC air filtration and ionization
- Touchless entries to reduce contact
- Infrared cameras to scan temperatures
- Introduction of StreamStage, a hybrid meeting solution created with Encore and SmartCity
- Earned Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Facility Accreditation for cleaning
- Purchased new cleaning and disinfecting supplies and equipment
- Installed touchless fixtures in bathrooms throughout the complex
- Posted health safety signs reinforcing distancing, hand washing and mask wearing

The senior event management team conferred regularly with the St. Louis City Department of Public Health and worked with the clients to develop and submit comprehensive event plans balancing customer needs with health safety imperatives. The Operations and Security teams conducted on-going preventative maintenance and secured the complex 24/7.

Planning for the Future
The America’s Center expansion project known as AC Next Gen is a joint investment of $210 million in the region’s future by St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The project will ensure St. Louis’ competitive position nationally in attracting world class conventions and events to our region and supporting the jobs of thousands of St. Louisans.

In collaboration with the Board of Public Service of St. Louis City, a lead architect and project management team was assembled in 2020, and work began on the project with scheduled completion in late 2023. The renowned Fentress Architects firm was selected to lead a host of specialized designers and engineers, and St. Louis-based KWAME Building Groups was tapped for project and construction management. The team worked at a rapid pace throughout the fiscal year often meeting 2-3 times daily totaling hundreds of hours devoted to creating a design that integrates seamlessly with the neighborhood while providing event organizers the amenities they require.
### America's Center FY2021 Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Ninja Warrior</td>
<td>June 30-July 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entire season competition filming</td>
<td>January 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legacy Dance Championships St. Louis Regional Competition</td>
<td>July 16-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel Exhibit</td>
<td>November 6-January 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore St. Louis’ Annual Meeting</td>
<td>November 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dennis Lafata Gateway Classic Volleyball Tournament</td>
<td>February 5-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSMAI Missouri</td>
<td>February 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidents Weekend Volleyball Tournament</td>
<td>February 13-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Louis Classic Gymnastics Invitational</td>
<td>February 18-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCAA Division II Wrestling</td>
<td>March 12-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of St. Louis Vaccination Event</td>
<td>March 19-22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nike Mid-East Volleyball Qualifier</td>
<td>March 26-28</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of St. Louis Vaccination Event</td>
<td>April 2-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBMC Prayer Breakfast</td>
<td>April 6-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMA Community Vaccination Center</td>
<td>April 6-June 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Meetings Industry Day</td>
<td>April 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Louis Auto Show</td>
<td>April 8-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>City of St. Louis Vaccination Event</td>
<td>April 15-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adidas Windy City National Qualifier</td>
<td>April 23-25</td>
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<td>Oddities &amp; Curiosities Expo</td>
<td>April 30-May 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marian Magic</td>
<td>May 1</td>
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<td>TransWorld’s Tradeshows</td>
<td>May 5-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Precision Dance Art</td>
<td>May 5-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monster Jam</td>
<td>May 15-16</td>
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<td>Inland Marine Expo</td>
<td>May 24-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department Sergeant Interviews</td>
<td>May 25-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri Bridal Show</td>
<td>June 12-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA Gymnastics Championships</td>
<td>June 21-27</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Gymnastics</td>
<td>June 24-27</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA Gymnastics National Congress</td>
<td>June 25-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church in America</td>
<td>June 28-July 2</td>
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</table>
leisure travel sales

The Leisure Travel Sales (LTS) Department is responsible for the group tour market both domestic and international, family reunions, group leaders, bank clubs, LGBTQ and the wedding market. Participation at the following virtual conferences: American Bus Association, National Tour Association, Student & Youth Travel Association, Travel South USA – virtual sales mission – Australia & New Zealand and Brand USA’s Global Marketplace Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. The LTS department met with over 150 travel planners during this year of virtual appointments. We also participated in NTA’s CONTACT in person and met with over 20 tour planners. Hosting a very successful Travel South International Showcase in December 2019 gave us the entree for one-on-one contact with a list of the largest international tour product managers to prepare for a strong return of the international market to St. Louis.

Film Office
The St. Louis Film Office assisted over 70 productions ranging from short films and documentaries to reality TV Shows with finding locations, securing necessary permits and general filming information. The Film Office worked with the team at America’s Center to bring American Ninja Warrior (ANW) to film their season at The Dome at America’s Center in July 2020. The Film Office also participated in several virtual networking events with the Missouri Film Office and Missouri Motion Media Association. In collaboration with several local production companies and other Missouri film offices, we established COVID safety protocols for film productions in Missouri. We attended the Independent Film Maker project week virtual event, with the Missouri & Kansas City Film offices.

visitor services

VISITOR SERVICES BEGAN THE FISCAL YEAR BY RESUMING IN-PERSON OPERATIONS AT THE GATEWAY ARCH AND ST. LOUIS UNION STATION VISITOR CENTERS. Throughout the year, we continued to provide assistance and assurances to travelers through the phones and website and began to see visitation gradually grow at our two operating Visitor Centers.

In Spring 2021, we reopened the Restaurant Concierge booth in time for NCAA Wrestling and resumed convention volunteer team service for TransWorld and Inland Marine Expo. Airport Visitor Centers in both terminals reopened by Memorial Day. And, in June, full welcome program staffing was engaged for USA Gymnastics and Presbyterian Church in America. In total, our staff and volunteers served 143,547 visitors at area Visitors Centers, America’s Center and St. Louis Lambert International Airport in the midst of the pandemic!

Throughout FY21, we kept our volunteers and Visitor Services staff involved through virtual programming. We developed a monthly series of programs including Ranger Talks with the National Park Service and Gateway Arch Park Foundation, plus offered a Holiday Historic Homes Tour, a Valentine’s Cooking Demonstration, an Earth Day Program in partnership with Missouri Botanical Garden, and Happy Hour fun with Zoom Bingo and Virtual Trivia.

In addition, Visitor Services led an effort locally to celebrate and commemorate Missouri’s Bicentennial. With the Missouri Bicentennial Commission and tourism partners, we developed a series of Missouri Explorer Challenges.

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COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION with partners remained a priority as we hosted over 25 partner webinars and events totaling over 1,500 minutes of hybrid/virtual content. These efforts assisted in welcoming 80 new partners and maintaining a high, 93%, partner retention rate among our total of 922 partner businesses and organizations.

Partner Connections
Evolving from last year’s weekly format to monthly updates, our partner connection webinars continued to include a regular update on sales and marketing efforts. Panels and updates from our partnership continued, as well as, special guest experts from nationally recognized companies and organizations within our industry. Some examples include Barnes & Thornburg LLP advising on legal issues with events during the pandemic, CBRE providing forecasts and travel data, the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis predicting the economic recovery of our industry and region as well as the US Travel Association sharing tools from their “Let’s Go There” campaign.

Working Groups – Road to Recovery
Explore St. Louis continues to gain positive feedback from our previously assembled group of industry leaders on the changing developments of the pandemic. These groups included leaders in hotels, restaurants, attractions, venues, transportation services, and retail operations.

Partner Holiday Celebration
Partners were treated to a virtual holiday celebration from the StreamStage at the America’s Center entitled “Cookies & Cocktails.” Levy Restaurants demonstrated delicious holiday cookie recipes while Blood & Sand provide a wonderful mixology lesson for the holidays. Partners were provided with the recipes to try at home with their families and engaged in an online trivia contest to win tickets to local holiday attractions.

Global Meeting Industry Day
Explore St. Louis again collaborated with Maritz Global Events and the St. Louis Chapter of MPI in recognition of Global Meetings Industry Day. This hybrid event was a panel discussion broadcast live from the StreamStage at America’s Center designed to celebrate our industry, share insights on how to press forward with hosting and planning events. The event was held on Thursday, April 8th, with over 200 participants in-person and virtually.

Partner Extranet Debut & Training
Following the transition to our new technology solution with Simpleview CRM & VenueOps, Explore St. Louis debuted a new Partner Extranet in May 2021. This new and improved portal allows direct access to key partnership benefits including responding to leads, accessing marketing tools, viewing important industry and event reports and more. Over 350 partners participated in a total of 8 sessions held during May 17th through May 21st.
Explore St. Louis
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www.explorestlouis.com

Explore St. Louis is the driving force behind St. Louis’ $5.8 billion convention and tourism industry. Explore St. Louis also operates the America’s Center Convention Complex and The Dome at America’s Center.