



# Annual Report

## Fiscal Year 2020



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

As a hotel general manager, I joined the CBCVB board in early 2015 and completed my second year as board president on August 26, 2020. I'm pleased to report that the work of the board and staff collectively over the last six years has been award-winning.

On March 3, 2020, Council Bluffs received the outstanding community and outstanding website awards from the Iowa Tourism Office. This was the second time in two-and-a-half years CB has been honored with these awards. In fact, the Iowa Tourism Office has recognized the CBCVB for outstanding work six times since the bureau separated from the chamber in 2014.

Our goal has always been to deliver value to the City of Council Bluffs that meets or exceeds the investment made in the bureau's efforts. We will never stop promoting CB's travel economy for the benefit of local businesses, local government, and all local residents.



Bill Vanderpool  
BOARD PRESIDENT

## 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

**SAM STIVERS/MARK SHOEMAKER**  
POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

## our staff

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
**MARK ECKMAN**

DIRECTOR OF SALES  
**ALICIA FRIEZE**

SENIOR CONTENT MANAGER  
**EMMA SCHWALLER**



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## A word from the executive director...

What a year! The fiscal year started with the ongoing Missouri River flooding and ended in the midst of a pandemic. Both made a huge impact on Council Bluffs and its travel economy.

It all began with the community hosting RAGBRAI in July 2019. Hotel business started to recover from the floods with occupancy increasing each month, year-over-year, from July 2019 through February 2020. Regretfully, that came to a hard stop in March due to COVID-19.

The Council Bluffs CVB took decisive steps to join local government, businesses, and other organizations to address COVID's impact on public health and local businesses. Those steps included alert messages on UNleashCB.com reflecting business closures and revised operations, blogs detailing health resources like Test Iowa, and updates on the latest event postponements and cancellations.

Those reactive measures gave way to proactive ones when an advertising initiative launched. Digital marketing began in April focusing on restaurants. A robust promotion of hotels and attractions commenced in mid-June as travel restrictions began to lift.

Last fall, we received some good news. The U.S. Travel Association released its annual economic impact of travel in Iowa counties for 2018. Travel expenditures in Pottawattamie County increased 6.95 percent for a total of \$334.69 million. That was almost double the increase realized in 2017.

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



Mark Eckman  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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# awards

At the beginning of March, the 2020 Iowa Tourism Conference was held in downtown Des Moines featuring the annual awards luncheon. The CBCVB submitted three award nominations winning honors for outstanding community and outstanding website. The community accolade recognized the purchase of a new office, creation of a visitor center, sales achievements, digital media accomplishments, among other work. The website distinction cited the dramatic increase in analytics as well as overall design and function of UNleashCB.com.



# quarterly achievements

## First Quarter: July - September 2019

- un Helped lead the RAGBRAI efforts of the Hospitality, Publicity, and Web & Social media committees, supported the Long-Term Parking and Sponsorship committees, sponsored CB's RAGBRAI website, and managed its social media outlets as Council Bluffs hosted the bicycle ride for the seventh time.
- un **Saw hotel occupancy increase**, year-over-year, **July 2019 thru February 2020**. Recovered nearly all hotel/motel taxes lost due to flooding March thru June 2019.
- un Engaged Hamilton Associates to conduct an audit of the FY 19 financials which revealed no major issues with the CBCVB's practices.
- un Settled into the new office and visitor center after relocating there in June 2019. Acquired brochure displays and other furnishings to make the space fully functional.
- un Landed another **\$50,000 Sports Authority grant** from the Iowa Tourism Office, receiving one of ten such grants funded statewide, the 12th such grant since FY 08.
- un Continued partnering with the Union Pacific Railroad Museum, The 712 Initiative, PACE, 100 Block, and Iowa West Foundation to celebrate the transcontinental railroad 150th anniversary thru the end of 2019.

## Second Quarter: October - December 2019

- un Learned that **travel expenditures in Pottawattamie County increased by 6.95 percent to \$334.69 million in 2018** according to the US Travel Association, the seventh highest in the state. This was higher than the state average of 5.8 percent.
- un Hired Emma Schwaller in December 2019 as the new senior content manager. She replaced Ashley English who relocated due to her husband's job.
- un **Supported the creation of ten 15-second videos** thru the Image Campaign. Hosted the videos on UNleashCB.com and pushed them out on social media.
- un Renewed a bi-weekly column in the Sunday edition of The Daily Nonpareil with a new title, "Exploring Home," which highlights area events, activities, and amenities.
- un Replaced a healthcare allowance with standard benefits for staff members including health, dental, short & long-term disability, and life insurance coverages.
- un **Invested in a major redesign of UNleashCB.com** to improve its appearance and function for both locals and visitors. Enhanced its ability to serve as a community calendar for both Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County.



## Third Quarter: January-March 2020

- un Created nearly **1.2 million impressions on social media**, a 10 percent increase over the prior year. Recruited 1,067 more social media followers.
- un Assisted Visit Omaha and Iowa Group Travel Association to host the largest motorcoach marketplace, American Bus Association, in Omaha. The event allowed us to **showcase CB to 16 out-of-state travel planners** on a familiarization tour.
- un Produced two video testimonials to persuade residents to attract meetings and tournaments here as part of the “Bring It to CB” backyard marketing campaign.
- un Honored by the Iowa Tourism Office with the **Outstanding Website** and **Outstanding Community** awards for the second time in two-and-a-half years. Council Bluffs has been recognized with six tourism awards since 2014.
- un Participated in the weekly Pottawattamie County EOC COVID-19 Response Task Force briefing for 17 weeks and provided a report at those meetings.



UNleashCB.com Homepage



One of the Ten UNcover Videos

## Fourth Quarter: April - June 2020

- un Surveyed CB hotels to estimate **lost business due to COVID**. More than **\$3.6 million** was reported with the loss of the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting, College World Series, US Olympic Swim Trials, among others.
- un Responded immediately to COVID with daily updates on restaurants, hotels, attractions, events, and other businesses on UNleashCB.com. Published 46 COVID blogs covering support for small businesses, outdoor recreation options, best practices attending in-person events, Test Iowa, and pandemic resources.
- un Deployed eBlasts and banner ads in April promoting Council Bluffs restaurants.
- un Grew the usage of UNleashCB.com by year's end resulting in a double-digit surge. **Page views, unique users, and sessions increased by 19, 32, and 24 percent, respectively, in FY 20 compared to the prior year.**
- un Developed an aggressive campaign to spur locals to plan staycations here and appeal to travelers to make CB a getaway destination. It employed digital advertising thru Google AdWords, display ads, eBlasts, and social media to reach target audiences to grow hotel business and hotel/motel tax receipts.

# sales: meetings & sporting events

## Meetings & Conventions

	Events	Attendees	Economic Impact
<b>FY 20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12,168</b>	<b>\$1.7 million</b>
FY 19	19	12,192	\$5.04 million
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



Bring It To CB Testimonial Video

## FY 20 sales efforts

**185 unique prospects**

**48 accommodation leads**

**10 venue leads**

## Sporting Events

	Events	Attendees	Economic Impact
<b>FY 20</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>68,406</b>	<b>\$9.7 million</b>
FY 19	16	45,672	\$22.3 million
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

## examples of wins in FY 20 include:

 IA Ass'n of County Conservation Bd Annual Conference

 Next four years renewed for NJCAA

 Next two years renewed for CREATE

 RABGRAI

## City of Council Bluffs Hotel/Motel Tax Receipts

<b>FY 19</b>	<b>2,512,319</b>
FY 18	2,770,278
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

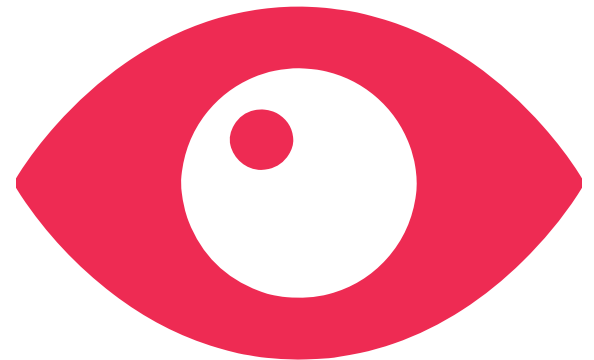
FY 20 began with an ambitious upgrade to UNleashCB.com. Ten 15-second videos became a new feature. More fresh content came in the form of 117 blogs. That's 37 more than FY 19 or a 46 percent increase. Despite issues with COVID, 1,081 events were submitted (only 124 less than FY 19). By year end, web usage still surged by double-digits in page views, unique users, and sessions - 19, 32, and 24 percent, respectively.



**1,081** events  
added to website  
calendar

## most viewed FY 20 blogs:

- [Stir Concert Cove Calendar](#)
- [Your Guide to CB RAGBRAI](#)
- [UNleash the Taco Ride!](#)



nearly **1.2 million**  
impressions on  
social media  
a 10.3% rise from FY 19

## Social Media Clicks to Website



## Website Usage Comparison

	FY 16	FY 17	FY 18	FY 19	<b>FY 20</b>	Change (from FY 19)
Sessions	33,716	48,217	59,421	120,292	<b>148,907</b>	28,615 — Up 24%
Users	27,717	39,326	49,322	90,059	<b>118,685</b>	28,626 — Up 32%
Page Views	67,541	104,089	148,810	239,282	<b>283,864</b>	44,582 — Up 19%
Pages/Sessions	2	2.01	2.50	1.99	<b>1.92</b>	-0.07 — Down 3.5%
Avg. Session	1:28 min.	1:42 min.	1:42 min.	1:29 min.	<b>1:27 min.</b>	-2 sec — Down 1.5%

UNleashCB.com went live in May 2017

# COVID-19 response

As soon as COVID-19 hit in Iowa, we knew that it was our responsibility to keep both residents and visitors up to date with what was happening in Council Bluffs. We immediately consulted with our web developers and were able to implement alert messages on our website to inform web users of closures, safety measures, and event cancellations or postponements. We also began writing blogs to help keep web users not only informed, but entertained during the extremely uncertain times.

 **hotels lost more than \$3.6 million in business**



**un** **Two meetings were lost due to COVID-19** with an average daily attendance of 1,644 and an economic impact of \$1,035,720. **Thirteen sporting events were lost** with an average daily attendance of 33,070 and an economic impact of \$20,968,937.



## examples of COVID-19 blogs include:

- COVID-19 Information and Resources
- Crush the Curve: Test Iowa Initiative
- How to Help Small Businesses During the COVID-19 Crisis
- Best Practices For Attending In-Person Events
- Looking for Carryout, Delivery, or Drive-Thru in CB?

## Marketing Initiative

- **Staycations** for locals
- **Reunions** for locals with out-of-town family or friends
- **Getaways** for travelers within a two to three-hour radius

Marketing implemented through eBlasts and banner ads thru the Daily Nonpareil, weekly promotions through the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce's Member to Member e-newsletter, out of state advertising, and Google AdWords.

