



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Abilene Convention  
& Visitors Bureau







# 2022 RECAP

It's a great day in Abilene!

Abilene rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic in a big way in 2022. This year was a year of chasing every opportunity and maximizing it to its fullest. Thankfully, it yielded big rewards ranging from recognition in multiple national media outlets to special events, grants and asset development projects. I could not be more proud of our organization's continued growth and achievements this year.

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

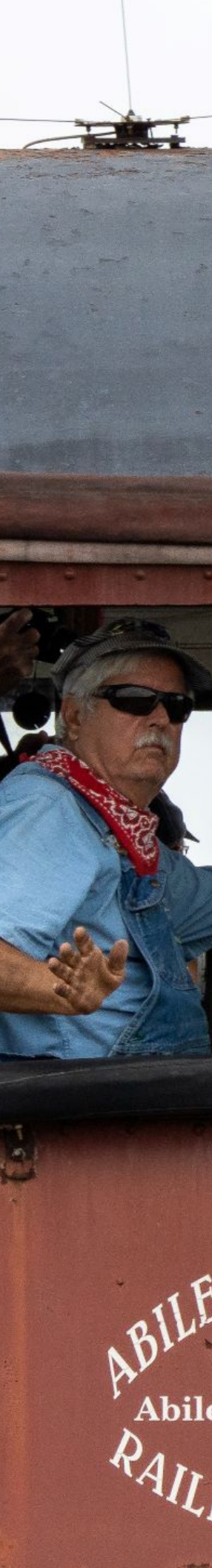
We also showcase new and continuing projects, grants, partnerships, visitation and the economic impact of tourism in Abilene.

We look forward to building upon this foundation in 2023.

#AbileneProud

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Roller Weeks".

Julie Roller Weeks, director  
Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau





# 2022

## SUMMARY

This year Abilene celebrated big wins and big projects!

- Destination of the Year by Midwest Travel Network (2022)
- Best Historic Small Town by USA TODAY (2022)
- #1 Favorite U.S. Small Town by TravelAwaits (2022)
- #1 Friendliest U.S. Small Town by TravelAwaits (2022)
- Best Promotion of a Historic Place by TrueWest Magazine (2022)
- Abilene Visitors Guide – Award of Distinction by the Communicator Awards
- Destination (Community) Awareness Campaign Award for the Medium Community Marketing Budget category - TIAK. Other communities in the Medium Community Marketing Budget Category include Emporia, Manhattan and Meriam.
- Hosted the Kansas Media Event
- Received more than \$100,000 in grants for asset development and marketing initiatives.





# 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](http://AbileneKansas.org/news)



HORSE IN A SMALL BAR IN DOWNTOWN ABILENE, KS (PHOTO CREDIT: SAGE SCOTT)

## 1. Abilene, Kansas (Winner)

For the second year running, [Abilene](#) has taken the top spot in our annual Best Of Travel Awards ([view the full list of winners and finalists from last year here!](#))! Cowboy roots run deep in Abilene; cattle drives along the Chisholm Trail would end in town with cattle being sold and boarding trains bound for the East. The pockets of these early cowboys didn't stay full for long, as they spent their hard-earned money on their vices of choice. Experience some of this rich history at [Old Abilene Town](#), or climb on board an old-fashioned steam-powered locomotive for a memorable trip. The Wild West is still alive and well in central Kansas.

- Best Historic Small Town by USA TODAY (2022)
- #1 Favorite U.S. Small Town by TravelAwaits (2022)
- #1 Friendliest U.S. Small Town by TravelAwaits (2022)
- Best Promotion of a Historic Place by TrueWest Magazine (2022)
- 10 Small Towns with Big Midwestern Charm - Best Life Online
- The 7 Best Steam Train Trips in the U.S. - Saturday Evening Post
- 20 Top Things to Do in Kansas - Midwest Living



# 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.

**Bonus:** The League of Kansas Municipalities featured Abilene as a Community Profile in both print and video.





# PROMOTION PAID

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

## 2022 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.

Additionally, an online guide is available for download on [TravelKS.com](http://TravelKS.com).

- True West Magazine
- KANSAS! Magazine and Travel Kansas publications
- Abilene event ads (Abilene Downtown Antique Fest, Meadowlark Swap Meet, Holm Automotive Car Show, and Cowtown Christmas)
- Cowtown Christmas event promotion radio ads
- Destinations Magazine – The CVB partnered with Tour Kansas on a coop ad in Destinations Magazine marketing Abilene as a group tour destination.
- Great Plains Theatre and Kansas City Ballet/Theatre – Playbill Ads





# 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 boards.



In 2022, the Abilene CVB repaired its two largest boards north of Golden Belt Heights and two additional boards in western Kansas.

According to 2021 data from the Kansas Department of Transportation, the daily traffic count for these locations ranges from 15,000 - 22,000 vehicles.

### Visitors Guide

In 2021, the Abilene CVB launched a brand-new two-year visitors guide that reflects its updated branding and includes new professional photos. Listings in the guide are at no cost to Abilene businesses and attractions.

The visitors guide is also available digitally on the CVB's website [AbileneKansas.org/visitorsguide](http://AbileneKansas.org/visitorsguide).







# PROMOTION

## PAID

### Brochure Distribution

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau contracts with Certified Folder and Central Brochure Distribution to place the Abilene Visitors Guide in more than 250 distribution racks in hotels, restaurants, and gas stations. The brochure is also available in Kansas' two welcome centers (Belle Plaine and Goodland) and other state-designated Travel Information Centers throughout Kansas.





# 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](http://AbileneKansas.org/newsletter).



## 2022 Abilene Tourism Advocate

2022 editions sent: 32	Individual sends: 196,570
Total unique opens: 47,839	Total link clicks: 3,553

## Brochure Requests

The Abilene CVB mails information about Abilene to anyone requesting information. In 2022, the CVB received more than 250 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 650 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](https://AbileneKansas.org/travel-updates), provides visitors with the necessary information to help them plan their trips.

## January 1 - December 31, 2022, Analytics

- Users: 76,927
- New Users: 76,293
- Sessions: 95,260
- Number of Sessions per User: 1.24
- Pageviews: 312,425
- Pages/Session: 3.28

Of note, website users continued to increase from 2021.

## Top cities where website visitors are located:

1. Kansas City
2. Chicago, IL
3. Abilene, KS
4. Dallas, TX
5. Salina, KS
6. Wichita, KS
7. Denver, CO
8. Topeka, KS
9. Manhattan, KS
10. Ashburn, VA



# PROMOTION

## OWNED

### Blog

The CVB utilizes its blog to share unique stories about Abilene. In 2022, the CVB wrote 45 blog posts. These stories are shared on the website, social media, Abilene Tourism Advocate e-newsletter, and with the Abilene Reflector-Chronicle.

Top blogs include:

- 5 Ways to Celebrate Kansas Day in Abilene in 2022 (January 26, 2022)
- Calling All Quilt Lovers (February 2, 2022)
- 5 Bus-Friendly Stops You Must Visit (February 23, 2022)
- 10 Springs Events You Won't Want to Miss! (March 1, 2022)
- Explore Ike Sites in Abilene! (May 18, 2022)
- Abilene's Cowboy Art Trail - (July 21, 2022)
- 5 Weekend Events to Add to Your Calendar in 2022
- Two Sisters, Two Brothers, and One Spectacular Mansion (August 29, 2022)
- 5 Answers to Your Questions About Legacy Kansas: Munson's Prime & Brookville Hotel (August 29, 2022)
- 10 Reasons Why Abilene Feels Like The Wild West (September 20, 2022)
- Abilene Kicks Off Holiday Season with a Cowtown Christmas (November 28, 2022)
- 5 Things to Do at an Old Fashioned Christmas (November 28, 2022)
- Recharge in Abilene, Literally! (December 14, 2022)
- 50 Things to Make Your Visit to Abilene THRIVE! (December 28, 2022)

Read these stories at [AbileneKansas.org/blog](https://AbileneKansas.org/blog).





# PROMOTION

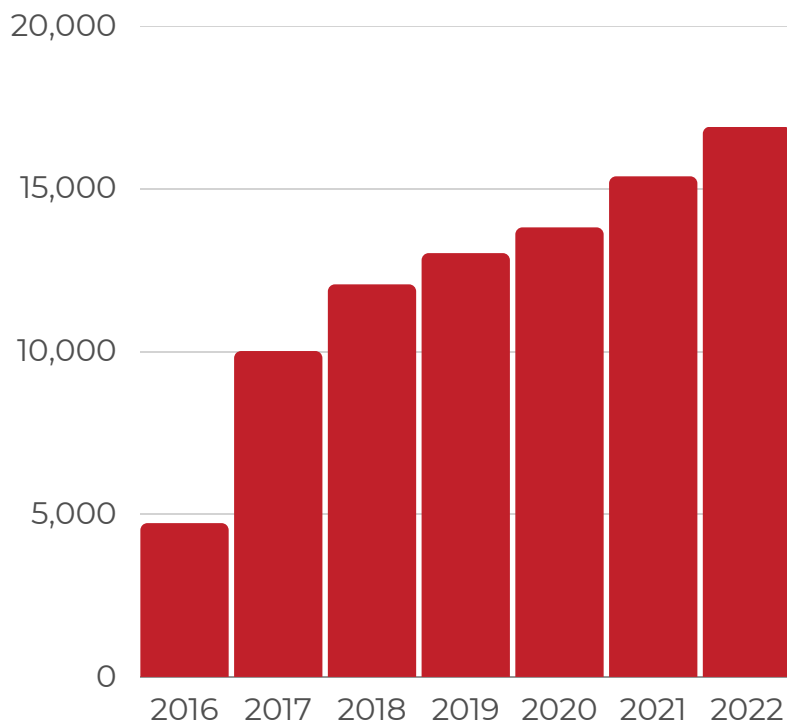
## SHARED

### 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 @AbileneKansas and Twitter @VisitAbilene. Videos are also shared on the @VisitAbilene YouTube Channel.



# PROMOTION

## SHARED

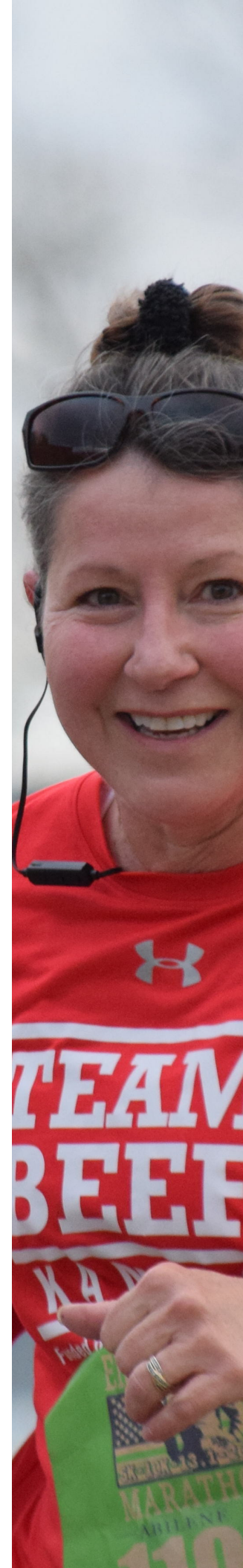


### Videos

Abilene CVB continues to create short videos to reach new audiences on social media.

- 10 Springs Events You Won't Want to Miss!
- Shop for Treasurers in Abilene!
- 2022 Central Kansas Free Fair & Wild Bill Hickok Rodeo
- Kansas Media Event
- 2022 Pink Friday
- 2022 Cowtown Christmas
- 2022 Homes for the Holidays Tour
- It's Christmas and we're all in Kansas, not misery!
- World's Largest Belt Buckle
- World's Largest Belt Buckle Unveiling

Watch 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 President of the Association in 2022) – 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 Abilene CVB hosted travel writer, One Delightful Life, through a partnership with the Kansas I-70 Association and a Marketing Grant from Kansas Tourism. The Association also completed a reprint of its brochure.
- **North Central Kansas Tourism Coalition** – The Abilene CVB coordinated a booth update for the Coalition.
- **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.
- **Greenwood County Cattlewomen** - This organization invited the CVB to take over its social media for a day to promote Abilene.

In 2022, the CVB director participated in the Kansas Chamber's Emerging Leaders Program.





# PROMOTION

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Midwest Travel Network

The Midwest Travel Network continues to be a valuable resource in connecting us with travel writers. The CVB sponsored their annual conference and the CVB director presented "How to Make Big Things Happen in a Small Town" during the conference in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

### Community Support

The CVB wrote letters of support for community projects, including the Eisenhower Foundation's Kansas Department of Commerce TASK Grant application.

The CVB also submitted a Kansas Department of Commerce BASE Grant for the Abilene Industrial Park (\$12,951,969) and SPARK proposals for the southeast drainage project (\$27,935,000) and downtown upper story housing incentive (\$975,000).

In addition, the CVB nominated Andrew and Lisa Kijowski for the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Volunteer of the Year Award; Rawhide Portable Corral for the Kansas Chamber's Coolest Thing Made in Kansas contest; Russell Stover, Rawhide Portable Corral and Abilene Machine 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 and as Vice-Chair of Dickinson County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (CEO) program.







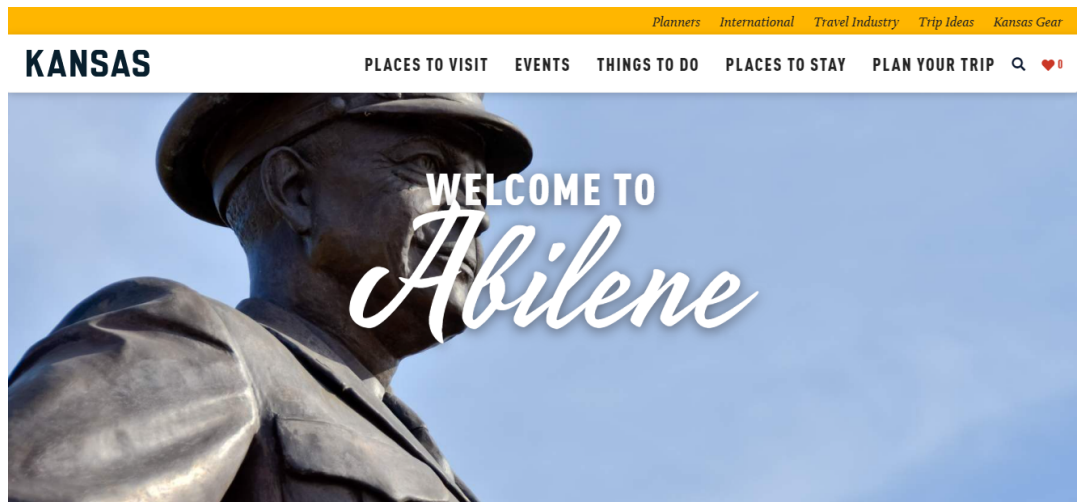
# PROMOTION

## 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 2022, these listings received 9,065 views and 2,738 clicks.

The CVB also coordinated 15 paid listings for the 2022 Kansas Travel Guide for Abilene businesses and attractions.





# PROMOTION

## SPECIAL PROJECTS



### **Kansas Media Event**

In 2022, Abilene was selected to host Kansas Tourism's Kansas Media Event. More than 40 travel writers visited Abilene to participate in the event (complete with a longhorn cattle drive!). They visited all of Abilene's tourism attractions and enjoyed attending the Wild Bill Hickok PRCA Rodeo. The six Kansas travel regions also exhibited at the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

### **Hosted Travel Writers**

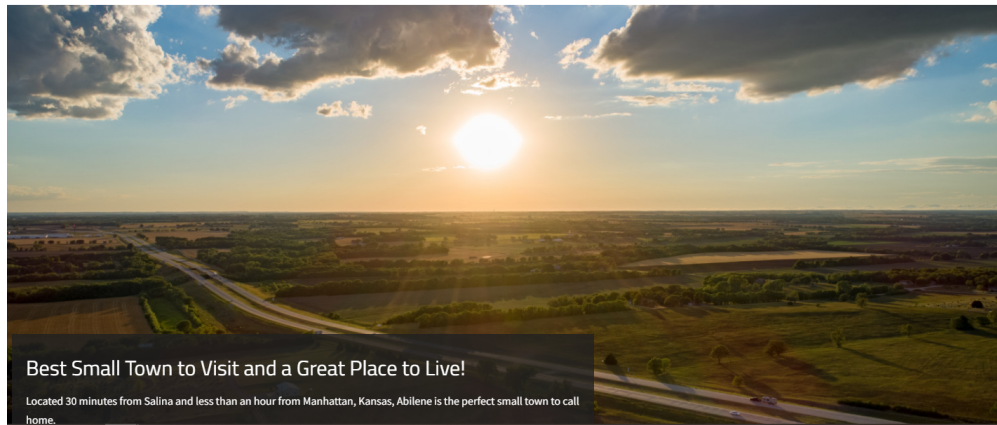
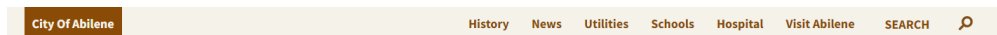
Independently of the Kansas Media Event, the Abilene CVB hosted The Cuisineist during the holiday season. Stories from all writers are shared on the CVB website at [AbileneKansas.org/news](http://AbileneKansas.org/news), on social media, and included in the Abilene Tourism Advocate e-newsletter.





# PROMOTION

## SPECIAL PROJECTS



### Golden Belt Heights

In 2022, the CVB coordinated a re-brand of the City of Abilene's Highlands housing development. This project included a new logo, brand standards, Facebook Page and website.

### Photo Library

The CVB hosted photographer David Mayes to capture photos of Abilene Downtown Antique Fest, Holm Automotive Car & True Show, Meadworlark Swap Meet, Kansas Media Event, Central Kansas Free Fair and the Wild Bill Hickok Rodeo. These photos are used on the CVB website, newsletter, and social media and shared with news outlets and writers.



# PROMOTION

## SPECIAL PROJECTS



### Travel Show Booths

The return of events meant the return of targeted travel shows. The CVB hosted booths at Destination Statehouse and African American Travel Conference in Topeka, Midwest Travel Network Conference in St. Cloud, Minnesota and the Kansas Media Event in Abilene.

### American Flags

Each year the Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau coordinates a fundraising campaign to purchase 200 new American flags for Buckeye Avenue and 3rd Street. Learn more about this project at [AbileneKansas.org/flags](http://AbileneKansas.org/flags).





# PROMOTION

## SPECIAL PROJECTS



### Shop Small First – Pink Friday Campaign

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



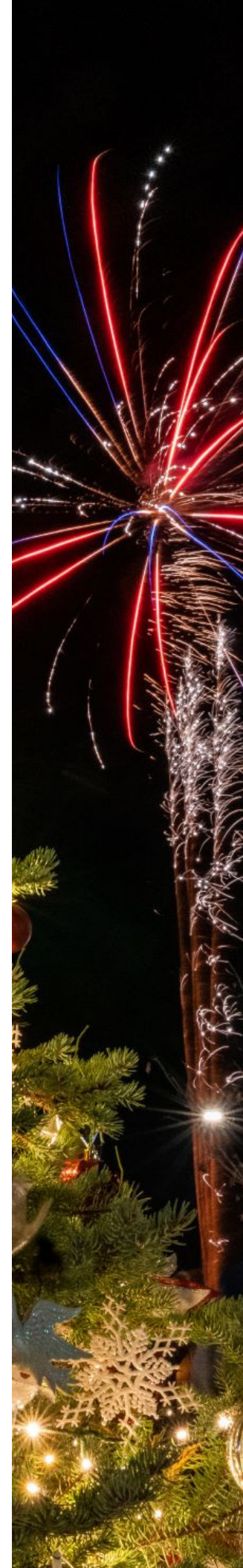
# PROMOTION

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

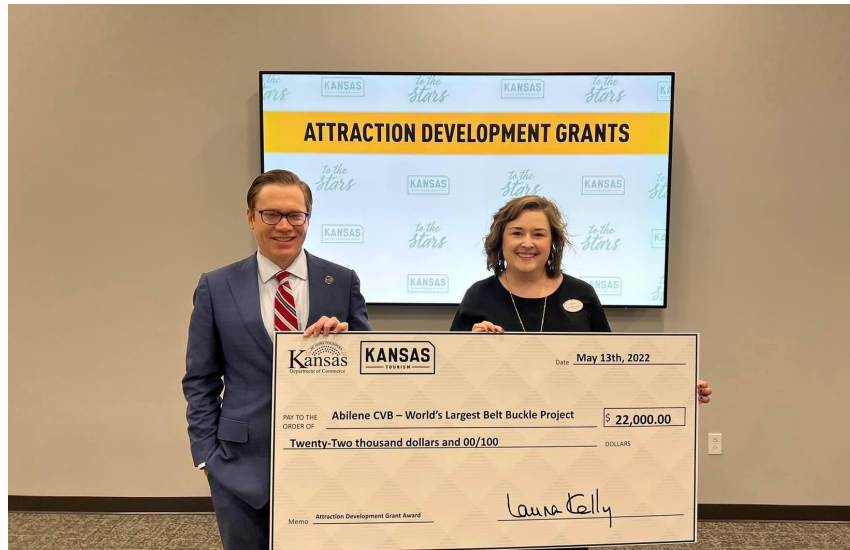


### Cowtown Christmas

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](http://AbileneKansas.org/Christmas).



# PROMOTION GRANTS



## Attraction Development Grant

The CVB received a \$22,000 Attraction Development Grant from Kansas Tourism to construct the World's Largest Belt Buckle.

In addition to the grant, the CVB sold 100 sponsorships (replica belt buckles and signage on the back of the buckle).

The project leveraged the grant and donations to create a media buzz!

## Heritage Homes Association

The CVB received a \$5,000 grant to assist the Heritage Homes Association with a new logo/branding, professional photos of each home, and a website director.



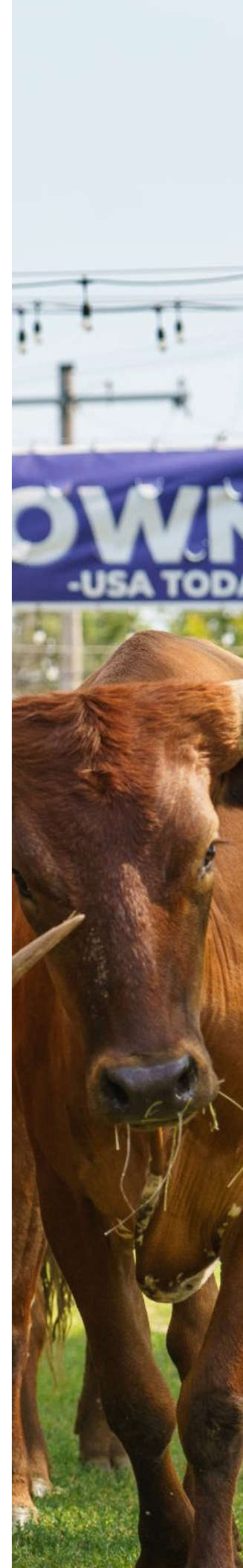
# PROMOTION

## GRANTS



In 2021, the Community Foundation of Dickinson County's Community Philanthropy Innovators Network (CPIN) working group initiated efforts to expand outdoor recreation opportunities and revitalize downtown through new markets.

To further this effort, the CVB wrote a successful \$35,568 grant to the Sunflower Foundation for the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad's Iron Horse (Mary Jane Oard) Trail Phase 1 project. An additional \$49,821.60 grant for Phase 3 of the project was approved by the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks in 2022.







# PROMOTION AWARDS



The Abilene CVB received a Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK) marketing award at the Kansas Tourism Conference for Best Community Awareness Campaign in the Medium Community Marketing Budget Category.

The Abilene Visitors Guide also received an Award of Distinction from the Communicator Awards.





# VISITATION

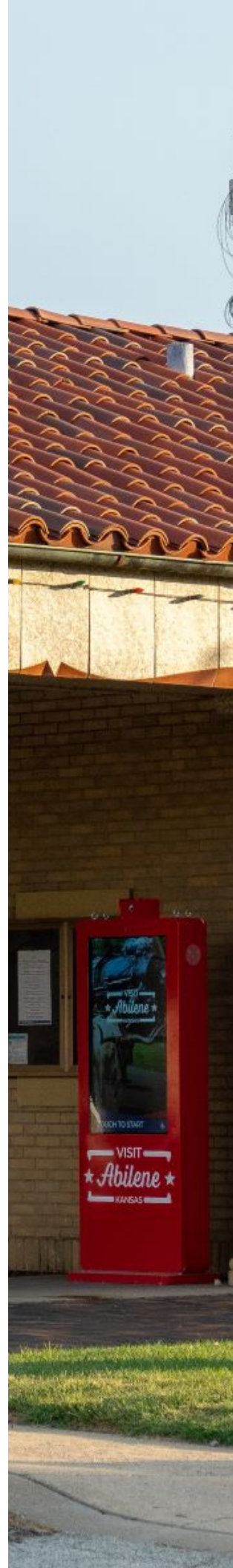
## Travel Information Center (TIC)

The Abilene Convention & Visitors Bureau maintains a state-designated travel information center to serve visitors. The CVB hired part-time Tourism Assist Sharolyn Adams in April 2022 and reopened the traditional visitors center at the east end of the depot.

Since reopening, Sharolyn 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. The building received new HVAC and chairs in 2022.

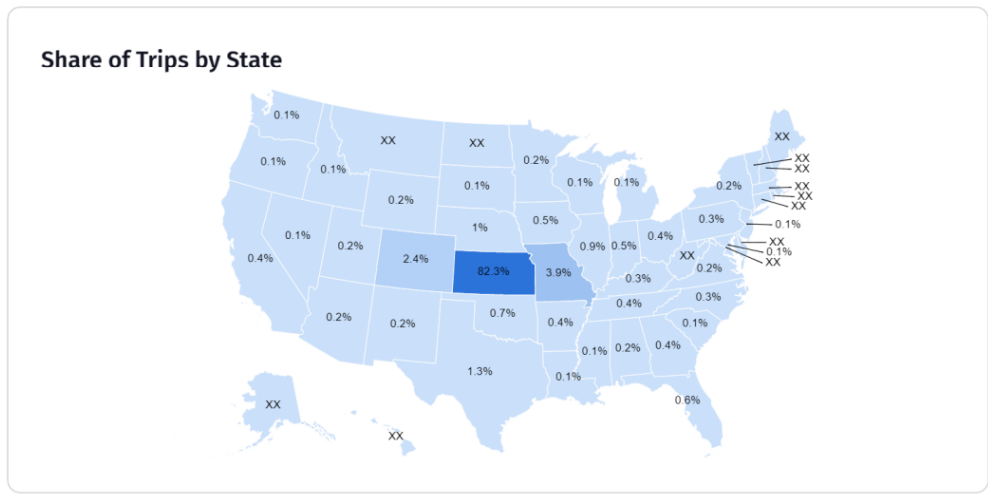




# VISITATION

In 2022, the Abilene CVB participated in a Kansas Tourism coop with DATAFY to capture visitation data based on cell phone usage. Unfortunately, a new iPhone update decreased the ability to track visitation.

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



**Filters:**      
**Polygons:**



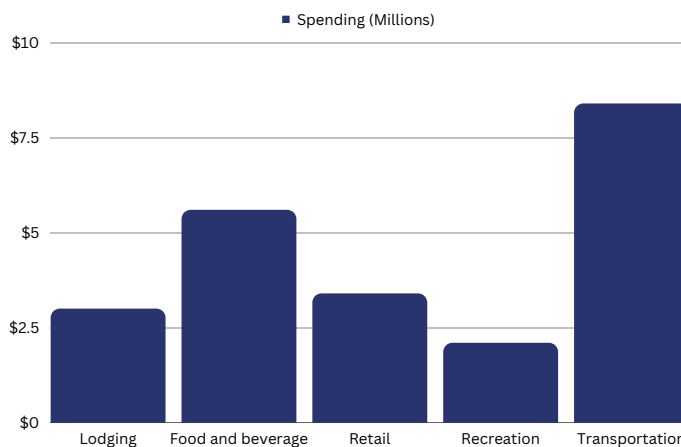
# VISITATION

## 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.
- Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are the busiest days of the week.
- 82.3% of visitors are from Kansas, with Missouri and Colorado bringing in a combined 6.3%.
- 33.1% of visitors are between the ages of 45-64, 30.7% are between the ages of 25-44, and 22% are older than 65.
- 41% of visitors earn less than \$50,000 per year, but 26.8% earn more than \$100,000 per year.
- The top Points of Interest include the area north of 14th Street (Interstate Travelers), LOVE's Travel Stop, 24/7, downtown and Russell Stover.
- Based on this data, the Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum is the top tourist attraction.

## 2021 Dickinson County Economic Impact

Source: Kansas Tourism





# VISITATION



In 2022, the Abilene CVB assisted several groups with visits, including the former White House Communications Agency Members, Christian Motorcyclist Association, Heart of America Greyhound Gathering, Kansas Department of Agriculture, 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\*: 8,513 riders (+2,809 from 2021).
- Dickinson County Heritage Center: 5,914 (+3,575 from 2021)
- Eisenhower Presidential Library *and* Museum: 44,060 (n/a from 2021)
- Great Plains Theatre: 5,453 (+812 from 2021)
- Greyhound Hall of Fame: 5,126 (+1,363 from 2021)
- Seelye Mansion: 5,610 (+692 from 2021)

*Note: all riders also visit Old Abilene Town.*



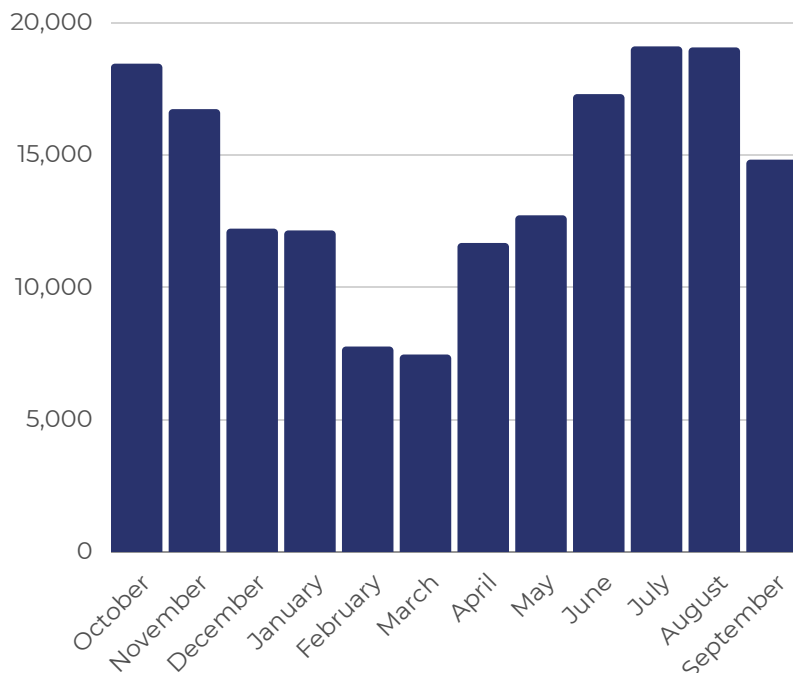
# ECONOMIC IMPACT

## 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 \$169,250.71 from \$2,115.633.88 in sales in 2022. This is a 13.54% increase from 2021. In addition, the City of Abilene received \$15,867.25 in Sales Tax collections from rooms sold, and Dickinson County received \$31,734.51.

## 2022 Transient Guest Tax Collections

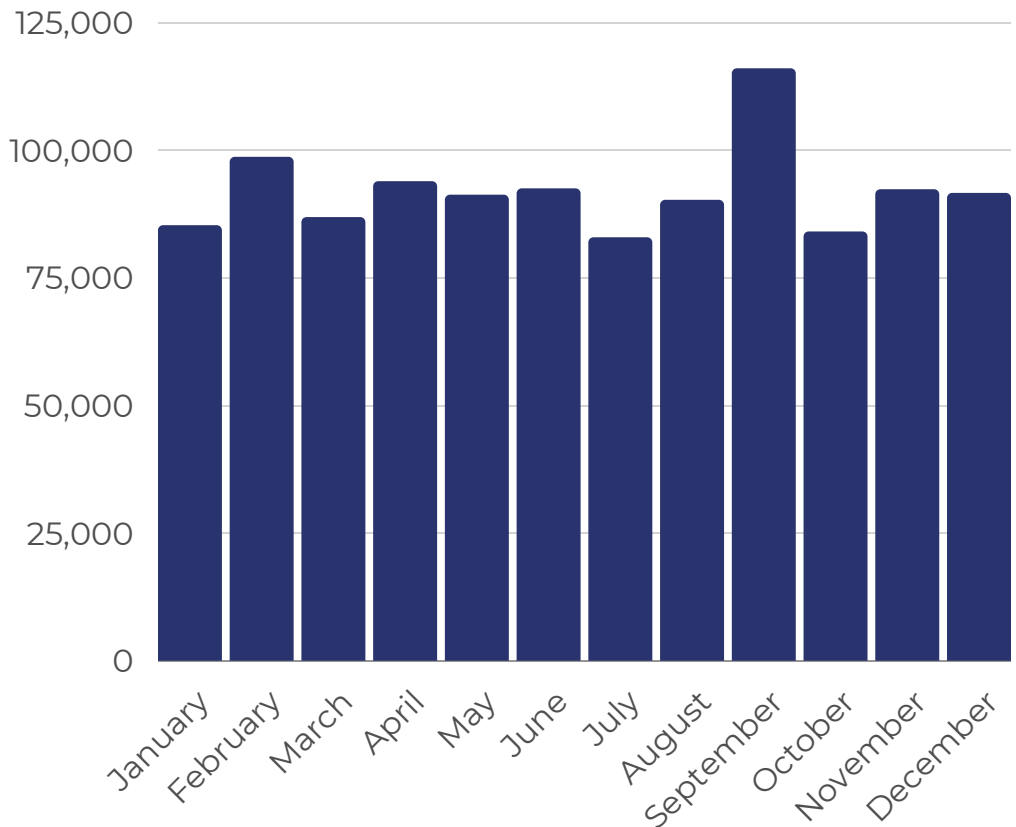




# ECONOMIC IMPACT

## Sales Tax

The City of Abilene's sales tax rate is 0.75%. According to the Kansas Department of Revenue, 2022 compensating use sales tax collections totaled \$1,105,106.89 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.

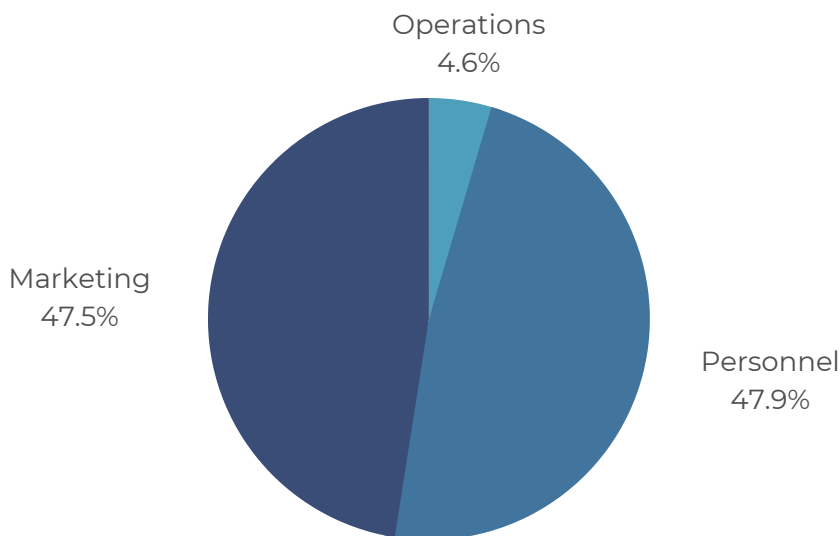
- 2022 Cash Forward - \$75,880.58
- Revenue - \$336,364.52\*
- Expenses - \$289,963.38
- End of Year Balance - \$122,281.72\*\*

*\*This includes a \$105,824 ARPA reimbursement from the City of Abilene for the revenue shortfall in 2020 & 2021.*

*\*\*This does not include a \$22,000 Attraction Development Grant reimbursement.*

## 2022 Tourism Budget - Expenses

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



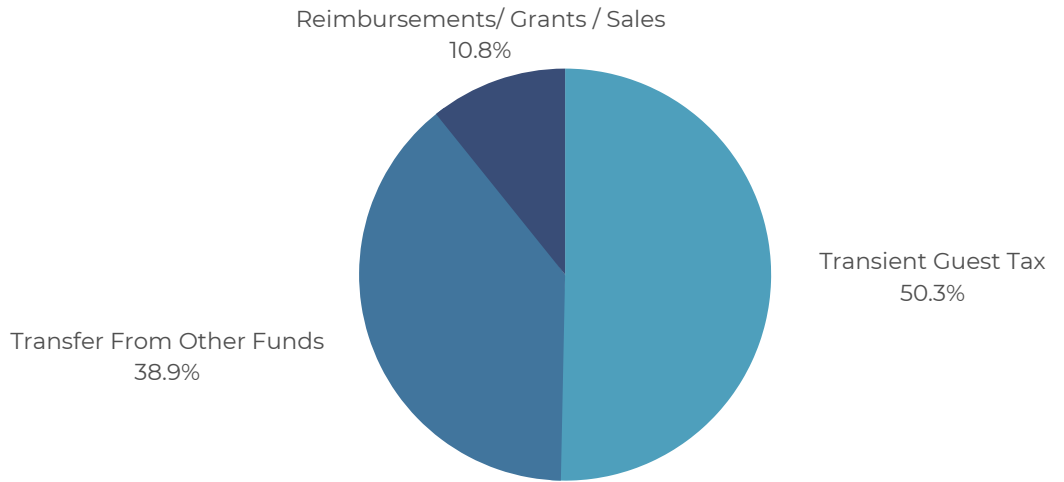




# BUDGET

## 2022 Tourism Budget - Revenue

The CVB started 2022 with \$75,880.58 in cash carryover, which is not reflected in the chart below.





# ABOUT US

As with tourism organizations across the country, the Abilene CVB made significant staff reductions to responsibly manage its budget due to decreased Transient Guest Tax Collections.

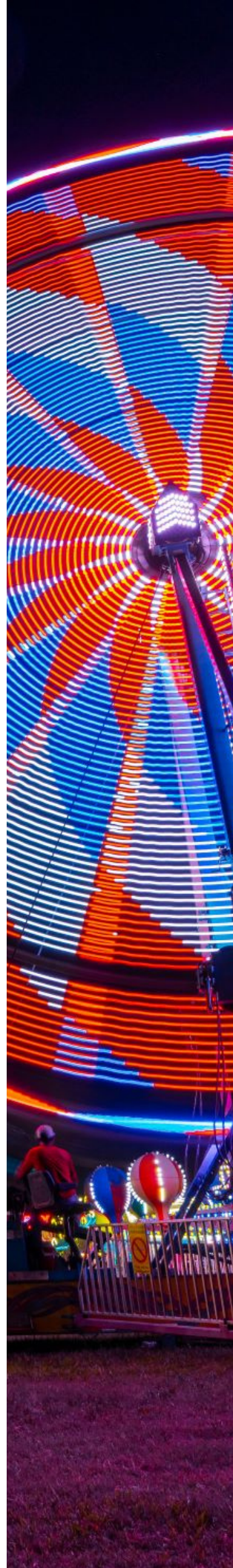
In 2022, the CVB added a part-time position, though other positions remain unfilled.

## 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