



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 25, 2016

CONTACT: Stephanie Kotschevar, Experience Grand Rapids
616-233-3577, skotschevar@experiencegr.com

2015 WAS A RECORD YEAR FOR GRAND RAPIDS AREA CONVENTION & TOURISM BUSINESS

Experience Grand Rapids celebrates sixth consecutive year of tourism growth

Grand Rapids, Mich. – Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR), the area's official destination marketing organization, has announced that 2015 was a record-breaking year for area hotel room revenue. Kent County hotels reached its highest year-end occupancy ever at 67.5%, which is above the national average of 65.6%. Occupancy also grew by 4% while the nation's grew at just 1.7%. This announcement comes on the heels of Grand Rapids' recognition on the *New York Times* "52 Places to Go" list in early January.

"For the sixth consecutive year Kent County hotel room revenue has grown over the prior year," said Doug Small, President and CEO of Experience Grand Rapids. "Hotel room revenue is a key metric for measuring tourism activity and 2015 hotel room revenue outpaced 2014 by 13.4%. With recognitions like the recent *New York Times* article, along with our continued efforts in creating enhanced brand recognition, we feel confident that visitors will continue to have Grand Rapids on their list of places to visit in 2016 and beyond."

Grand Rapids' momentum is making a positive impact on the city's ability to attract new conventions and meetings. The booming craft beer and culinary scenes, distinct cultural attractions and events like Frederik Meijer Gardens and ArtPrize, increased amateur sports events and the opening of the Art Van Sports Complex also continue to be popular draws.

"We are encouraged by the record number of contracted future conventions, meetings and sports tournament rooms contracted in 2015 for future years. In addition, other industry partners also reported record numbers," said Small. "Frederik Meijer Gardens experienced record attendance at more than 775,000 guests and Gerald R. Ford International Airport welcomed an all-time passenger record surpassing the previous record in 2014 by more than 215,000 passengers."

Hotel room revenue growth is affected by leisure tourism, strong convention attendance and the area's growing business economy.

With a growing interest in Grand Rapids, EXGR saw an opportunity to expand its reach as an organization. At the beginning of 2016, the EXGR destination sales team added a Specialty Markets Sales Manager who will manage group tour and travel, weddings, reunions and niche markets such as LGBT and craft beer groups.

In addition to the efforts of its convention sales team, EXGR experienced digital success and introduced new promotions. In 2015, EXGR unveiled a new website that promotes topic related content and mobile optimization, the Beer City Brewsader™ program, and the Grand Rapids Food Trail.

"Increases in tourism are due in part to great work by our destination marketing team," said Janet Korn, Senior Vice President, Experience Grand Rapids. "The new website has helped enhance our mobile website user-experience and we have welcomed 791 Brewsaders™ since the launch of the Beer City Passport in mid-October 2015. With new promotions and digital updates we can better market our destination to potential visitors. Plus, our investment with the Pure Michigan campaign continues to promote our destination to new audiences."

Additionally, Grand Rapids continues to grow more visitor-centric. The Grand Rapids Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program, which educates people about the importance of tourism in the community, started in August 2013. To date, EXGR has trained over 2,100 individuals touching 461 companies.

Looking ahead, Small said that 2016 room inventory growth will support Grand Rapids' growing leisure, sports and convention market.

"Grand Rapids continues to gain momentum and rise as a top tourism destination," said Small. "To meet growing demand, Grand Rapids will add close to 700 hotel rooms to the area. Grand Rapids will also be implementing new sales strategies by hosting the 24th National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) Sports Events Symposium, the National Tour Association (NTA) board, the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners board and the Heartland Showcase in 2016. These are all groups that influence meeting planners' and tour operators' destination decisions. By hosting them, we have the opportunity to promote the destination directly to decision makers. It's exciting to see the city expand and we look forward to welcoming more people to experience Grand Rapids."

#

About Experience Grand Rapids

Established in 1927, Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR) leads the marketing of Grand Rapids/Kent County as a premier convention & visitor destination providing a significant positive impact to the West Michigan economy. Previously named the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau, EXGR represents the second largest city in Michigan with over one million residents.