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## 2016 WAS A RECORD YEAR FOR GRAND RAPIDS AREA CONVENTION & TOURISM BUSINESS

*Experience Grand Rapids celebrates seventh consecutive year of tourism growth*

**Grand Rapids, Mich.** – Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR), the area's official destination marketing organization, has announced that 2016 was another record-breaking year for area hotel room revenue. From 2015 to 2016 hotel business increased 8.7% exceeding growth for both Michigan's and the United States' hotel room revenue gains of 4.8% and 6.8% respectively.

"For the seventh 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 because it is affected by leisure tourism, strong convention attendance, the area's growing business economy, and the increasing number of sports related events."

Thanks to the efforts of EXGR's partners at the West Michigan Sports Commission, the Grand Rapids area has grown as a sport destination. Among more than 80 events on the calendar; 2017 brings USA Cycling's Fat Bike Nationals in January (a first for Michigan), the 2017 International Softball Congress Men's World Tournament and PDGA Masters World Championships in August (both new to Grand Rapids), and the USA Weightlifting American Open Series in September.

Grand Rapids' overall growth as a leisure destination is effected by the rise of the music scene, the continuously expanding craft beer scene, and updates to popular attractions. In 2016, Van Andel Arena had one of its strongest lineups to date with Garth Brooks' record for most tickets sold for a single engagement and Paul McCartney's record for gross ticket sales for a single event. The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum also re-opened in 2016 with a new interactive exhibit and expansion for education.

"Grand Rapids continues to gain in popularity as a travel destination," said Janet Korn, Senior Vice President, Experience Grand Rapids. "Allocates like the 'New York Times: 52 Places to go in 2016' combined with effective destination marketing led by Experience Grand Rapids focused on the brand assets of art and culture, food and craft beer, family friendly and more recently music and outdoor recreation work in tandem to inspire travel to the area."

Further growth can be attributed to outstanding arts and culture exhibits like the *Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion* exhibit at Grand Rapids Art Museum which welcomed over 23,000 attendees which ranks it as the sixth most visited exhibit based on average visitors per day, record numbers by the West Michigan Sports Commission, and Gerald R. Ford International Airport set a four-year passenger record in 2016 with a passenger number total of 2,653,630.

Furthermore, the visitor experience remains a focus. The Grand Rapids Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program, which educates people about the importance of tourism in the community, has trained over 2,890 individuals and touched over 540 businesses since it started in August 2013. New marketing programs are also being implemented, such as shuttles to ArtPrize for suburban hotel visitors. Following the first-year success, EXGR will again offer this as a hotel guest service during the weekends throughout ArtPrize.

Looking ahead, Small said that Experience Grand Rapids will be considering the suggestions made in the Destination Asset Study commissioned by Grand Action.

"The forecast for 2017 is "sunny" because of exciting cultural exhibits coming to Kent County including a seven-month exhibition of Ai Weiwei at Frederik Meijer Gardens, sporting events like the National Congress of State Games, and significant conventions such as Grand Aerie Fraternal Order of Eagles, Church of the Brethren and National Environmental Health Association. Combining with our increasing popularity as a cool city due to events such as ArtPrize, GRandJazzFest, and LaughFest and culinary, craft beer, and outdoor activities."

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### **About Experience Grand Rapids**

Established in 1927, Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR), the areas' official destination marketing organization, strengthens the region's economic vitality and quality of life by marketing Grand Rapids/Kent County as a preferred visitor destination.