

DISCOVER  
**ALBANY**



*2017 Annual Report*

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## Our Mission

Discover Albany strengthens the awareness of Albany County as a convention and visitor destination, attracting individuals, families, and businesses from around the world to increase revenue and stimulate economic development and growth for the community.





## *Executive Committee*

Bob Belber, Chair, SMG Regional Manager, Times Union Center & Albany Capital Center  
Holly Brown, Palace Performing Arts Center  
Susan Cleary, Empire State Plaza Convention Center  
Michael Gulotty, Chair Elect, Vista Host  
Dick Kotlow, Treasurer, UHY Advisors NY  
Robin Jackson, Assistant Treasurer, Albany Marriott  
Carrie Hillenbrandt, CMP, BBL Hospitality Group  
Michele Vennard, President/CEO, Secretary, Discover Albany

## *Directors*

Mark Benson, University at Albany  
Tyler Desmond, Desmond Hotel Albany  
Leola Edelin, Renaissance Albany  
David Hayes, Hilton Albany  
Michael Hoffman, Turf Hotels  
Jeff Mirel, Rosenblum Companies  
Christine Quinn, Albany County Executive's Office  
Justin Smith, Prestige Hospitality Group  
Kathleen Van De Loo, Association Development Group  
Tim Vennard, Mazzone Hospitality, LLC  
Bob Wolfgang, Tech Valley Security

## *Ex-Officio*

Daniel McCoy, Albany County Executive  
Kathy Sheehan, Mayor - City of Albany  
Paula Mahan, Colonie Town Supervisor  
Mark Eagan, Capital Region Chamber of Commerce  
Anthony Capece, Central Avenue Business Improvement District  
Sarah Reginelli, Capitalize Albany Corporation  
Georgette Steffens, Downtown Business Improvement District  
Joseph LaCivita, Colonie Economic Development

## Letter from the Chairperson

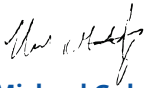


2017 will serve to be one of the most pivotal years in the history of the Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau. In the face of considerable near term change, the entire team, led by President/CEO Michele Vennard, including staff, Board of Directors and Board Executive Committee all dug their heels in to provide a strong yet agile foundation for this destination's future.

During the year there were countless successes. The most dynamic being the culmination of the destination branding project that culminated in the launching of Discover Albany. This new flag for our destination arrives at a time when the hospitality and tourism community more than ever needs common sense rallying for our Albany brand, from leaders and constituents alike. As an Albany hotelier, I was always surprised at the polarity between community leaders who understood the importance of destination management/leadership (and sales/marketing/e-visibility), versus the leaders whose vision obscured the competitive necessity of a "Discover Albany" (traditionally known as a convention and visitor's bureau). Now as an Albany based VP overseeing hotels in 10 major markets, I have witnessed communities where it seems EVERY citizen and leader proudly points to their locales' version of "Discover Albany" and those communities where fractured support for destination championing unwittingly presses the brakes on the wheels of commerce well beyond just the tourism realm. It is the hope and vision of the entire Board that the "Discover Albany" brand weaves its way into the vocabulary of all who benefit from the power of our industry.

Our staff blossomed the A2D program, now in its second year. With over 100 graduates in 2017, this program trains destination champions. A partnership between stakeholders and the ACCVB to frame the Discover Albany brand, A2D develops our stakeholders' talented teams so they deliver the most comprehensive experience for our destination visitors. Destination awareness broadens their adventuring, be it to a local product, arts venue, or other community assets. County leadership has been supportive and more invested in our work than ever. Recognizing our value, The City of Albany and Mayor Sheehan have continued to step up to support the ACCVB, and have been in close dialogue with the executive team to ensure that our office space and our ability to sell and service the destination without falter. Michele Vennard has continued her nearly 25-year charge to both grow the destination and invigorate the support our industry requires for this destination to remain competitive.

The greatest challenge of 2017 was the bridge-building to carry us from 25 years of amazing President/CEO Michele Vennard leadership and community stewardship, to the welcoming of a new era and President/CEO in summer 2018. Michele, the executive committee, the search committee, the location committee, and the greater board of directors have diligently focused on strengthening the pillars of our mission, via the real process of preparing for our future. As a member of the board for several terms, and as returning Chair, I have witnessed Michele treat each and every year as pivotal, each opportunity to further our brand, our destination, as an imperative. Truly a remarkable champion for all of us in the greater Albany County and beyond, Michele has set a standard of commitment, investment, and tenacious passion for our today and tomorrow that will remain a legacy for our destination. A legacy that we can lean on for all of its wisdom, strength, and vision. Please celebrate Michele's accomplishments, together, as we all become stronger "Discover Albany" stewards, during and after this transition.



**Michael Gulotty**

Discover Albany, ACCVB Chairperson of the Board  
VP Operations, Vista Host Inc.



### **Professor Anthony Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award, “The Toby”**

Albany’s Hospitality Industry is an essential component of the Capital Region’s economic vitality. The Professor Anthony Strianese Hospitality Excellence Award is the only honor developed solely to recognize excellence in travel and tourism and represents the best of Albany’s hospitality culture. There are hospitality professionals around the world who were positively influenced by Professor Strianese and his 40-year career in hospitality so naming the award for Toby is a great honor to his memory.

### *2018 Recipient: Mazzone Hospitality*

Recognizing the strength and quality of the Mazzone Hospitality Brand and what it has brought to the destination and Albany’s hospitality industry, the Board of Directors would like to bestow the 2018 Anthony J. Strianese Hospitality Excellence award to Mazzone Hospitality.

Mazzone Hospitality is the largest catering and hospitality company in the region. In 25 years, Mazzone Hospitality has grown from a small family-run company to employing 1,000+ in the capital region. Mazzone Hospitality services corporate clients, off-premise catering and stand-alone facilities. Their catering services for many meetings and events have helped to support the growing economy in the Capital Region. As caterer at both the Empire State Plaza and Albany Capital Center, Mazzone Hospitality helps Albany put its best foot forward for meeting and convention events, setting that great “first impression” of our destination. Mazzone Hospitality is committed to delivering the best hospitality experience in Albany County and beyond.



DELIVERING THE DIFFERENCE



## Hospitality Grants

The Albany County Convention & Visitors Bureau Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) corporation, provides grants which help to build and support Albany County tourism attractions, events and other travel related activities. The grants encourage collaboration to further extend the economic impact of hospitality industry. The fund is managed by the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region and is funded by a portion of the earned income of the bureau, translating business success into hospitality giving back to the community. The latest round of funding brings the total to \$260,000 awarded in support of Albany's Hospitality community. In 2017, the foundation awarded \$48,000 to 15 excellent recipients

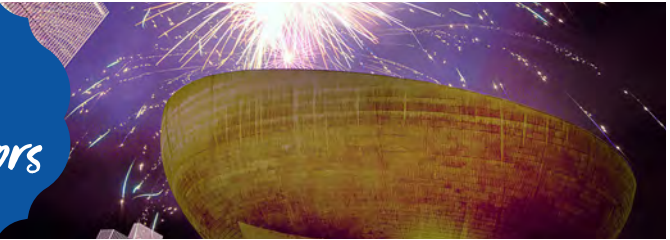
### 2017 Grant Recipients

Albany Symphony  
Capital Region Nordic Alliance, Inc.  
Old Songs, Inc.  
Albany Center Galleries, Inc.  
Albany Institute of History & Art  
Park Playhouse, Inc.  
Shaker Heritage Society  
International Center of the Capital Region  
African American Cultural Center of the Capital Region, Inc.  
Albany Barn, Inc.  
Capital Repertory Theatre  
Five Rivers Limited  
Friends of Pruyn House  
Palace Performing Arts Center  
Steamer No. 10 Theatre, Inc.



### "This great opportunity to enhance the visitor experience..."

We awarded Shaker Heritage Society a grant to help them create educational videos about the first Shaker settlement in America. With the funds, they have been able to create a script and hire a professional video team to produce it. "As a recipient of the Hospitality Grant, the Shaker Heritage Society will be able to introduce our visitors to a unique and nationally significant aspect of this region's cultural heritage," says Starlyn D'Angelo, Executive Director for the Shaker Heritage Society. "Having the opportunity to work with a professional production company and to use the latest video technology will ensure optimal engagement with our audience. We are very grateful for the support of the Discover Albany and for **this great opportunity to enhance the visitor experience** at Albany's historic Shaker Site."



Discover Albany is proud to announce the addition of 17 Albany Ambassadors in 2017. Albany Ambassadors are local volunteer meeting planners who have embraced the “Host it Here” slogan and were instrumental in bringing meeting, convention, and event business “home” to Albany. Ambassadors generated 6,451 room nights 20,530 attendees and an impressive \$4.4 million in economic impact in our community. This number was driven in large part to the Capital Center’s conferences and the Maccabi Games which involved over 5,000 people in their community wide event.

## Ambassadors

### **Leo Carpenter**

Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses

### **Reverend Morais Cassell**

Church of God of Prophecy

### **Jose M. David, MD**

National Association of UP Medical Alumni

### **Jeffrey Faulkner**

National Association of UP Medical Alumni

### **Tom Gallagher**

Cornell University – College of Agriculture and Life Sciences  
Grassfed Exchange

### **Paul Gold**

New York State Council for the Social Studies (NYSCSS)

### **Linda Hayes**

Sweet Adelines International – Greater New York/New Jersey Region #5

### **Ned Hirt**

New York State Society of Human Resource Management, Inc. (NY SHRM)

### **Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York**

2017 Maccabi Games

### **Karen Jones**

Zonta International

### **Harriett Kimball**

Sweet Adelines International – Greater New York/New Jersey Region #5

### **Kathy Marco**

Guilderland United Soccer Club

### **Kelly Morrone**

New York State Association of Volunteer Services Administrators, Inc.

### **Tim Potts**

New York State Council for the Social Studies (NYSCSS)

### **Timothy Purscell**

Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses

### **Sidney Albert Albany Jewish Community Center**

2017 Maccabi Games

### **Jeffrey Vincent**

ESCYPAA





## Strategic Initiatives

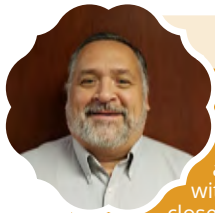
Discover Albany Continues to use Strategic Initiatives as our guide to success. Progress is reported to the Board six times per year and staff continually keep the initiatives “top of mind” in their work. What follows is a synopsis of key programs and developments that transpired throughout the year.

### Initiative One

**Enhance the awareness, appreciation and support of Discover Albany and Albany’s visitor economy.**

#### Develop a compelling message

- Working with regional partners launched a video and photo campaign on VisitUSA.com (official US travel site)
- Developed a robust consumer print and online marketing campaign resulting in 25,553 inquiries, up 42% from 2016.
- Key areas of focus included the Erie Canal and Tulip Festival.
- Earned a Marketing and Communication MARCOM Award for our 2017 Albany Visitor Guide. Guide was direct-mailed to consumers and distributed at busy travel hubs in-and out-of-state.
- Launched the Engagement Academy, Albany Visitor A2D program resulting in 127 new Albany Visitor Champions. Hosted three separate champion events to continue champion engagement.



#### A2D “Builds a Strong Culture”

“The A2D training prepares your teams to be able to enhance service delivery to your guests, strengthens the visitor’s perception of Albany, and more importantly, **builds a strong culture** within your organizations by bringing your teams closer together by sharing a fun learning experience.”

##### Nick Boulas

CHA, CFBE, CHT,  
General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn – Albany Medical Center

- Schenectady County Community College has now incorporated A2D in their hospitality curriculum.
- With great assistance from Eric Mower + Associates, a series of 6 videos were produced to introduce both local and visitor audiences to Discover Albany.
- Hosted 11 journalist FAM tours, highlighting multiple businesses throughout the county.

## Develop additional performance and productivity measures to quantify impact

- Launched revised consumer newsletter with 28,291 subscribers and a 14% open rate.
- Conducted a summer visitor survey for the second consecutive year to better understand who customers are and their travel choices.

## Enhance Communications with community and business leaders

- Developed content for Albany Murals (Albany Capital Center) website, designed accompanying collateral.
- Hosted 12 Directors of Sales meetings reaching an average of 50 Partners at each share and present pertinent information.
- Increased Discover Albany profile and direction for the Albany Cultural Heritage program.
- Hospitality Gives Back – developed 3 give-back programs in 2017 that helped our community.
- Hosted the ESSAE trade show at the Capital Center with 11 Discover Albany Partners and the trade show after party at the new Cornerstone at the Plaza venue.
- Hosted Discover Albany Video launch party that attracted 80 guests and elected officials.

## “The Relationship Between Hotels and the Bureau...”

“Being in this market for many years, I have come to realize **the importance of the relationship between the hotels and the bureau.** I have always made it a point to get to know each bureau member and their role. I also make it a point to attend every DOS monthly lunch meeting. These relationships are also so important. We all, at some time or another, will need to lean on our partners. whether it’s for advice/knowledge, relocation or overflow for guests, etc. It’s at these meetings that we get to know these partners and their capabilities.”



### Jean D'Angelo

Director of Sales, Hilton Garden Inn – Albany/SUNY

## Use media and technology to enhance Discover Albany visibility

- Launched new brand and website for Discover Albany located at [www.albany.org](http://www.albany.org) and for Film Albany, [www.filmalbany.com](http://www.filmalbany.com).
- Media outreach resulted in 89 stories about the destination, Discover Albany and partners resulting in leveraged value of \$124,210.

## Public Relations & Media Outreach

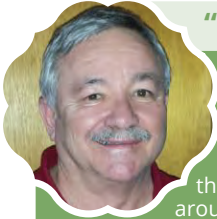
- Increased Facebook activity that includes increased advertising and retargeting.
- Launched Search Engine Marketing campaign. 72,266, impressions; 5,228 clicks, (7.23% CTR)
- In celebration of the Erie Canal Bicentennial developed a series of six 30-second videos that are shown as interstitial messages on WMHT and appear on their website. The messages offer history of the Erie Canal, and direct viewers to visit [www.albany.org](http://www.albany.org) for more information.
- Microsites providing specific meeting or event information were developed for 18 clients in 2017 and in total were accessed 2,544 times.
- CRM / Extranet portal training was provided to staff and continues to be a component of Partner services.
- Engaged the Barberstock Digital Asset Management program to manage photo and video library, track rights and permissions, transmit photos and create a robust website gallery.

## Initiative Two

Lead the destination in new visitation and the ultimate success of the Albany Capital Center

### Develop an Action Plan to outline destination goals

- Hosted 3 neighborhood hotel general manager meetings to listen and discuss opportunities in the areas of selling and social media strategies.
- Developed a Wolf Road working group to encourage cooperative programming and to identify issues that will be critical to success of the corridor.
- Joint Sales appointments with Capital Center Sales staff were established.



### "Best Conference So Far..."

"Organizers of the Grass-fed Exchange Conference were very pleased with how welcoming and flexible the Albany area was for the conference. We had 500 attendees from 40 states, and Discover Albany was the first to welcome travelers at the Albany Airport with a banner and booklet with things to do around Albany.

Evaluations at the end of the conference had comments like: "Best conference so far"; "Albany is a great place to host a conference!" and "The Desmond was a perfect hotel for a conference this size."

**Tom Gallagher**  
Cornell Cooperative Extension



### Increased new visitation in Albany County

- Discover Albany serviced 238 meetings and events this year.
- 77 sales site tours were conducted throughout the year.
- Working with ESDC / ILNY hosted 3 International familiarization tours for Chinese, UK and Irish travel trade.
- Developed and hosted Downtown Albany and Haunted history walking tours with close to 100 participants.
- We helped our partners build their businesses. In 2017, the total number of partners referrals was 556 partners to 69 clients.

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## Initiative Three

Ensure future Discover Albany and destination success with a plan for transition.

### Develop an Action Plan to outline destination goals

- The Organizational Assessment was completed, presented and analyzed by Board and staff and a series of recommendations and actions were developed.
- That work resulted in the development of a new organizational chart and staff realignment.
- A transition plan was developed that focuses on Location/Visitor Hub, Partnership growth, Funding realities, Marketing and Leadership transition.



## Sales Activity Report

Our Sales team, working in conjunction with our partners is building business for Albany by creating and working leads. These leads, in turn, translate into bookings. Here's a summary of how we did in 2017.

Total 2017 Leads	YTD +/-	Total 2017 Lead Attendance	YTD Attn +/-	Total 2017 Room Nights	YTD RN +/-
253	+2%	106,203	-24%	308,766	+27%
Total 2017 Bookings	YTD +/-	YTD Attendance	YTD/LY +/-	YTD Room Nights	YTD/LY +/-
165	-32%	123,220	-20%	453,918	-11%

## Operations Metrics

Our Albany Heritage Area Visitors Center served the tourism community by keeping up a dynamic calendar of exhibits and events. Discover Albany also led walking tours for visitors and education programs for local students. Below is a breakdown of the number of visitors each month.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
749	608	880	1,058	1,400	1,325	1,877	1,435	1,097	1,534	927	439

**2016 Totals: 13,781**  
**2017 Totals: 13,338**

### Albany Visitor Center

**YTD Attendance:** 13,338,  
 including 4,478 students  
**Gift Shop Net Income:** \$6,027  
**Program Net Income:** \$12,67

### Airport Information Center

**Guests Served:** 91,821

## Fun and History at the Visitors Center

This year, the Albany Heritage Area Visitors Center hosted guided ghost tours, literary tours, and history tours to welcome tourists to Albany with style. Educators at the center also led programs for more than 4,000 students, many in cooperation with local heritage sites.



# Marketing Metrics

## Branding:

To keep up with changing markets, the bureau adopted the new Discover Albany brand. The new brand puts our destination front-and-center and helps us reposition our agency so we can address residents as well as visitors, and build a culture of appreciation right here in our own region.

## Website:

Discover Albany launched a new mobile-friendly website in October 2017 that's built around content visitors have identified as important. The site is visually rich and provides content that is both informative and inspiring. Most important, the site is designed around our new branding, which is based on authentic Albany experiences.



### 2017 Statistics:

**Unique visitors:** 314,098  
**Total page views:** 894,264

### Website Traffic:

Organic: 219,163  
Other: 94,935

### Top Traffic Sources:

Organic Search: 219,163  
Direct: 45,240  
Referral: 32,074  
Social: 17,159



## Email Marketing:

**Consumer List:** 28,291  
**Average Open Rate:** 14.4%  
**Average Click Thru Rate:** 10.6%

## Social Media:

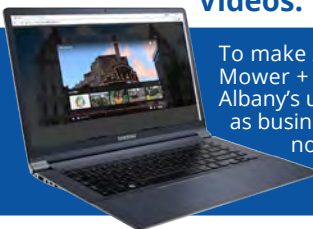
### 2017 Statistics:

**Total clicks:** 26,757  
**Total engagements:** 42,682  
**Impressions:** 3,940,782

**Twitter Followers:** 9,257 (Up 10%)  
**Facebook Fans:** 9,437 (Up 23%)  
**Instagram Followers:** 3,464 (Up 22%)



## Videos:



To make Albany more visitor-ready, we partnered with Eric Mower + Associates, to create a series of videos, each highlighting Albany's unique attractions. From Nipper to the Capitol – as well as businesses, and feature interviews with A2D champions and notables – they were filmed at 23 different locations. The videos are being distributed on our website and on social media.

# Financial Report



## 2017 Annual Report

### Condensed Balance Sheet (as of 12/31/17, unaudited)

#### Assets

Cash and Investments	\$1,562,975
Receivables	\$49,185
Property & Equipment	\$82,465
Other Assets	\$382,980
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$2,077,605</b>

#### Liability and Net Assets

Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$71,715
Other Liabilities	\$129,117
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$200,832</b>

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets \$2,077,605**

### 2018 Budget

#### Income

	2018 Budget	2017 (unaudited)
Earned Income	\$116,000	\$127,676
Fee for Services	\$1,690,838	\$1,626,602
Grants	\$124,000	\$120,664
Investments and Interest Income	\$30,500	\$67,058
Other Income	\$750	\$514
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$1,962,088</b>	<b>\$1,942,514</b>

#### Expenses

	2018 Budget	2017 (unaudited)
Administrative Expenses	\$306,700	\$314,281
Marketing, Development & Sales	\$312,500	\$296,736
Other Expenses	\$43,850	\$180,257
Personnel	\$1,292,200	\$1,102,484
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,955,250</b>	<b>\$1,893,758</b>



## Additional Testimonials



### “Great Service to this Market”

Trent Griffin-Braaf opened his business, Tech Valley Hospitality Shuttle in late 2016. He was the GM of a local hotel, and he knew from experience that a shuttle to take guests to local points of interest, transportation, etc. would be helpful. He joined the bureau last year, to help him build clientele in the area. “The bureau has connected me with a lot of local businesses,” says Griffin-Braaf. “The team at the bureau have been helpful with keeping us updated with events coming into the area, and whenever I have a question they are prompt in response.” With the addition of the Capital Center, and other local attractions, he knows he’s in the right business. “Albany is the capital, and with the increase in hotels, banquet facilities, and corporations, we know we can be of **great service to this market.**”

**Trent Griffin-Braaf**  
Tech Valley Hospitality Shuttle



### Getting Ink for Albany

To secure media coverage for the destination, Discover Albany prepares media releases, pitches stories, responds consistently to media inquiries, and hosts visiting journalists. In 2017, we prepared 31 media releases, hosted 2 press conferences, and did 34 media interviews. We also hosted 11 journalists, who we brought to 47 businesses and attractions. Because of these successful efforts, we were able to secure 89 articles, valued at an estimated \$124,210.



### “A Tremendous Roadmap for Us”

“I can’t explain just how pleased we are with how our event turned out. The help that was provided to us to make our event successful was immeasurable. If we had a problem, Discover Albany and the Convention Services team were there immediately to help and fix it. The information that was provided on a weekly basis was **a tremendous roadmap for us.**”

**Linda Hayes**  
Chair of Regional Convention, Sweet Adelines International



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