

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

MOVING FORWARD

Working with our partners, communities and businesses, we advanced our mission to strengthen the tourism economy, support small businesses and serve our residents.

Tourism is a vital and growing segment of the economy in Yakima County. It enhances our quality of life by supporting small businesses and generating tax revenue that funds essential public services such as parks, roads, social programs and public safety. The most recent data shows:



Nearly 2.5 million visits came to Yakima County



500,000 room nights are attributed to visitors



Travelers spent \$397 million in Yakima County



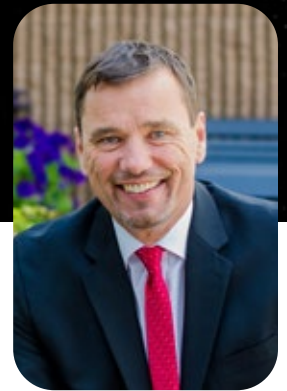
\$51.6 million in state and local tax revenue generated



Visitors support 5,145 jobs for our residents



LINDA DILEMBO
YVT Board Chair



JOHN COOPER
President & CEO

HIGHLIGHT



Best Wine Region
in USA TODAY's Readers' Choice Awards



One of the most exciting moments of 2024 came in late July when the **Yakima Valley** was selected as the **Best Wine Region** in USA TODAY's **Readers' Choice Awards** out of twenty competing wine regions. Yakima Valley Tourism organized a campaign encouraging the public to vote for the designation. The award is a testament to our local wine industry and community.

YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER



The Yakima Convention & Event Center is the premier meeting and event facility in Yakima and Central Washington. The facility generates significant economic activity for Yakima while being a stunning showcase for the community.



In 2024 the Center produced great increases in revenue, event days held, booking pace and attendance growth. In addition, we welcomed groups that had not met here for many years or have never been here, including Washington State Municipal Clerks, Administration of the Courts and the Association of County/City Information Systems, to name a few. The Center received very high accolades on service and the quality of the facility.



Maintaining the facility's quality is crucial for its success. The restrooms originally built in the 1997 expansion were fully renovated to align with the upgrades from the recent expansion. Additionally, the audio/visual and sound systems in the Kathy Coffey South Ballroom were completely overhauled, ensuring this space matches the high standards of the rest of the building.

“ JOELLE ROBERTSON
Event Manager,
Washington State Democrats

I just wanted to extend a thank you to you and your team for all the great support you offered at our event this weekend. Your staff was so great to work with and extremely responsive to any request I had - truly went above and beyond.

CONVENTION CENTER 2024 NUMBERS



422
EVENT DAYS
HELD

20% increase
over 2023



561
FUTURE DAYS
BOOKED

23% increase
over 2023



76K
CONVENTION
ATTENDEES

10% increase
over 2023

CONVENTION & GROUP SALES

Recruiting and serving the needs of conventions, tradeshows and other events to our community is a major charge for Yakima Valley Tourism.



CYNTHIA LYDUM, CMP

Vice President of Global Accounts,
Conference Direct

I have spent years working for and with Destination Marketing Organizations and understand how valuable they are when selecting a destination and for support during the meeting. The team at Yakima Valley Tourism are true professionals and assist myself and my clients every step of the way. They really make the process of selecting their location and producing a meeting so easy!

FORGING AHEAD

With the Center expansion appealing to new and larger groups, 2024 was a solid year for meetings and events. Although some cancellations occurred, the conventions held, as well as those holding future dates, continue to grow. The sales department finished the year with strong lead generation.

79

FUTURE CONFERENCE
TOTAL LEADS

34

FUTURE EVENTS
CONFIRMED

In April, the Convention Sales team hosted the Spring Client Event at the Tacoma Rainiers. Thirty-four meeting planners attended along with hotel partners, Sodexo Live! Catering and the Yakima Convention & Event Center team.

MEDIA & TRAVEL TRADE

Yakima Valley Tourism invites and hosts trade travel members for tours of Yakima and the Yakima Valley. We hosted several travel writers and social media influencers who explored hop and wine country, the outdoors, cultural events, our restaurants and farm fresh experiences. We secured media coverage through staff outreach, our public relations firm and past media visits.

97

FEATURES
IN MEDIA
OUTLETS

3.6 BILLION
POTENTIAL VIEWERS

MEDIA COVERAGE

Our efforts resulted in **97 print and digital features** about Yakima and the Yakima Valley, with **more than 3.6 billion in circulation and views**. We built new relationships with social influencers, content creators and editorial partners to stay top-of-mind for future coverage and provided content and imagery to media and bloggers.



TRAVEL TRADE

In 2024 we promoted the community at US Travel's IPW Conference and the Travel & Words media conference. Staff **met with 139 travel writers and tour operators** to pitch stories about the Yakima Valley. In addition, we hosted our first podcaster, Allison Levine of the Wine Soundtrack (150,000 listeners globally), to interview ten different wine makers in our region and highlight our "Best Wine Region in the USA" accolade. We also hosted our first LGBTQ+ social media influencers (with more than 270k followers combined) to highlight diverse communities and groups in the Yakima Valley.

YAKIMA VALLEY SPORTS COMMISSION

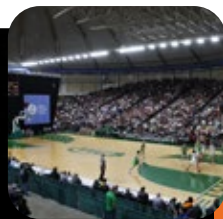
Sports tourism is a driver of economic growth in the Yakima Valley. It generates financial benefits while raising the region's profile amongst the Pacific Northwest sports community. The Yakima Valley Sports Commission is committed to improving existing sporting events, attracting new ones and establishing the Yakima Valley as the leading sports destination in the Pacific Northwest.

WIAA PARTNERSHIP

The Yakima Valley hosts numerous WIAA State Championships in several sports each school year. **31 WIAA State Championships events were held in our community in 2024.** The newest WIAA event for the Yakima Valley, the 1B, 2B and 1A Boys and Girls Track & Field Championships, was held at Zaepfel Stadium, bringing in an estimated 1,630 athletes. **The Sports Commission has a strong relationship with the WIAA and continues efforts to bring more WIAA State Championships to the Yakima Valley.**

SIGNATURE EVENTS

The Sports Commission hosts several signature events to bring visitors to the Yakima Valley and serve the residents of our community. They include the **Yakima Valley Sports Awards**, the **Dye Hard 5K**, the **Hot Shots 3-On-3 Basketball Tourney**, and the **SunDome Volleyball Festival**. In addition, staff partnered with a local lacrosse organization on the **Duel in The Desert Lacrosse Tourney**.



GARNERING RECOGNITION

For his years of service at the WIAA State Basketball Tournaments, the Sports Commission's Rich Austin received the Ed & Shirley Pepple Service Award by Washington Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Association (WIBCA). The honor is given to individuals who have made an exceptional positive contribution to high school boys basketball in Washington. In addition, Rich was recognized as Citizen of the Year by the Yakima Association of Realtors for his service to the community.



The sports market continued to grow

511

FUTURE SPORTING EVENTS BOOKED

73K

ROOM NIGHTS FROM SPORTING EVENTS

\$68

MILLION IN FUTURE EST. ECONOMIC IMPACT



MICK HOFFMAN

Executive Director, WIAA

Sports tourism is a driver of economic growth in the Yakima Valley. It generates financial benefits while raising the region's profile. The Yakima Valley Sports Commission is committed to improving existing sporting events, attracting new ones and establishing the Yakima Valley as the leading sports destination in the Pacific Northwest.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

2024 was a year of evaluation and adapting as the travel industry, technology and consumer behaviors rapidly evolved. Our partnership with Datafy continues to provide integral insights into our unique visitation trends, revealing areas of opportunity. A growing partnership with TwoSix Digital has proven valuable in employing new digital solutions.

3,110,896

SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- VisitYakima.com saw a 15% engagement rate increase and 35% increase in pages viewed per session
- 48% increase in social media impressions
- 60% increase in VisitYakima.com traffic from bi-weekly email newsletter resulting from new content strategies
- 132% increase in bi-weekly email newsletter open rate resulting from new email management strategies
- 1,599,851 impressions generated by paid social campaign

61%↑

WEBSITE
ENGAGEMENT
RATE



132%

OPEN RATE INCREASE FOR EMAIL MARKETING



KEY PROJECTS

- Completed an extensive project to build a new back end for VisitYakima.com and re-write site-wide file extensions that improved the user experience and Search Engine Optimization performance.
- Strategy development in progress to optimize VisitYakima.com for AI search.
- The initial stages of a brand analysis and overall brand refresh underway.
- Community partners and hospitality collaborations remained a key priority.



VISIT
UNION GAP



Visit
SUNNYSIDE

HIGHLIGHT

In 2024 we created and managed the websites, advertising and visitor guides for Sunnyside and Union Gap

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

TOURISM AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

We began developing the Yakima Valley Tourism Ambassador Program that will launch spring of 2025. It's an industry-recognized certification program that drives visitor

spending through in-depth knowledge of the tourism product and aligning stakeholders to deliver a positive brand experience.



EDUCATIONAL MARKETING SERIES

We partnered with industry expert, April Reddout, to deliver a series of educational programs for craft beverage and related hospitality members. Each of the workshops was developed to help our industry partners drive consumer engagement and growth. Key topics included the power of tours and ag experiences, building your experiences and events portfolio and marketing.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

At year-end, Yakima Valley Tourism proudly counted 284 businesses and organizations as members that included restaurants, hotels, attractions, wineries and breweries, community organizations and more. Together, we collaborated to enhance tourism across the Yakima Valley.

Members were kept informed about tourism news and opportunities through 24 e-newsletters. The popular Yakima Valley Official Travel Guide™ and Yakima Area Map will return in 2025 with new featured listings, updated text and refreshed photos.

VISITOR SERVICES

Visitor information centers (VICs) have a proven record of serving visitors and inspiring them to extend their stays. They are also a vital resource for residents.



This year we leaned into new areas for our visitor service outreach. The main visitor center on Fair Avenue was open Tuesdays through Saturdays year-round. Our second location at Valley Mall was re-focused on info distribution and restarted mid-year with service Thursdays through Sundays. Pop-up booths at special events allowed us to reach more visitors and locals. We partnered with local arts and cultural attractions and groups to work the Farmer's Market booth, giving them exposure to the market visitors.



9,191

PEOPLE SERVED

IN-PERSON, BY PHONE, EMAIL & MAIL

An increase of 33% over 2023

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2025

Here are key highlights from our 2025 Business Plan focused on boosting tourism and enhancing our community:



Yakima Valley Tourism

10 North 8th St. · Yakima, WA 98901
509.575.3010 · VisitYakima.com

COMMUNITY & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- Continue to implement DestinationNEXT strategic efforts, including partner the new Tourism Ambassador Program.
- Help develop new tourism products, facilities and opportunities countywide.
- Keep the value of tourism top of mind with community leaders and the public.
- Utilize Visitor Services pop-ups as a means to inform the community about our efforts.

YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

- Showcase the 18,300-square-foot expansion and new amenities such as improved AV.
- Pursue projects for the Center including increased parking and a new headquarter hotel.
- Finish efforts to meet or exceed requirements of the Clean Building Law.
- Maximize Center use to meet and exceed budgeted income and expenses.

CONVENTION & GROUP SALES

- Highlight the community through targeted sales calls and events to meeting planners.
- Collaborate with the Yakima Convention & Event Center to attract conventions and events aligned with the facility's objectives.
- Encourage planners to visit the region for site tours and professional development.
- Generate 80-100 sales leads, book conventions and room nights.

VISITOR & COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Assess the long-term needs for funding, services, partners and locations.
- Continue to get the Mobile Info Center Kiosk (M.I.C.K.) at local events and attractions.
- Deliver exceptional customer service at Visitor Information Center locations and pop-up booths.
- Assist more than 10,000 visitors through in-person interactions, mail, email, and phone inquiries.
- Find creative ways to attract new visitors and locals to the information centers while encouraging travelers to stay longer.

YAKIMA VALLEY SPORTS COMMISSION

- Maintain the strong partnership with the WIAA.
- Build relationships with local and regional sporting organizations, venues and tournament directors.
- Raise awareness about the sports commission and the value of sporting events.
- Encourage good sportsmanship through the Know Your Role™ program.
- Highlight new and improved sports facilities to attract sporting events.

DESTINATION MARKETING & PROMOTION

- Implement data-driven marketing strategies and brand management practices.
- Elevate the destination by promoting the four core pillars to attract visitors year-round.
- Foster industry and community partnerships, building collaborations and promotions to support tourism industry stakeholders.
- Provide focused assistance to the craft beverage industry.
- Remain the Yakima Valley leader in tourism-related digital & social promotion.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

- Provide support and services to member businesses.
- Meet and solicit 50 potential members.
- Build membership to 325 members and sustain a high level of retention.
- Update, sell and distribute the 2026 Official Yakima Valley Travel Guide™.
- Plan new programs to boost business for members and the community.

MEDIA & TRADE RELATIONS

- Develop and distribute tailored pitches to travel media and content creators.
- Secure travel and lifestyle coverage of the Yakima Valley in diverse media outlets.
- Represent the Yakima Valley at trade and media events, highlighting key attractions and events to drive visitation.
- Enhance and oversee internal and external reporting on media activities and outcomes.
- Facilitate connections between film crews and local resources.