

Florence/Lauderdale  
Convention and Visitors Bureau  
2018 Sales & Marketing Plan

DRAFT

## Industry Outlook

Understanding travel trends, behaviors and patterns is key to crafting marketing strategies for the best return. Who are the decision makers? How are consumers accessing information? Who is our target market? What inspires someone to visit a destination? And many other questions that must be answered for a more targeted message. While there are many sources online to extract this data, here are what some of the top travel sites are reporting for 2018:

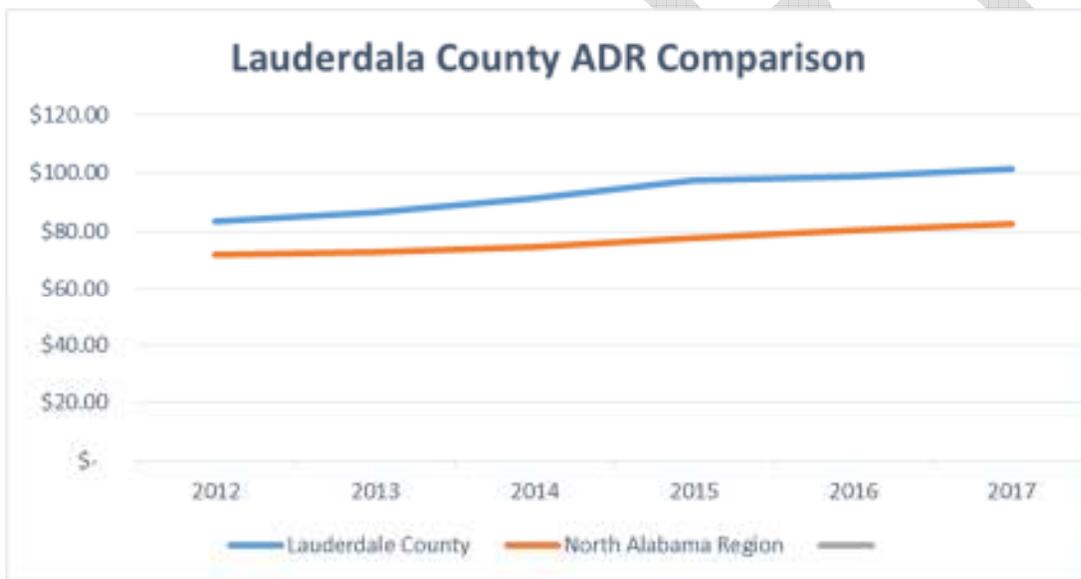
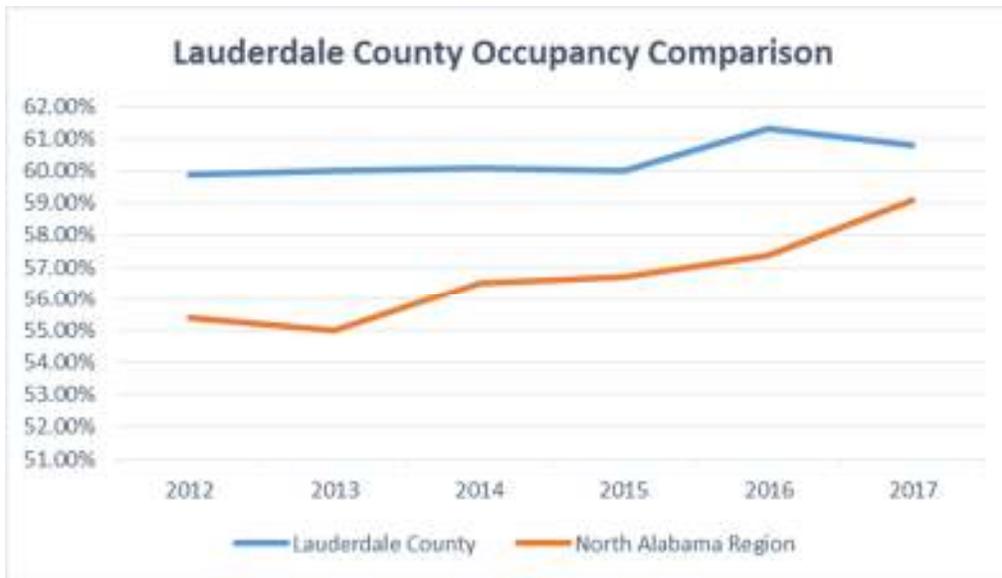
- **Rising travel research on mobile comes as no surprise** –70% of travelers with smartphones have done travel research on their smartphone (Google)
- **We want to book whenever it suits us** - 59% of travelers begin researching their next trip between one and three months before departure (TripAdvisor)
- **Most travel bookings are done by women** - Women are the ones booking tours and activities 67% of the time (TrekSoft data)
- **Travelers are merging business and leisure** - In the U.S. 43% of business trips are “bleisure” (Expedia Media Solutions)
- **Experiences is still our favorite word in travel** - The most forward-thinking DMOs use a digital and content-first strategy to build an emotional & inspirational brand with experiences at its centre. (TrekSoft)
- **Good marketing has visuals, creativity and a digital focus** - 84% of millennials don’t trust traditional advertising. Brands need to get creative instead of being pushy and disingenuous (The McCarthy Group.)

As we move farther into the digital age, our marketing efforts will focus on how we can engage, educate and inspire travel. Clearly, user-generated content (UGC) is one way to make our audience part of the Visit Florence social media team. Watching what kind of content is generated gives our team the direction for what our locals and travelers are passionate about – what’s trending and what they find exciting or cool about our destination!

Both occupancy and average daily rate (ADR) in Lauderdale County continue to outperform the median average in North Alabama destinations with a small decline (0.5%) from 2016 to 2017 in occupancy, yet ADR up \$2.50 over 2016 numbers and up \$19.07 over the average in North Alabama. Lodging tax revenues in 2017 are up 2.2% over 2016 proceeds.

[insert occupancy comparison chart]

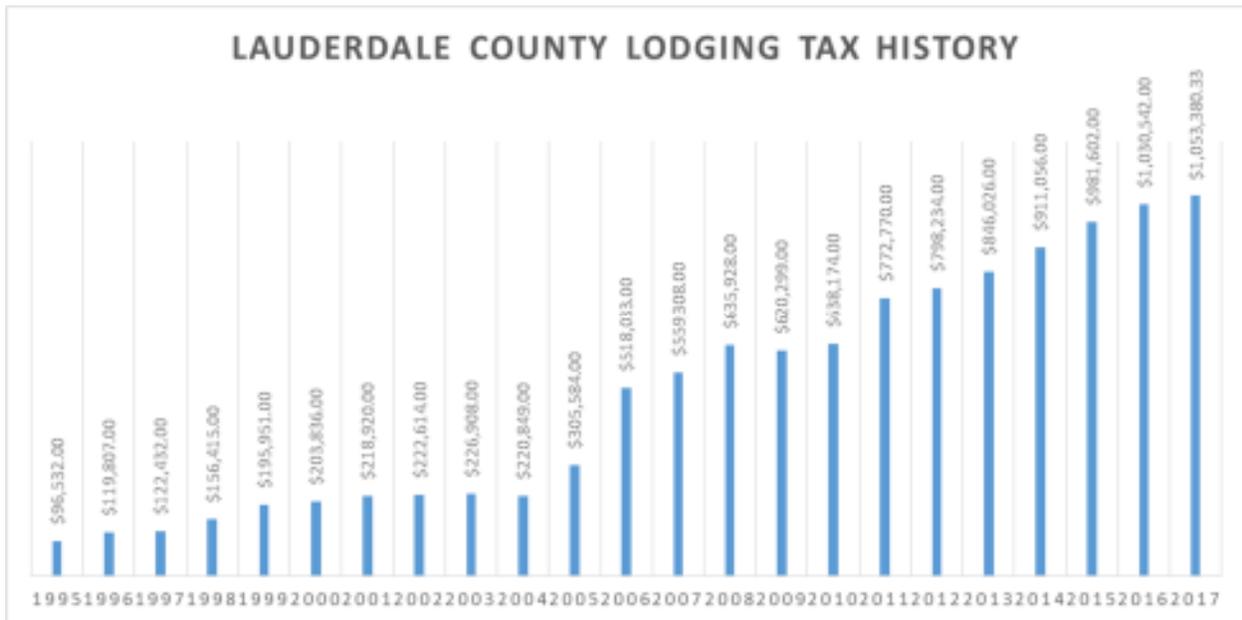
[insert ADR comparison chart]



Over 25 million people visited Alabama in 2016 spending over \$13.4 Billion. \$836 million of State and Local Tax revenues were generated in 2016. Without this revenue, each Alabama household would pay an additional \$444 in taxes to maintain current service levels. Every \$107,310 of travel-related expenditures creates one direct job in Alabama.

At a local level, visitors spent almost \$238 million in Lauderdale County in 2016. A 4.8% increase or \$10 million up over 2015. Tourism employs 2,828 people in Lauderdale County. Lauderdale County is in the TOP 10 counties statewide for most number of people employed in Tourism.

[insert table for YOY increase in lodging tax revenue for Lauderdale County]



### Top Employers in the Shoals – Lauderdale and Colbert Counties

Tourism Industry	Lauderdale County	All sectors (direct and indirect)	2828
North American Lighting	Muscle Shoals	Automotive Lighting Fixtures	1,437
ECM Hospital	Florence	Health Care	1,222
Constellium	Muscle Shoals	Aluminum Can Sheet; Other Common Alloy Products	1,135
Helen Keller Hospital	Sheffield	Health Care	980
Lauderdale County Schools	Lauderdale County	Education	950
University of North Alabama	Florence	Education	900
Freight Car America	Colbert County	Rail Cars	839
Tennessee Valley Authority	Muscle Shoals	Government	821
City of Florence	Florence	Government	815
Northwest Shoals Community College	Muscle Shoals	Education	599

## **2018 Sales and Marketing Plan**

### **Florence/Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau**

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIC OVERVIEW**

To develop and enhance the tourism sector through the positioning of Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area as a year-round destination of choice for visitors, through leisure travel, sport tourism, conferences, or group travel, and to realize an increase in visitation and visitor-spending to strengthen the overall economy and quality of life.

The Florence/Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) undertakes tourism marketing and development initiatives because it is a key driver in our economy. Destination marketing can also serve to introduce businesses and potential residents to the city in both professional and leisure capacities.

Marketing initiatives will be focused on showcasing the area's competitive assets and leading with its strongest demand generators for travel to differentiate us from competing destinations. We will achieve this by leveraging all tourism markets to maximize visitation and visitor-spending.

#### **CORE ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

- Market leisure activities that highlight Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area's unique music heritage, culture, culinary, fashion and natural resources and develop products, services, and activities to keep visitors continually coming back.
- Increase visitation in the Group Travel/FIT sectors and to act as a lead generator for the conference market.
- Attract regional, state, national and international sports events to build the shoulder season and strengthen our event resume.
- Ensure each guest to the city has access to visitor services, information and support.
- Increase the positive travel media coverage referencing Florence/Lauderdale County and Muscle Shoals.
- Build upon existing product clusters which need further enhancement and support as part of a tourism development initiative, including but not limited to Music, Outdoor, Fashion, Art, and History.

**TARGET MARKETS:** Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, including some international markets consisting of the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia in the Travel Trade markets.

**2018 KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURABLES:**

The sales and marketing team have established targets for individual markets. The following list indicates where we will be focusing our efforts to influence growth in our industry:

- SALES CALLS
- FAMILIARIZATION TOURS
- EARNED MEDIA
- SPORT BIDS
- SPORT MEDIA
- PATRON COUNT INTO VISITOR CENTER
- GROSS RETAIL SALES
- TOTAL ROOMS BOOKED
- ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM EVENTS
- NEW UNIQUE VISITS TO WEBSITE
- MOBILE APP DOWNLOADS
- EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS
- FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS
- TWITTER FOLLOWERS
- INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

Further to the above KPM's, our digital marketing campaign will have a set of campaign metrics that will track the campaign delivery, channel performance, new vs. returning visitors, time on site, top converting channels and path to conversion. This information helps us to focus our campaigns to capitalize on the highest concentration of activity in a particular channel.

## 2018 Florence/Lauderdale CVB Operating Budget

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>2018 OPERATING</b>
Lodging Tax	\$1,051,150
Other Public	\$120,043
Private	\$45,500
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$1,216,693</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>2018 OPERATING</b>
Corporate	\$372,963
Programming	\$503,168
Administration	\$340,562
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$1,216,693</b>

## LEISURE TRAVEL

### OBJECTIVE:

To attract a visitor(s) through multiple consumer advertising channels for the purpose of a pleasure visit by showcasing a variety of unique product offerings and increase their length of stay.

### MARKET OVERVIEW:

The consumer/leisure market is one which yields significant spending over the entire calendar year. Statistics indicate that over 25 million people visited Alabama in 2016, spending over \$13.4 Billion. Visitors spent almost \$238 million in Lauderdale County in 2016 which is an increase of 5% in expenditures over 2015.

Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area has a unique and eclectic music history, natural resources, historical narratives, fashion icons and cultural gems which make this destination an attractive and appealing place to visit, live and work.

In 2018, VisitFlorenceAL will launch a 12-month leisure digital marketing campaign into Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama using several tools and tactics to yield awareness and engagement of the destination. By launching strategic advertising campaigns into feeder markets, Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area is kept “top of mind” in the travel decision making process of our target audiences. By showcasing these offerings, our destination will stand to benefit as consumers will find more to do and will stay in the area for a longer period of time.

### 2018 TARGETS:

- Grow our website visitation and inquiries by 25% to 159,375
- Increase the number of app downloads by 50% to 2,716
- Grow our Facebook follower audience by 32% over 2017 to 22,332\_likes on Facebook
- Grow our Twitter follower audience by 16% over 2017 to 5,965
- Grow our Instagram follower audience by 62% to 6500

### TACTICS :

- Create the NEW *Official Visitors Guide to Florence/Lauderdale County and Shoals Area* by developing partnerships with near-by metropolitan centers to further distribute the guide as a resource to visitors.
- Enhance our on-line presence through innovative and advanced social media programs while exploring new platforms such as Pinterest. Strengthen our online presence through Facebook campaigns by growing our follower base and engaging our current audience. Further development of value-add packaging/contesting with industry partners.
- Leverage Brand USA’s 2017-18 platform focused on music to attract both domestic and international visitors on the Muscle Shoals music history and current live music offerings.
- Make continued improvements on both the functionality and design of the *visitflorenceal.com* website as a means of providing more engaging content while referring consumers to partner websites.

- Maximize the innovation of our native web app as a practical resource for the visitor. Heavy emphasis on the promotion and advertising of the app through print, digital, communications and street team engagement.
- Build a solid Partnership Program with our industry stakeholders by offering value-add through enhanced website listings, partner mixers, app listings, e-communications, AD space in visitor guide and distribution as well as company visits to assess the health of our relationships.
- In a next step to our digital marketing strategy, we will use a mix of user-generated content (UGC) and local experiences and attractions in a year-long campaign through display ads, video, SEM/PPC programs, mobile geo-fence ads and site remessaging ads.
- Showcase the cultural assets, natural heritage and historical offerings including the Civil War period, music heritage, Natchez Trace, festivals and events that define the area. Work with the City of Florence, DFU, Main Street, University of North Alabama and other community partners to build on the sense of place in downtown Florence.
- Invest in growth and expansion of existing tourism product and work to identify new product and programming opportunities.

#### **STRATEGIC MESSAGING:**

America's Greatest Place to Live – Southern Living – Muscle Shoals Sound – Iconic Museums - Cultural and Heritage Experiences – Outdoor – Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail – Fashion and Fame – WC Handy – Main Street – The Singing River

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**

- STR Report
- Google Analytics
- Advance Travel + Tourism dashboard
- Economic Impact Reports
- State Visitation Reports
- Industry Visitation/Sales Reports

**Lead:** CEO/Manager, Media Relations

## **TRAVEL TRADE**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To attract motor coach and other visitor groups (FIT), fly n' drive, both domestic and international, to Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area.

### **MARKET OVERVIEW:**

An aggressive and strategic effort will be made to capitalize on the Shoals advantage to attract group tours to the area. Operators have indicated first-hand that there is an increased interest in the area because of the popular "Muscle Shoals" documentary and niche attractions that are attractive to group travelers, such as the Rosenbaum House, Helen Keller home and Tom's Wall. There are many opportunities to add Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area to existing tour itineraries – especially the ones that highlight Southern music -- and those that will be added through promotion of the Americana Music Triangle. Exploration of new tradeshow events presents new opportunities. Participation in the American Bus Association tradeshow will open the door to new leads showcasing Florence and the Shoals as a music icon destination!

### **2018 TARGETS:**

- Increase the number of qualified leads by 20% to 90 leads
- Increase the number familiarization tours by 25% to five (5) area tours

### **TACTICS:**

- Create suggested themed itineraries. Together with our industry partners and our official visitor guide, these sources provide buyers with many reasons and experiences when traveling to our destination. Popular itineraries will include: Muscle Shoals Music, Homegrown and Homemade, Fashion & Fame, Girlfriend Getaway, Outdoor Adventures, Civil War and Talking Stones to A Frank Lloyd Wright Home.
- Leverage the statewide support of the state bicentennial along with the City of Florence bicentennial over the years of 2017, 2018 and 2019.
- Honored as the 2017 Alabama Top Attraction of the Year, the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio at 3614 Jackson Highway will be on display to the world as both a working studio and museum. In partnership with the Muscle Shoals Music Foundation Board of Directors, Visit Florence will work to maximize both media opportunities and tour packages to capitalize on this significant achievement.
- Partner with Alabama Tourism Department, Alabama Travel Council and Alabama Mountain Lakes Association to identify key group tour operators that are coming to our area and state. Contact them to include our destinations sites in existing tours and itineraries.
- Follow up on new leads from domestic and international operators provided by these and other organizations.
- Facilitate and lead familiarization tours from both domestic and international audiences.
- Attend domestic and international trade shows to promote the Florence/Lauderdale and Shoals area experience, including Travel South Showcase, Travel South International and American Bus Association.
- Prepare detailed lead reports and make available to the local travel industry to further develop group business.

**STRATEGIC MESSAGING:**

Muscle Shoals Sound - Southern Culture - Singing River – Americana Music Triangle – The Swamper’s - Civil War History - Unique Museums and Galleries - Natchez Trace Parkway - WC Handy

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**

- STR Report
- Increased group bookings
- State Reports

**LEAD:** Manager, Sport/Event Sales/CVB Team

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## **SPORT TOURISM**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To lead and assist the local community by establishing Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area as a sport tourism and recreation destination. The Florence/Lauderdale CVB serves as a catalyst and support for the creation, promotion and delivery of sport events for visitors, participants, partners and residents.

### **MARKET OVERVIEW:**

In 2018, the Sport Tourism division of the Florence CVB will put a high priority on the creation of new events whether through a bid process, or work with our database of Event Right Holders to host a tournament. According to the National Association of Sport Commission's (NASC) annual study in 2016, sport tourism was responsible for \$10.47 billion in direct spending nationwide. Between 2012 and 2016, according to the study, visitor spending in the United States has increased at a strong 26.1%. The attraction of sport events in the "shoulder season" stabilizes the cash flow of tourism operators and provides an economic stimulus during times of excess capacity for local accommodation providers.

### **2018 TARGETS:**

- Increase the number of sales calls by 10% to 121 leads
- Increase the number of sport bids or support by 33% to 4 new events
- Increase the paid media in sport by 10% to \$979,000.00
- Increase the economic impact of sport events by 20% to \$6,560,934.00
- Establish a benchmark of 7000 room nights booked through our sales efforts. An increase of almost 10% over 2017

### **TACTICS:**

- Build upon the partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department to identify opportunities of new sport events by leveraging established relationships which Parks and Recreation has developed along with supporting UNA and opportunities they have to secure new events.
- Attend industry recognized trade shows to develop qualified leads and contacts.
- Host and facilitate sport organizations with facility site tours of Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area.
- Work with community partners to build a "service-oriented" model within the department that will offer a suite of support services to event operators for a more seamless delivery of events.
- Visit state, regional and independent sport organizations to develop relationships and communicate what Florence and Lauderdale County has to offer as a host community.
- Develop bids for both sport events or meetings and conferences.
- Measure value of paid media (captured by outlet and reported monthly to Board)
- Seek out events and tournaments that will come to our area for less than the current events planned.

**STRATEGIC MESSAGING:**

One of the Nation's Top Bass Fisheries - UNA Football – UNA Division One Athletics - State-of-the-Art Sportsplex - Location – Home of the Harlon Hill trophy

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**

- STR Report
- Paid Media
- Economic Impact Reports
- Contracted Events

**LEAD:** Manager, Sport/Event Sales

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## **MEDIA RELATIONS**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To maximize public relations reach and “third party endorsement” from travel and outdoor writers, bloggers and other key influencers who provide content for travelers.

### **MARKET OVERVIEW:**

The ingenuity of third-party endorsement in tourism marketing has made it cost effective for destinations to have a national, and in some cases an international, presence with consumers. Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area have received an abundance of promotion through the continued positive publicity the area has received in the past few years, including the “Muscle Shoals” documentary and other newsworthy events that have happened as a result.

Local designers Billy Reid and Natalie Chanin are often featured in national publications as well as unique stories such as Tom’s Wall. Downtown Florence is more vibrant than ever before and known as one of the South’s Best Small Towns according to Southern Living magazine.

### **2018 TARGETS:**

- Increase the number of qualified media leads by 30% to 82
- Increase the number of familiarization tours by 60% to sixteen (16) area tours
- Increase the media value by 22% over 2017 to \$6,125,526 for the destination

### **TACTICS:**

- Participate in Media Meetup organized by Southeast Tourism Society and other writer events. Evaluate success of each event based on contacts made, journalist commitment to visit and articles
- Research publications, blogs and special interest groups that produce print or online media that match the strong assets available in Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area. Submit creative story ideas.
- Respond to journalists and other travel professionals’ needs as required.
- Partner with Alabama Tourism Department, Alabama Mountain Lakes, Southeast Tourism Society, SEOPA, SATW, Travel South, Americana Music Triangle, Natchez Trace Compact and others to co-host journalist visits.
- Establish itineraries to match targeted journalist needs.
- Work with local tourism partners to secure rooms, food and tours to defray hosting costs.
- Provide news releases about special events and tourism products.
- Utilize VisitFlorenceAL.com and Visit Florence Blog as portals for compelling, timely content and as vehicles to deepen engagement with leisure visitors, locals, meeting professionals and travel trade.

- Measure value of earned media (captured by outlet and reported monthly to Board).
- Maintain consumer website with Media Coverage stories and relevant Press Releases to motivate travel to Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area.

**STRATEGIC MESSAGING:**

Muscle Shoals Sound - One-of-a-kind Architecture - Singing River – Americana Music Triangle - Southern Authenticity - Fashion and Fame - Main Street

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**

- Earned Media – Critical Mention
- Inquiries
- Tear Sheets
- Google Alert/Google Analytics

**LEAD:** Manager, Media Relations/Digital Communications

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## **VISITOR SERVICES**

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To provide Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area visitor information and retail products to guests of the Visitor Center with outstanding customer service.

### **MARKET OVERVIEW:**

Ensuring visitors to Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area are able to access information and support during their travels is an essential component of the visitor experience – one which can translate into increased length of stay, repeat visitation and referrals for the city.

The Visitor Center was established as a multi-purpose venue to service the growing number of visitors to our city. Its primary purpose as an information and retail outlet provides visitors with useful resources and souvenirs for purchase, but further serves as a gathering-place for local residents, artisans, musicians, and those representing the cultural and historical scene in the city.

Our knowledgeable and friendly Visitor Services staff extends that “southern hospitality” that makes each and every visitor feel right at home.

The Visitor Center staff joins the front-line team of all our industry partners to help manage guest responses and comments along with tracking their point of origin.

### **2018 TARGETS:**

- Increase the number of patrons to the center by 10% to 12,342
- Increase our retail gross sales by 5% to \$19,622

### **TACTICS :**

- Ensure that all visitor information publications and touch pad resources are up to date with current area attractions, events, event calendars and activities.
- Provide the necessary training for all front line staff to guarantee each visitor is welcomed and well-informed.
- Conduct and analyze visitor surveys to gauge visitor satisfaction.
- Manage all product display, inventory control and product purchasing with Director of Operations.
- Serve as host to all programming within The Gallery - managing bookings, advertising, calendar and inquiries.
- Work with Director of Operations and Manager, Media Relations to advertise the center to our visiting and local audiences via social media.
- Work with City and County officials to improve and correct all signage points in the area for locating the Visitor Center.
- Support the Visit Florence Street Team Program.
- Conduct FAM tours and special programs for hotel staff.
- Work with Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area to fund Visitor Center programming.
- Host various seminars to support our Partnership Program.

**KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:**

- Patron surveys
- Receipts
- Inquiries
- Special Programs

**STRATEGIC MESSAGING:**

Florence/Lauderdale County and the Shoals area – unique local gifts – The Gallery – visitor information

**LEAD:** Director of Operations/Visitor Services

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## Meet the Florence/Lauderdale CVB Team

Rob Carnegie – President & CEO

Alison Stanfield – Director of Operations

Suzie Shoemaker – Manager, Sport/Event Sales

Randa Simpson - Manager, Media Relations

Micah Cox – Project Administrator/Partnership Services

Linda Jones – Visitor Experience Specialist

Delois Crawford – Visitor Experience Specialist

## Meet the Florence/Lauderdale CVB Board of Directors

David Muhlendorf

David Abramson

Larry McCoy

Rob Jones

Chris Lewis

**Florence/Lauderdale Convention and Visitors' Bureau**

**McFarland Park**

200 Jim Spain Drive

Florence, AL

35630

[www.VisitflorenceAL.com](http://www.VisitflorenceAL.com)

888-356-8687

[include all social media logos]

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Facebook – VISITFLORENCE AL

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