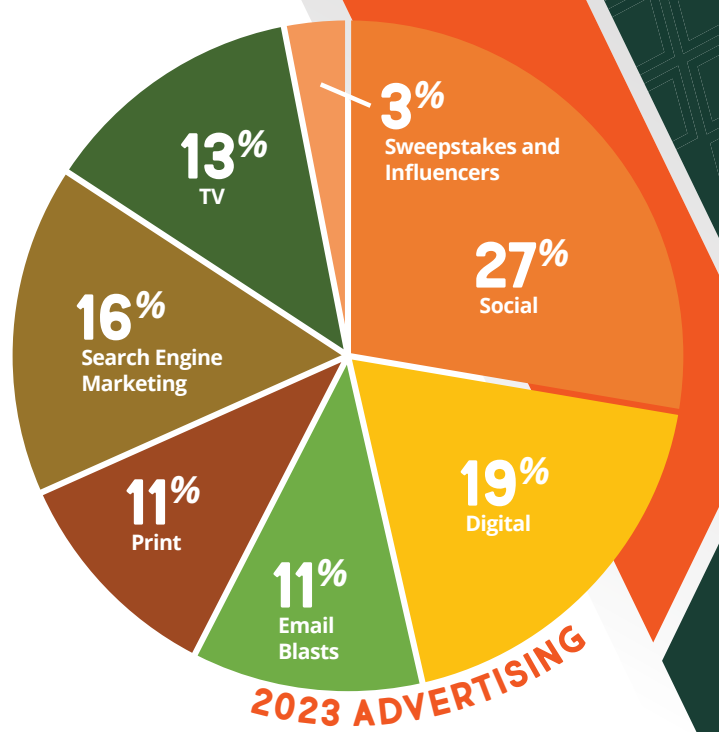
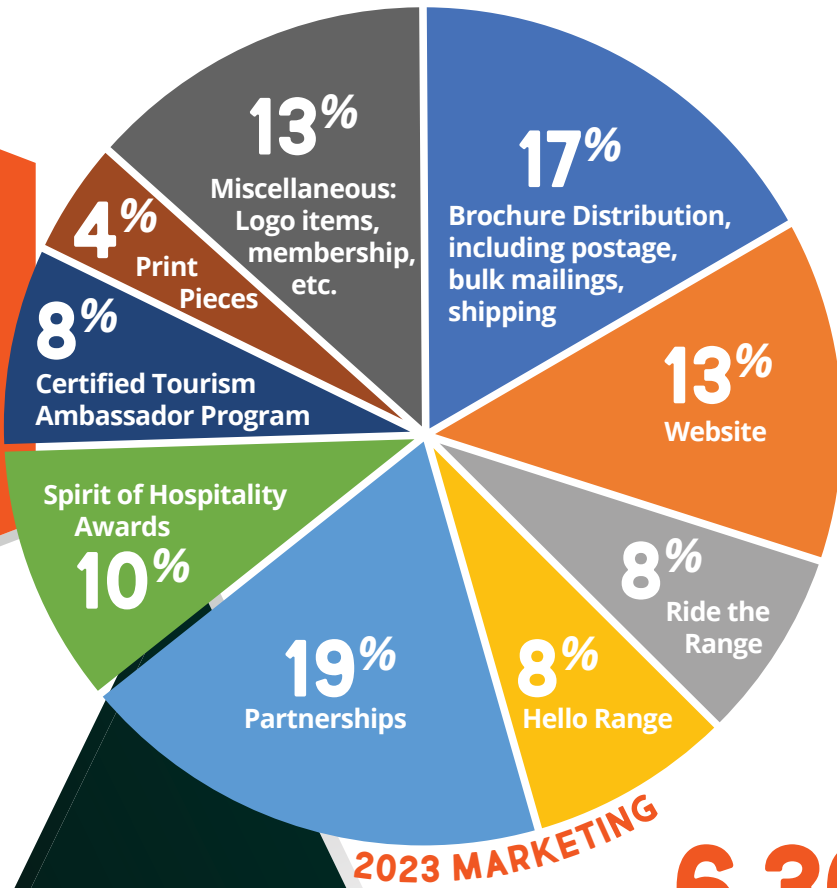
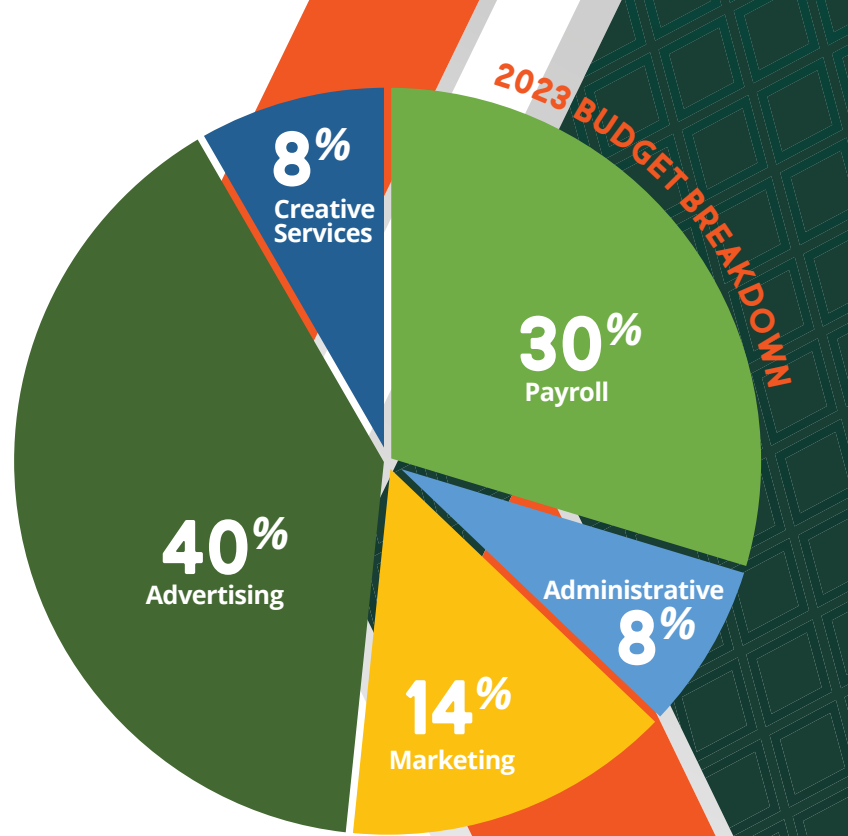


2023 ANNUAL REPORT

5 MILLION+
digital ad impressions



124,053
NEW
WEBSITE
visitors

6,300 REQUESTS
for vacation guide and map
from website

1 MILLION+
organic social media
impressions



Reflecting back on 2023

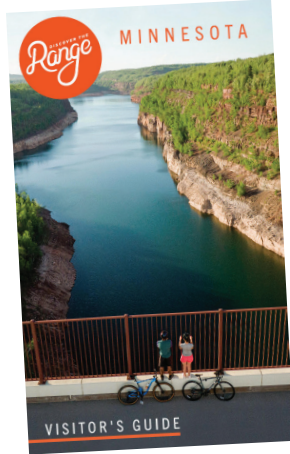
Now that 2023 has come and gone, we can spend a little time – literally, not much; there's too much to do! – reflecting on the year. While our 2023 lodging tax income topped all previous years, many of our lodging properties did not see a significant, or any, increase in occupancy over last year. Many hotels in the area can attest to the fact that business travel to our region and in fact around the country has not returned to pre-pandemic numbers, and the local construction boom that helped many hotels in recent years (think of Rock Ridge High School and Iron Trail Motors Event Center), has cooled.



BETH PIERCE

That means the increase is driven by lodging rates, which have remained very healthy since the pandemic ended. We fully expect hotel rates to come down in

the near future – they are already headed that way – but can we make up for that with increased occupancy in 2024? We will certainly do our part to make that happen! But the reality is that our product is what will truly move the dial on travel and tourism in our region.



So, what is our product? Certainly, our product includes our events and festivals, shopping and dining, historic sites and attractions, and trails and other recreation. And these have improved tremendously in recent years with new businesses, reinvigorated and new events, and more trails and amenities. But our product also includes us. The way people feel when they visit an area, and the vibe that an area gives off,

have a big impact on whether visitors say positive things about us, tell others to visit, and generally impact the biggest factor in people's decision to travel to a certain destination: word of mouth.

Our frontline hospitality staff know that when people feel welcome and treated well, they'll be back, and they may even leave a great review. But when it comes to tourists and other visitors, we ALL have to be part of that welcoming feel and the upbeat energy that is felt in the most successful destinations. Everyone has a role to play in making our region a success as a destination and a place to live. Having a positive attitude is half the battle and if you need inspiration, just look around. Amazing things are happening in our Iron Range towns – things that are making us a great place visit and, hopefully for some, to put down roots.

Welcome New BOARD MEMBERS

We're very excited to welcome new board members:
Shaun Hainey
Michelle Cramer
Bridgit Maruska
Jamie Lindseth



Iron Range Tourism Bureau Board Members:

FRONT ROW: Tony Jeffries, Buhl City Administrator and Jim Hunt, Event/Program Services Manager at Iron Trail Motors Event Center. SECOND ROW: Betsy Olivanti, Community Development Director for the City of Hibbing, new member Bridgit Maruska, Parks, Trails and Recreation Director for the City of Chisholm, Britt See-Benes, Virginia City Administrator, Jim Makowsky, Director of Operations for WDA Management and Bill Aho, Owner of WDA Management. BACK ROW: Fred Seymour, General Manager of Giants Ridge; Shaun Hainey, Northspan Consultant and Northland Connection Program Manager, Jamie Lindseth, agent at Range Reliable, Pustovar and Miners Insurance agencies, Michelle Kramer, General Manager of the Comfort Inn and Suites of Mountain Iron, Barrett Ziemer, Executive Director of Range Regional Airport, and Shawn Herhusky, Community Development Representative at Iron Range Resources. Not pictured: Kim Sampson and Jackie Monahan-Junek.

From the Board Chair

Fred Seymour, General Manager, Giants Ridge

As we kicked off 2024, many of us had high hopes for another winter with good snow, the kind that attracts snowmobilers, skiers, fat bike enthusiasts and snowshoers to the excellent trails of The Range. That clearly was not to be, and our lodging properties have taken a hit these first few weeks of the year. One positive note can be found at Giants Ridge and other sporting venues around the region, where high school teams found the best snow in the state for alpine and Nordic events, and hockey and other sports teams are recognizing the quality facilities we have in our schools and communities. Each tournament brings overnight guests to our hotels and other properties, and groups to our restaurants, gas stations and retailers.



FRED SEYMOUR

It is with the high quality facilities at Giants Ridge, Iron Trail Motors Event Center, the Hippodrome, Hibbing Memorial Building, Range Recreation and Civic Center, Rock Ridge High School, Redhead Mountain Bike Park and others in mind that we at Iron Range Tourism have committed to a sports marketing emphasis this year.

With the help of an IRRR grant, we have already done the work of building out sports venue information on our website (soon to be live), and through a partnership with Explore Minnesota Tourism, beefed up sports venue listings on PlayEasy, an online network for sporting venues, destination, events, and event planners.

This spring, we hope to again bring area facility managers and athletic directors together to talk about how we can attract more tournaments to The Range, and support those that are already happening. Each and every event, from the Senior Men's Curling Championships at Curl Mesabi this month and the upcoming Minnesota State Indoor Archery Tournament in April to the Minnesota Cycling Association finale at Redhead in October, Iron Range Tourism is here to welcome teams and competitors, and assist in any way we can. That assistance may be funding bid packages, helping with sponsorship, providing welcome bags or even volunteering onsite. As we continue with our 36-year history of shining a light on the great things to see and do on The Range, look for sports travel to become an emerging market for us.

And as we work our way through another year together, we hope to see you out and about on The Range, enjoying the many attractions, trails and events this region has to offer.

2023, A Year of AWARDS

In 2023, Iron Range Tourism was recognized for excellence by two statewide entities: the state's tourism department, Explore Minnesota Tourism, and the Economic Development Association of Minnesota. Our work in leading the marketing cooperative Ride The Range earned us a marketing award at the annual Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference. This partnership between Giants Ridge, Iron Range Tourism, Redhead Mountain Bike Park, Tioga Mountain Bike Park, Visit Grand Rapids and Cuyuna County, brands these impressive trail systems into a cycling destination through marketing and public relations efforts. Our EDAM award was given for Jingle All The Range, an initiative to roll all of The Range's holiday events into one fabulous website and experience.



Accepting the EDAM award for innovation:

IRTB board member Betsy Olivanti, IRTB marketing coordinator Ceasar Ortega, IRTB director Beth Pierce, IRTB board member Jim Makowsky, and EDAM president, Kati Bachmayer.



In the photos, accepting the award for Ride The Range:

Beth Pierce, Executive Director of Iron Range Tourism; Chisholm City Administrator Stephanie Skraba; Chisholm's Director of Parks, Trails and Recreation, Bridgit Maruska; Steve Rahkola, Director of Sales and Marketing at Giants Ridge; IRTB board members Bill Aho and Jim Makowsky; and IRTB's Marketing Coordinator, Ceasar Ortega.



Welcome, Ceasar!



CEASAR ORTEGA

After working for Iron Range Tourism on a parttime basis for nearly a year, Ceasar Ortega joined us full time in January of 2023. As many of you can attest, he has been a great addition to the organization! In fact, Ceasar has truly become "the face of Discover The Range" through his work covering events, trails, businesses and attractions in our service area for our social media channels. Ceasar has also been developing a podcast called Meeting Mesabi, soon to launch, and is very active with the Laurentian Chamber Ambassadors and Range FanCon. We are grateful to have him on board!

-Beth

Celebrating the SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY

Want to learn MORE?

We love to present to groups! We'd also love to have you get involved with our CTA program, Spirit of Hospitality Awards, or as a board member.

Contact us at beth@ironrange.org, 218-749-8161 or stop into our office at the Mesabi Station, 111 Station 44 Rd., Eveleth

Last year's winners are shown here.

IRON RANGE
Spirit
OF HOSPITALITY



Since 2012, Iron Range Tourism has been celebrating the people and places that provide a warm welcome to visitors from around the country and the world. The Spirit of Hospitality Awards were created to recognize those in our service area who are excelling at customer service and making all of us look good with their great attitudes, friendly smiles and helpful ways.

Throughout the year, we accept nominations online, and we meet with every nominee before deciding a winner in each category. We host an awards event for all nominees each fall, and it's always a great time. We'd love to see you there on October 6! Learn more about this worthy event: ironrange.org/spirit-of-hospitality.

CERTIFIED TOURISM
Ambassador
OF THE IRON RANGE



Want to get your staff fired up about the fun things to see and do in the region, and get some customer service lessons on the side? Sign up for one of our Certified Tourism Ambassador classes, or let us know you'd like to attend one and we'll work around YOUR schedule. These 3.5-hour classes are fun, engaging and offer a whole new perspective on this region. This class is designed for anyone who might come in contact with visitors, including students! We had a BLAST with Rock Ridge High School business class (photo above). Contact us for more information at beth@ironrange.org 218-749-8161.



Longtime IRTB board member Bill Aho, second from left, was named 2023 Developer of the Year by AmericInn by Wyndahm for his International Falls property. Aho also owns the AmericInn of Virginia and the Eveleth Super 8. Shown with him, second from right, is the operations manager for all three properties, Jim Makowsky, also a longtime IRTB board member. Congratulations Jim and Bill!

