

# Pure Ludington

Ludington Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

## PRESS RELEASE

**Contact:** Kim Skeltis, APR; 616.419.8385; [kim@blueblazepr.com](mailto:kim@blueblazepr.com)

### **LUDINGTON FINISHES STRONG 2016 TOURISM SEASON WITH HIGHEST EVENT AND ATTRACTION ATTENDANCE, STEADY HOTEL ROOM RENTAL INCOME**

*New Year's Eve Ball Drop Drew Largest Crowd Ever; Ludington State Park Broke DNR Campground Attendance Records, S.S. Badger Crossings Up from 2015*

LUDINGTON, Mich. – Feb. 24, 2017 – The word is out about Ludington. Ludington and Mason County closed another strong tourism season in 2016, with steady hotel room rental income from 2015, record-breaking attendance at signature events like the New Year's Eve Ball Drop, and an increase in visitors to attractions like Ludington State Park and the S.S. Badger.

"Ludington clearly is a favorite destination on people's Michigan bucket lists," said Kathy Maclean, executive director of the Ludington Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. "It's especially impressive for our size to have the variety of activities and annual events that draw all types of visitors. Ludington and surrounding Mason County offer a competitive visitor experience with something for everyone – from the outdoor lover, to the craft beer enthusiast, to the beach goer."

#### **Room Rental Income on Par with Record-Breaking 2015**

In 2016, Ludington area hotels generated \$12,319,347 in room rental income – only slightly lower than 2015 at \$12,385,283 (the highest year for room rental income in Ludington's history) and a 29.5 percent increase from five years ago in 2011. Room rental income is a primary metric to measure tourism activity, and figures are collected from LACVB hotel members. (Actual room rental income is higher if non-member hotels are included.)

"We're thrilled with these hotel numbers, especially considering two of our popular hotels were closed for part or all of the year that took 165 rooms out of the 2016 inventory compared to the previous year," said Maclean. The 113-room Holiday Inn Express & Suites was closed January to May 2016 while being converted from the former Baymont Inn and Suites, and the 52-room Lakeside Inn of Ludington was closed for all of 2016 while it was up for sale. The hotel will open in May 2017 as the Ludington Beach House.

Ludington saw increases in room rental income in the months of January, June, and September through November, with the biggest year-over-year increases in June at \$1,590,773 (7.4 percent higher than June 2015) and October at \$1,009,113 (15.8 percent higher than October 2015). June experienced an uptick in visitors especially due to the Love Ludington Weekend and related marketing about the Guinness World Record Longest Ice Cream Dessert attempt, which attracted approximately 15,000 to 18,000 people during the weekend. October saw high visitors due to the unseasonably warm fall and prime fall foliage viewing.

#### **Event and Attraction Attendance Spikes**

Ludington also saw its best year yet for attendance at signature events like the New Year's Eve Ball Drop, Suds on the Shore, Rhythm & Dunes, Gus Macker and Ludington Lakestride. Additionally, Ludington State Park led Michigan's 100-plus state parks in terms of highest number of camp nights booked. The city also saw an increase in leisure boaters. Highlights include:

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## Events

- **New Year's Eve Ball Drop** – The 2016 [New Year's Eve Ball Drop](#) saw its largest crowd yet in its eight-year history at 15,000, up by 50 percent from 10,000 in 2015 due to a strong publicity push and another ball drop being cancelled in West Michigan.
- **Love Ludington Weekend** – The official “Love Ludington” weekend of June 11 brought approximately 15,000 to 18,000 people to downtown Ludington to participate in the [Guinness World Record attempt for the Longest Ice Cream Dessert](#) (which Ludington won). The [Ludington Lakestride](#) running event was held the same day and saw 998 runners, an increase from 940 in 2015.
- **Beer festivals** – The third annual [Pure Ludington BRRRewfest](#) saw a 75 percent increase in attendance at 700 people in 2016 from 400 people in 2015. Pre-event ticket sales also increased almost 300 percent, with 353 online tickets sold in 2016 versus 89 tickets sold online in 2015. [Suds on the Shore](#) had 3,000 attendees in 2016, up 29 percent from 2,316 attendees in 2015.
- **Rhythm & Dunes** – The two-day [Rhythm & Dunes](#) concert had its best attendance yet in 2016, bringing in approximately 12,000 to 14,000 total in 2016, up more than 15 percent from 2014 when 10,000 to 12,000 attended.
- **Gus Macker** – [Gus Macker](#) drew a full crowd for its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year with 836 teams 3,344 players, 10,000 to 15,000 fans – up from 783 teams and 3,132 players in 2015 (the number of fans stayed the same). The Ludington Gus Macker remains the largest Gus Macker tournament in the country.

## Attractions

- **Ludington State Park** – In 2016, [Ludington State Park](#) attracted 849,703 visitors, including 624,725 day users – a 7.4 percent increase in visitors from 2015. Regarding camping, 2016 saw the highest number of camp nights booked in the past five years at 48,284 camp nights (up 2.3 percent from 2015), with the highest number of camp nights booked among all state park campgrounds.
- **Historic sites and museums** – [Historic White Pine Village](#) attracted 8,615 attendees in 2016, up from 8,604 in 2015. [Sandcastles Children's Museum](#) had 25,922 attendees in 2016, up 3.4 percent from 25,058 attendees in 2015. The museum also attracted 300 people to its annual New Year's Eve event, up 63 percent from 184 in 2015.
- **S.S. Badger** – While the [S.S. Badger](#) does not disclose passenger numbers, the company confirmed it again saw an increase in passenger crossings in 2016 from 2015. Terri Veen, director of marketing and media relations, said that the company has seen consistent growth in passenger counts for the fourth consecutive year. Also, all of the Badger shoreline cruises sold out again in 2016.
- **Ludington Municipal Marina** – The [Ludington Municipal Marina](#) saw a strong year for boat traffic, especially among leisure boaters. The marina sold 58,515 gallons of diesel in 2016, up 53 percent from 38,155 gallons in 2015. Ludington Municipal Marina Manager Jim Christensen attributed that to an increase in “Loopers” who travel [America's Great Loop](#), a continuous waterway through eastern North America including the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Great Lakes, Canadian canals and inland rivers. The marina also tracked 3,665 boat days (days boat parties docked at the marina overnight) in 2016, up from 3,622 boat days in 2015. And the marina saw an increase in power boats in the 30' to 50' boat size, showing an increase in leisure boat touring through Ludington.

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## New Visitor Experiences in 2017

The LACVB is gearing up for another busy tourism season as it welcomes visitors to its many annual events ([click here](#) for a full schedule), as well as some new attractions and events. New tourism offering highlights include:

- **“Be Someone’s Angel” Guinness World Record Attempt for Most Sand Angels**, June 10, 12 p.m., Stearns Park Beach. Official world record attempt at 1 p.m. [Facebook event page](#). The Spectrum Health Foundation Ludington Hospital hosts this [Guinness World Record attempt for the most sand angels](#) created simultaneously, which benefits the Spectrum Health Ludington Hospital Cancer Service Center. Part of the annual Love Ludington Weekend, the event is free though a \$20 donation per participant is suggested to provide funding assistance to patients who cannot afford treatment.
- **Port of Ludington Maritime Museum**, opens June 10 at 5 p.m., 217 S. Lakeshore Dr. Ludington’s newest attraction opens this summer – the [Port of Ludington Maritime Museum](#), located in the former U.S. Coast Guard Station. A landmark on the National Register of Historic Places, the museum will entertain, enlighten, and instruct through a variety of interactive exhibits providing a look at Ludington’s maritime heritage. Visitors can pilot the car ferry Pere Marquette 22 into Ludington’s harbor, learn the unique light signals of Lake Michigan’s many lighthouses, and see authentic artifacts used in Ludington’s celebrated harbor and by many of its famous Coast Guardsmen and car ferry sailors. Following the grand opening June 10, the museum is open year-round (*check [website](#) for hours and fees*).
- **Big Sable Point Lighthouse 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** – This iconic black-and-white lighthouse built in 1867 is one of the oldest continuously working lighthouses in Michigan and the second tallest on Lake Michigan’s eastern shore, and it turns 150 years old in 2017. While Nov. 1 is the official birthday, anniversary events will take place monthly from May through October 2017, ranging from docent-led lighthouse tours to a historic home tour. Follow the [Sable Points Lighthouse Keepers Association’s website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for anniversary information. In honor of the anniversary, the biennial [Michigan Lighthouse Festival](#) comes to Ludington Aug. 25-27 with events such as a lighthouse book talks, musical performances, a Tall Ship® “sail-away,” and more.

“As strong as last year was for tourism, we don’t see visitor numbers letting up any time soon, especially with our roster of 2017 events,” said Maclean. “We’re always adding new events and attractions in Ludington to keep people coming back for more, along with offering our tried-and-true favorites. It’s going to be another exciting year!”

### **About Ludington**

*Located on the shores of Lake Michigan with miles of beachfront and water access, Ludington offers a quintessential “Up North” experience close by. Ludington and surrounding Mason County deliver the perfect combination of unspoiled natural resources and unrivaled outdoor recreation with quaint, small-town charm. And it’s all within easy reach, located at the intersection of U.S. 31 and U.S. 10. Come to Pure Ludington – Up North close by. For information on the Ludington area including lodging, events, and other tools to help plan your next Ludington getaway, visit [PureLudington.com](#) or call (800) 542-4600.*

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