

# Detroit auto show packs big economic punch for region's tourism

**Carol Cain** Free Press Business Columnist

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How important is the 2023 North American International Detroit Auto Show to tourism and events across the region?

It's "vital," according to Claude Molinari, president and CEO of [Visit Detroit](#), the organization working alongside others to bring conventions and tourists here. He knows the annual show held at Huntington Place, which is scheduled to open to the public Sept. 16-24, will draw thousands of visitors and influencers from across the globe.

And the fact that the UAW went on strike at 12 a.m. Sept. 15 has not been lost on show organizers, who still hope for a strong turnout.

"First and foremost, we are all invested in and wholeheartedly support the auto industry — that's why it's more important than ever for everyone to work together to find an equitable resolution. At the Detroit auto show, we're focused on the upcoming public days and creating an amazing and unique show experience for attendees that demonstrates our unwavering commitment to Detroit and our love of cars," Rod Alberts, executive director of the [Detroit Auto Dealers Association](#) which stages the auto show, said in the hours before the strike and affirmed after it.

Molinari, who ran Huntington Place before taking over the Visit Detroit job in 2021, said he doesn't think the strike will dissuade the general public from attending the show. There are many events and facilities in metro Detroit that are popular, like the [Detroit Institute of Arts](#), the [Henry Ford](#), the [Motown Museum](#) or sports teams with the Detroit Lions, Pistons, Tigers, Red Wings and Michigan Panthers.

But the auto show is in a league of its own as one of the biggest auto gatherings in the nation, with the latest EVs, internal combustion engine vehicles, technology and cool one-of-a kind interactive displays all in one place. The event has brought in more than \$5 billion to the local economy over the past 20 years, according to show organizers. Almost as important, it has continued to buoy the region's reputation as an innovator in the evolving mobility space.

It seems the tourism industry owes the Motor City some love, too.

"With more than 200 million Americans taking road trips yearly, travel wouldn't be travel without Detroit (and its role in putting the world on wheels)," Freeman added.

The auto show has weathered major changes and challenges as it has adjusted to new realities of mobility and EVs and expectations about the event.

"The last four or five years has been more challenging with the accelerated rate of change," said Alberts of DADA. "But this show continues to demonstrate that Detroit is still the mobility capital. It's also a place someone can see the latest electric vehicles and displays all in one place."



Geoff Freeman, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, along with senior leaders on the U.S. Travel Association, Claude Molinari, president and CEO of Visit Detroit, and Dave Lorenz from Travel Michigan get a behind-the-scenes tour of the North American International Detroit Auto Show set up at Huntington Place on Sept. 5, 2023. *U.S. Travel Association*

[Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan said the show](#) is, “an opportunity for our city to celebrate our automakers and the incredible vehicles they produce. Each year, the show gets better and it’s always exciting to see the latest models and innovations in the field of mobility.”

Kirsten Hillman, Canada’s Ambassador to the U.S, visited the auto show on Sept. 13 and also the battery show at Suburban Showplace in Novi and talked about the growing connections between the two countries.

“Canada and the United States make cars together and we are working together to develop and refine cutting edge battery technologies,” Hillman said. “On display at the Detroit auto show are vehicles that are assembled in Canada, have significant Canadian design and technology elements, or include significant Canadian-made components. I am talking with Canadians and our Michigan partners, including the governor, about the importance of these sectors to our economies and the fight against climate change.”

Mariangela Zappia is Italy’s ambassador to the U.S. and attended her first Detroit auto show on Sept. 13. She also attended the [LoveltDetroit](#) installation, held for a second year at 1001 Woodward, which is open all month and celebrates Italian design and innovation.

“In addition to its key role as the U.S. automotive capital, Detroit has contributed so much to music, art, architecture and design,” said Zappia. “As other manufacturing hubs, Detroit has faced difficult times but it re-emerged from them with an admirable resilience, which adds to its appeal.”

For the Italian car industry, “the Detroit auto show has a truly special significance, given the bond created a few years ago with the merger between Fiat and Chrysler, now Stellantis.” The show features products from Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Maserati, Lamborghini, Ferrari, Dallara, and Pininfarina.

Former Michigan Governor/U.S. Ambassador to Canada James Blanchard , who grew up in Ferndale, is a lifelong fan of the show.

“I recall attending in the early 1950s when it was held at the State Fairgrounds and saw the Corvette for the first time. It was amazing. Ford had to scramble (to introduce something similar) and came up with the Thunderbird,” he added, saying every kid in his class wanted to design cars.



People look over the Ford Motor Company lineup on display during the 2023 North American International Detroit Auto Show held at Huntington Place in downtown Detroit on Wed., Sept. 13, 2023. *Ryan Garza, Detroit Free Press*

In his leadership roles, Blanchard has witnessed how the show has resonated not only with companies from across the globe who wanted to be part of it but then set up operations in the region, like Mazda, Toyota and others.

Karen Totaro, general manager of Huntington Place, has been part of the effort led by the DADA team to stage the event. “I hope people realize what an amazing, positive impact the Detroit auto show has on the region, economic impact-wise but also simply pride in who we are and our roots to the auto industry,” she said.

**More:** [Detroit auto show 2023 will be made for shopping: Here's what to see and do](#)

Alberts told me organizers will start planning next year’s show almost as soon as this year’s exhibits are taken down.

Molinari told me he’s feeling optimistic about the show and also the region's tourism/convention business.

“This Detroit auto show is the most important mobility event in the world, making it critical for our region,” said Molinari.

He added, “2023 has the potential to be one of the best years for travel in the history of the Detroit region. Leisure, event, and convention travel has been very strong through the first two-thirds of the year, and business travel is gaining traction after a significant slowdown during the pandemic.”

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