

Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance

2015 Annual Report

NEW YORK'S
Finger Lakes[®]

Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance
309 Lake Street, Penn Yan, NY 14527
315.536.7488, www.fingerlakes.org

2015 Staff and Board of Directors

2015 FLTA Staff

President - Cynthia Kimble - CindyK@FingerLakes.org
Director of Marketing - Jessica Robideau - JessicaR@FingerLakes.org
Director of Sales - Marianne Rosica-Brand - MarianneR@FingerLakes.org
Office Manager - Karen Colizzi Noonan - KarenN@FingerLakes.org
eMarketing Coordinator - Daniel Stokes - DanielS@FingerLakes.org

2015 FLTA Board of Directors

Ken McConnell – Chair – Barrister’s Bed & Breakfast– At Large
Heather Davidson – Vice-Chair – Inns of Aurora – Cayuga County
Sarah Wiles – Secretary – Mid-Lakes Navigation – Onondaga County
Dennis Fagan – Treasurer – Schuyler County
Sheila Thomas – Holiday Inn Elmira – Chemung County
Jim Dempsey – Cortland County CVB – Cortland County
Tom May – Beachcomber of Conesus Lake – Livingston County
Peter Arnold – Genesee Country Village & Museum – Monroe County
Ruth Hundertmark – Lacey Magruder Winery – Ontario County
Gene Pierce – Knapp Winery – Seneca County
Colleen Fabrizi – Gaffer District – Steuben County
Eva Mae Musgrave – The Edge of Thyme Inn – Tioga County
Laura Winter Falk – Experience! The Finger Lakes – Tompkins County
Bonnie Hays – Historic Palmyra – Wayne County
John Socha – Showboat Motel – Yates County
Fred Bonn – Finger Lakes State Parks – At Large Representative
Sue Knapp – The Upstairs Inn at O’Susannah’s – At Large Representative
Jay Dinga – Tioga Downs – At Large Representative
Laury Ellen Poland – Finger Lakes Wine Country – Ex Officio

FLTA Mission:

Lead tourism economic growth and development through exemplary promotion of the Finger Lakes region as a world class destination.

Vision:

Be the recognized leader for destination marketing strategies and resources in the Finger Lakes region.

FLTA History

Founded in 1919, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (FLTA) is an association of private sector attractions, tourism related businesses and participating county tourism offices working together to enhance and promote visitor businesses for the 9,000 square mile, state designated tourism region. FLTA represents partners in all 14 counties of the region which include Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Livingston, Monroe, Onondaga, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne and Yates.

At 96 years of age, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance is one of the oldest destination marketing organizations in the nation.

A Message from Our President and 2015 Chairman of the Board

In 2015, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (FLTA) successfully executed its Marketing Plan and provided programming to our partners that allowed them to customize their own marketing efforts through FLTA. FLTA was successful in obtaining a third line item in the New York State budget for \$100,000.00! FLTA has asked our legislators to consider a request for \$250,000 for the 2016/2017 State budget. All funds will be used to augment FLTA's already existing marketing efforts.

In the spring of 2015, FLTA started the process to have the Finger Lakes region designated as a National Heritage Area which was announced at a press conference at the park adjacent to the FLTA offices. A bill has been drafted by Senator Gillibrand that would authorize the National Park service to cover the cost of the required feasibility study, which is step one in this lengthy process.

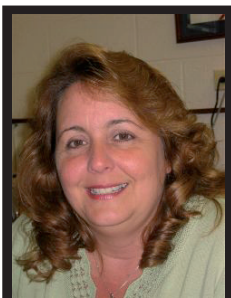
The FLTA's website posted a record number of visitors for the year, up 4.15% from the prior record breaking year! As FLTA focused on its Alexa score and worked to improve this score it resulted in 773,698 visits to FingerLakes.org. In looking at other regional, tourism websites, FingerLakes.org scored better based on Alexa rankings than any of the other regional websites and was close to the Alexa score for the I Love NY website. The FLTA website continues to be a strong choice among the visiting public for gathering travel planning information.

FLTA thoughtfully invested marketing dollars, avoiding duplication of efforts with other entities promoting the region. For this reason, FLTA made the deliberate decision not to invest in public relations. Although FLTA invested little by way of funds into public relations due to the investment by others, FLTA did have multiple inquiries by writers for assistance with FAMS, photos and facts. Within the content of this Year in Review publication you will find additional public relations results for FLTA.

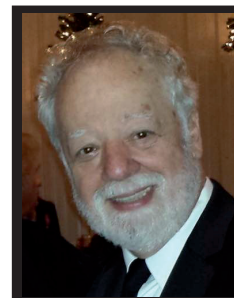
The 2014 Tourism Economic reports from the State indicate that visitor spending grew by 3.9% making tourism a \$2.9 billion dollar business for the Finger Lakes region. The State as a whole posted a growth rate of 5.4% for the same period and as we execute our 2016 plans we will work to gain more of the state's market share. The results for the 2015 Tourism Economic report should be made available by April of 2016 and, once provided, can be found in the research section of FingerLakes.org.

In addition, the Board's investment in the Book a Room Now (aka: JackRabbit) system again is posting results. With this accommodation booking widget, housed on the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance's website, a visitor can locate available partner accommodations from across the region. No fees are charged to partners or visitors and as of year-end over 84,405 referrals were made to participating accommodation partners, resulting in an estimated 5,470 room nights that were booked in the Finger Lakes tourism region during 2015 as a direct result of this booking engine.

As we look forward to 2016, we are planning to deliver cooperative marketing programs that focus on electronic marketing media while still providing collateral materials, trade and travel show participation, the AAA program, manning the Thruway Information Centers, continued investment in the Book a Room Now reservation system, the addition of the Best of New York consumer show services and efforts that will continue to direct traffic to the highly visited fingerlakes.org website. Utilizing the marketing grant funds will also provide FLTA with the ability to offer cooperative marketing platforms with TV, radio, paid search, print and internet advertising to our partners. It will be through the efforts of New York State, FLTA's Board of Directors and private/public partners' investment and cooperation that we will continue to promote the region as a desired destination.



Cynthia Kimble
FLTA President



Ken McConnell
2015 FLTA Chairman of the Board

Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance is Happy to Welcome the Following Organizations as New Partners in 2015

A Lakeside Cottage House Apartments
Abandon Brewing Co.
Amity Rose Be
Anthony Road Wine Company
B&B's of Seneca Lake
Bed n Biker
Best Western Plus
Black Walnut Bed & Breakfast
Blue Willow B & B
Boathouse Beer Garden
Booker's Backyard
Bristol Mountain
Bristol Mountainside B & B
Buena Vista House B&B
Busy Bee Market
Buttonwood Grove Winery
Cam's New York Pizzeria of Penn Yan
Camp Arey
Canandaigua Quick Print
Candlewood Suites
Castel Grisch
Catherine Valley Outfitters
Cayuga Lake Cabins
Cider Week FLX
City of Geneva
Clarion Syracuse
Coltivare
Comfort Suites Cicero Syracuse North
Country Inn & Suites
Crowne Plaza
D-'s Pierogi Place LLC



Days Inn
Dippity Do Dahs
Elmira College/Continuing Education & Graduate Studies
Farm Sanctuary
Fat Jacks BBQ
Finger Lakes Art Cooperative
Finger Lakes Skydivers
Finger Lakes Tasting Room
FLP Group
Four Seasons Golf and Ski Center
GCP Discount Liquors & Wines
Genesee Valley Penny Saver
Geneva Printing Company
Halsey House B & B
Hampton Inn Rochester North
Hilton Garden Inn Rochester Pittsford
Hobart & William Smith Colleges
Holiday Inn Express/Syracuse Airport

Holmes' Plate 54	San Felice Family Rental
Homewood Suites by Hilton	Seneca Retreats
Howell Liberatore & Associates, Inc.	Serenity Cove, LCC
India House	Shepard Hills
Iron Flamingo Brewery	Shops at Traders Village
Judy's House	Silverbird Woodfired
Keuka Candy Company	Siphre Books
Kidventure Dome/The Jones Theater	South Valley Outfitters & Waterfowl
Kismet New American Bistro	Southern Tier Outdoor Show
Lamoreaux Landing Wine Cellars	Springhill Suites Syracuse
Lamppost Bed & Breakfast	Carrier Circle
LinQ	St. John Fisher College
Locke's Glen on the Lake	Staybridge Suites
Maplewood Inn & Suites	Sugar Creek Glen Campground
McCorn Winery Lodging	The Barrel Room
McGregor Vineyard	The Davis Gallery at Houghton House
Microtel	The Flour Shop
Moonshadow Bed & Breakfast	The Kitchen Store
Moosewood Restaurant	The Nest Egg
MVP Bar & Grill	The Willows B&B on Keuka Lake
Newark Garden Hotel	Thirsty Owl Wine Company
Pals Car Service	Through the Grapevine B & B
Papa John's	Toganenwood Estates
Pinwheel Market & Cafe	Top of the Lake
Prison City Pub & Brewery	Toro Run Winery
Proforma Shrader & Shrader	Turtle Leaf Café
Puddledockers	Vineyard Villas
Quad Graphics	Watson Homestead
Quintus	Weedsport Speedway
Ramada/Cortland	White Birch Vineyards Tasting Room
Rochester Institute of Technology	Wings Café by Sweet -n- Saucy
Ryan's Wine and Spirits	Yates Cultural and Recreational Resources, Inc.

By the Numbers

In 2015...

- Attendants at the Thruway Information Centers at Warners and Pembroke greeted **68,769** visitors to the Finger Lakes and distributed **147,482** pieces of partner literature.
- A combined **17,534** Finger Lakes Travel Guides and **19,975** Finger Lakes Map and Mini Guides were handed out at the Thruway Information Centers.
- A total of **125,000** Finger Lakes Travel Guides were distributed.
- Through Issuu.com, the 2015 Travel Guide was viewed **13,773** times, the Finger Lakes Group Tour Planner was viewed **1,370** times and the New York's Finger Lakes Fishing & Hunting Guide was viewed **1,685** times.
- FingerLakes.org received **773,689** visits, a **4.15%** increase over last year. These visits led to **3,258,415** total page views on FingerLakes.org.
- In 2015, FLTA trained **616** AAA/CAA agents from **140** AAA/CAA offices. The AAA/CAA campaign covered 10 states in the Northeast U.S. and Ontario, Canada.
- A total of **112** organizations joined FLTA as partners.
- FLTA referred **84,406** FingerLakes.org visitors to FLTA accommodation partner websites through Book a Room Now.



Dan Belliveau with a representative from the Holiday Inns of Upstate New York.

2015 Consumer Shows

FLTA attended a number of trade shows through 2015 as it has done in past years. FLTA focused on shows in key markets throughout the Northeast. FLTA attended the following consumer shows in 2015:

February – *New Jersey Flower and Garden Show*

19,500 estimated attendance and 980 Travel Guides were distributed.

-*AAA Travel Odyssey & Vacation Show*

900 estimated attendance and 420 Travel Guides were distributed

March – *AAA Southern New England Marketplace*

17,911 estimated attendance and 840 Travel Guides were distributed

-*Travel and Vacation Show*

17,300 estimated attendance and 980 Travel Guides were distributed

May – *Daytrips and Destinations*

5,000 estimated attendance and 420 Travel Guides were distributed.

October – *Toronto Women's Show*

36,200 estimated attendance and 560 Travel Guides were distributed.

FLTA presented Finger Lakes materials to more than 100,000 potential visitors and handed out 4,700 travel guides.

After the trade shows, interest from potential visitors and group operators was measured through email marketing efforts. Statistics from these measurements were used to make future decisions regarding FLTA marketing efforts.

2015 Highlights

Senator Gillibrand Visits the FLTA Offices

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand announced on June 22 she is introducing legislation that would begin efforts to make the Finger Lakes Region a National Heritage Corridor. If this legislation passes, the Finger Lakes will undergo the Feasibility Study Process to determine if the region meets the necessary standards to become a National Heritage Area.

Tourism is a \$2.8 billion industry in the Finger Lakes and employees 58,384 people. Designation as a National Heritage Corridor has led to an incremental but substantial increase in tourism in areas with that designation.

Right now, there are 49 areas designated as a National Heritage Corridor. These areas are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural and historic resources come together to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape.



Photo by The Observer

FLTA Awarded Line-Item in NYS Budget

In 2015/2016, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance was awarded \$100,000 as a line-item in the New York State Budget. This line-item was given to FLTA to use on marketing efforts to promote the Finger Lakes region.

After consulting with the FTLA Marketing Committee, the awarded funds from 2014/2015 NYS Budget were used to work with Tipping Point Media targeting travellers from the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area as well as from Northern New Jersey and New York City.

The campaign resulted in 3.1 million impressions, 3,684 ad clicks and 1,351 Travel Guide request form completions.

Overall, this campaign yielded an estimated \$1,528,280 in visitor spending or a \$15.28 return for every dollar invested.



Edible Magazine

The Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance worked with Edible Magazine to give FLTA partners the opportunity to advertise in a number of Edible publications.

Partners could participate in full-page cooperative advertisements, representing FLTA and all partners who chose to participate; both print and digital representation was available with this opportunity. Partners could select either the May Edible Finger Lakes or the May Edible Brooklyn/Manhattan editions of the magazine.



Winemaker for a Week

For the sixth straight year, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance worked with Greek Peak Mountain Resort and the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail to give one lucky winner and a guest a chance to get behind the scenes at six Cayuga Lake Wine Trail wineries as the Winemaker for a Week; the winner stayed at Greek Peak Mountain Resort.

To qualify, entrants had to fill out a form at WinemakerforaWeek.com. After the deadline, five entrants were selected at random and had to submit an essay. The best essay, as determined by the participating organizations, was submitted by Mike Guarino and he became the Winemaker for a Week; he visited with his wife, Donna.

The program led to 438 leads and exposure for FLTA, the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail and Greek Peak Mountain Resort.



Mike and Donna Guarino with Steve DiFrancesco from Knapp Winery

Email Marketing

FLTA informs its partner base as well potential visitors using two newsletters; the public newsletter goes to over 38,000 recipients who have shown interest in visiting the Finger Lakes and the partner newsletter goes to the over 700 FLTA partners. FLTA continually outperforms the industry standard 21% open rate and 2% click rate with both the partner and public newsletters.

Released every other month, the FLTA Public Newsletter keeps the interested public informed of what's going on in the Finger Lakes, including important news from the FLTA offices, FLTA partners as well as seasonal, informational articles about the region.

The FLTA Partner Newsletter keeps the partner base informed of upcoming and new opportunities and programs offered by FLTA. This newsletter will also include any important news from FLTA or FLTA partners that could be relevant to partners.

Public Newsletter

Time Frame	Bounce Rate	Open Rate	Click Rate
Q1	1.9%	31.2%	19.0%
Q2	1.7%	33.0%	19.5%
Q3	2.0%	32.0%	10.0%
Q4	5.0%	32.0%	16.0%
2015 Average	2.7%	32.0%	16.1%

Partner Newsletter

Time Frame	Bounce Rate	Open Rate	Click Rate
Q1	2.3%	18.6%	8.5%
Q2	2.0%	33.0%	19.5%
Q3	2.0%	23.0%	11.0%
Q4	17.0%	14.0%	9.0%
2015 Average	5.8%	22.2%	12.0%

www.FingerLakes.org

FingerLakes.org had its second consecutive record breaking year; viewership increased to 773,689 in 2015 a 4.15% increase over 2014.

FingerLakes.org also saw a 6.80% increase in users over 2014 with 606,745 unique visitors. Those visitors visited 3,258,415 pages resulting in 4.21 pages per session.

FingerLakes.org continued to lead other regional travel websites in overall traffic, leading all but ILoveNY.com for much of 2015 according to the Alexa Ranking System. The Alexa ranking system is counter intuitive, the lower the number for ranking, the better a website's overall score.

In 2015, FingerLakes.org peaked with a score of 291,741 in August; ILoveNY.com was just ahead of FingerLakes.org at the time, with an Alexa Ranking of 132,775.



Social Media

FLTA continued to use Facebook and Twitter to promote itself and partner organizations throughout 2015. This year, FLTA used a social media calendar to coordinate social media efforts between platforms without posting the exact same content to each. Using Facebook, FLTA held a giveaway via Facebook to test the effectiveness of this type of effort. This test resulted in impressive statistics and is an effort that will continue moving forward.

Facebook

FLTA saw another big year on Facebook, growing the number of likes to the page by 42% over 2014, a total of 12,116 at the end of the year. In addition to trialing a give-away program, Facebook was used to distribute FLTA and partner updates to followers.

In April, FLTA gave-away a Windmill Farm & Craft Market tote bag. This singlepost was liked 1,338 times, shared 4,541 times and had a total reach of 146,368 people.

Twitter

@TourFingerLakes, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Twitter handle, also showed a significant increase in followers, going from 5,969 to 6,918 followers in 2015 or a 12% increase. Key hashtags for FLTA 2015 were #Flx and #Flxwine; these hashtags were used to attach the FLTA twitter handle to larger movements in the region and beyond.

FLTA also secured placement on the Sundance Vacation Blog as a “Mother’s Day Travel Idea” alongside two other regions, by responding to an @TravelSundance tweet.

2015 Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Achievements

January

FLTA's Jessica Robideau met with 37 operators and group tour planners, at the ABA Marketplace in St Louis, Missouri to discuss group travel opportunities in the Finger Lakes.

February

Dan Stokes joined the FLTA team as the eMarketing Coordinator.

March

FLTA and representatives from partner organizations met with NYS legislators to discuss the economic importance of tourism and discuss several key tourism issues, including regional funding.

Cindy Kimble spoke to a group from Simcoe Canada about the Finger Lakes region and what Canadian visitors can explore.

FLTA and members of the marketing committee and Board of Directors met at La Tourelle in Ithaca for a strategic marketing session to discuss how FLTA can spend the \$375,000 awarded from CGA funds. Dr. Chekitan Dev of Cornell University facilitated the meeting to guide the direction of the conversation and develop strategies to allocate the funds.

April

Jessica Robideau and Dan Stokes attended the Empire State Tourism Conference in Albany to network with tourism industry peers and participate in educational sessions.

FLTA received a \$100,000 line item in the 2015/2016 NYS budget to use for regional marketing and advertising efforts for the Finger Lakes.

Dan Stokes attended the I Love New York Australian Ready Workshop to familiarize with the growing Australian market.

May

Cathy Chester, author of blog "An Empowered Spirit" and contributor for the Huffington Post visited the Finger Lakes to explore handicap accessible accommodations and attractions.

FLTA hosted the annual Literature Exchange at Waterloo Premium Outlets. Roughly 160 partners attended, exchanged brochures and took part in networking opportunities.

Jennifer Mullen and her team from CBS 6 in Albany contacted FLTA for assistance on their Road Trippin' segment on the Finger Lakes to draw visitors from the Capital Region.



June

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand visited FLTA to announce efforts to make the Finger Lakes a National Heritage Area

CBS 6's Road Trippin segment aired on TV and was published online.

FLTA provided images to 6 Pack Publishing for an article targeting international visitors about motor biking and cycling through the Finger Lakes.

Cathy Chester posted the first of two blog posts resulting from her trip to the Finger Lakes. The post featured Greek Peak Mountain Resort and Lakewood Vineyards.

July

Blogger, Cathy Chester, hosted by FLTA in May posted a second article about the Corning Museum of Glass that appeared both on her blog and in the Huffington Post.

FLTA hosted a Board of Directors appreciations luncheon in the Red Jacket Park pavilion to thank the board for their continued support of FLTA and its staff.

Jessica Robideau was interviewed by WCNY/PBS for their show "Insight". This 27 minute episode focused on the growing beer industry in the Finger Lakes. FLTA was featured for over 3 minutes of the show.

August

FLTA hosted Rachael Yerks, authors of EZPZ Meals, a travel and food blog including recipes based on the destinations she visits.

September

Mike Guarino, the 2015 Winemaker for a Week winner, and his wife Donna visited the Finger Lakes for their weeklong experiential vacation.

Marianne Rosica-Brand joined the FLTA team as the Director of Sales.

A photo provided by FLTA along with a few paragraphs about the Finger Lakes was included in an article in AAA World Magazine about craft breweries.

October

FLTA held a strategic planning session with the Board of Directors to create goals for the next three years and set the direction of the organization for the next three years. The session was facilitated by Elizabeth Martyn of Sophos Hospitality Consulting.

November

FLTA was contacted by Marc Peyser of Money Magazine for information for an upcoming article that would feature the Finger Lakes as a value location to visit during the month of April.

December

FLTA held their annual holiday party with roughly 170 partner businesses in attendance alongside key assemblymen & legislators. Due to the large turnout, 2016's holiday party will be held at the Lakeside Country Club.

At the Holiday Party, FLTA handed out the Exceptional Customer Service Awards to four recipients: Tambi Schweizer of Heron Hill Winery, Carolyn Ambrose of Experience! The Finger Lakes, Shelly Marshall of the Holiday Inn Express Horseheads and Bonnie Hamilton of the Radisson Hotel Corning.

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