

# ANNUAL REPORT 2014

October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014



# Visit *FingerLakes* .COM



## Key Accomplishments

- *30% increase in social media following*
- *29.1 million media impressions*
- *38 international travel influencers hosted*

## Financial Highlights

- *\$927,593 in occupancy tax collections*
- *\$85,125 in grants*
- *\$75,842 in cooperative programming from tourism industry*

## 2012-2013 Board of Directors

Mike Roeder, Chairperson  
Ravenwood Golf Club

Michael Kauffman, 1st Vice Chairperson  
Eastview Mall

Robert Bennett, 2nd Vice Chairperson  
Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites -  
Victor

Suzanne Farley, Secretary  
Artizanns: Gifts from the Finger Lakes

Frank Riccio, Treasurer  
Clifton Springs Country Club

Russ Kenyon, Past Chairperson  
Kenyon and Kenyon

Jessica Bacher  
Hampton Inn Geneva

John Brahm  
Arbor Hill Grapery

Audrey Carrier  
Audrey's Events

Carl Carlson  
Cheerful Valley Campground

John Cowley  
Supervisor, Town of Naples

Lisa Fitzgerald  
Finger Lakes Winery Tours

Daniel Fuller  
Bristol Mountain/Aerial Adventures/  
Roseland Waterpark

Alexa Gifford  
Logical Business Solutions

David Hutchings  
Sonnenberg Gardens & Mansion State  
Historic Park

David Linger  
Finger Lakes Gifts & Lounge

Richard Maltman  
Five Star Bank (Retired)

## Board Chair, Mike Roeder

This was a year of growth and change for Finger Lakes Visitors Connection. We said goodbye to longtime board members Lois Kozlowski and Mary Luckern, and welcomed new members Audrey Carrier and John Cowley.

The Board's agenda was diverse throughout the year, and focused heavily on digital growth. It was a year of using technology to the max, and putting us at the forefront of digital marketing and social media. It was also a year of product development. As the Finger Lakes Region continues to grow, we will advocate for positive growth in Ontario County. The organization has a seat at the table for economic development, and showed support of major tourism projects like Bristol Mountain Aerial Adventures and the Geneva Events and Visitors Center, which are critical to all of our success.

The Board of Directors participated in Finger Lakes Visitors Connection events throughout the year such as the June social media seminar, and celebrated important milestones like Finger Lakes Visitors Connection's 30th anniversary. The Board is excited to help Ontario County tourism grow for the next 30 years and beyond!



## Mission and Vision

*Create visitorship and economic vitality by marketing and developing the assets of Ontario County as a premier leisure and meetings destination.*

*Tourism is recognized as an industry that contributes to the economic prosperity of Ontario County by infusing new dollars into our communities, enhancing the quality of life for residents and promoting the natural beauty of our county.*



Valerie Knoblauch – 2014

## President, Valerie Knoblauch

30 years – that's what Ontario County Four Seasons, Ontario County Tourism Bureau, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection – WE – celebrated this year. That's a lot of years to gather memories, tout accomplishments and express satisfaction with a job well done! We don't often pat ourselves on



## Who we are

Ontario County Four Seasons Local Development Corporation was established in 1984 by the Ontario County Board of Supervisors in order to increase the value of the tourism industry and its contributions to the economy of Ontario County – more specifically to create revenues, jobs and payroll growth to enhance economic development. The organization is a private, not-for-profit 501c3, local development corporation.

Today, the company operates under the d.b.a. of Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Ontario County, NY. (FLVC).

the back, but this year, we deserve to. The numbers also speak for themselves: the highest sales tax collections ever, media wins that far exceed past accomplishments, and recognition for our use of new technologies. All of these are based in the memories of VIP guests, yearly events like our literature exchanges that people value so much, and experiences of our new products like the Aerial Adventure Park. I think it's important to honor the past and cherish the memories.

But – and there's always a but – even in this 30th year it is important to not settle for the memories as a measure of FLVC's or tourism's success and potential.

No matter how fond the memories, there has to be more. Finger Lakes Visitors Connection (board, staff, industry partners) is made up of people who are movers, shakers, challengers, dreamers, goal seekers! That's been the key to our success, and the foundation of our positive memories. But, as we head in to 2015, I'll urge all of our memory building partners to focus on the next dream, the next great adventure.

Let this quote by Doug Ivester be our motto for 2015 and beyond!

*"Never let your memories be greater than your dreams."*

- Doug Ivester



Valerie Knoblauch  
– 1984

## Staff

Valerie Knoblauch, President and CEO  
Sue Schmidt, CMP, Vice President and Sales  
Michelle Dawson, Executive Assistant to the President

AJ Shear, Communications Manager  
David Lee, Visitor Experience Manager  
Carol Hicks, Marketing and Sales Assistant  
Laurie Adams, Visitor Services, Part time  
Lindsay Rice, Visitor Services, Part time  
Interns: Brendan McGlynn, Finger Lakes Community College  
Taylor Whittaker, Canandaigua Academy

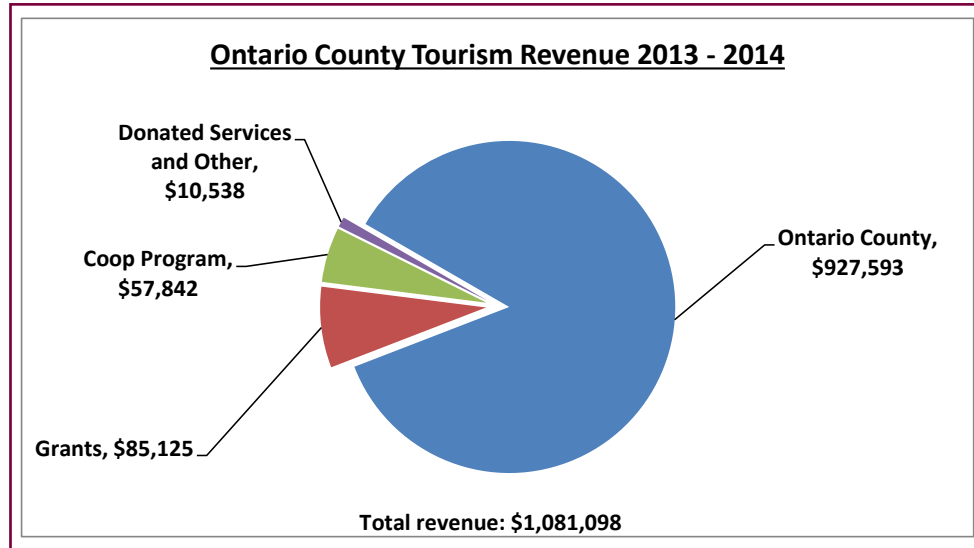
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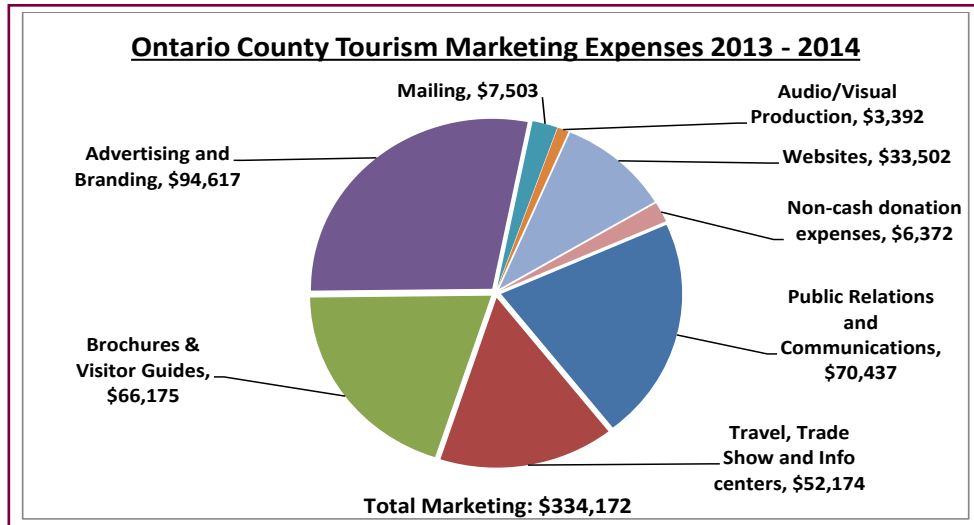
# Financial Facts

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection is a private, not for profit, whose principle funding is a contract with Ontario County for the purposes of promoting Ontario County as a travel destination. Finger Lakes Visitors Connection received its largest revenue ever from the occupancy tax collection this year, \$927,593, compared to \$847,027 the previous year. This was also the first year in the history of the organization that the budget crested the \$1 million mark at \$1,081,098. Additionally, the organization received two grants from the State of New York; \$56,889.93 in I LOVE NY Matching Funds and \$37,500 through the New York State Department of Economic Development.

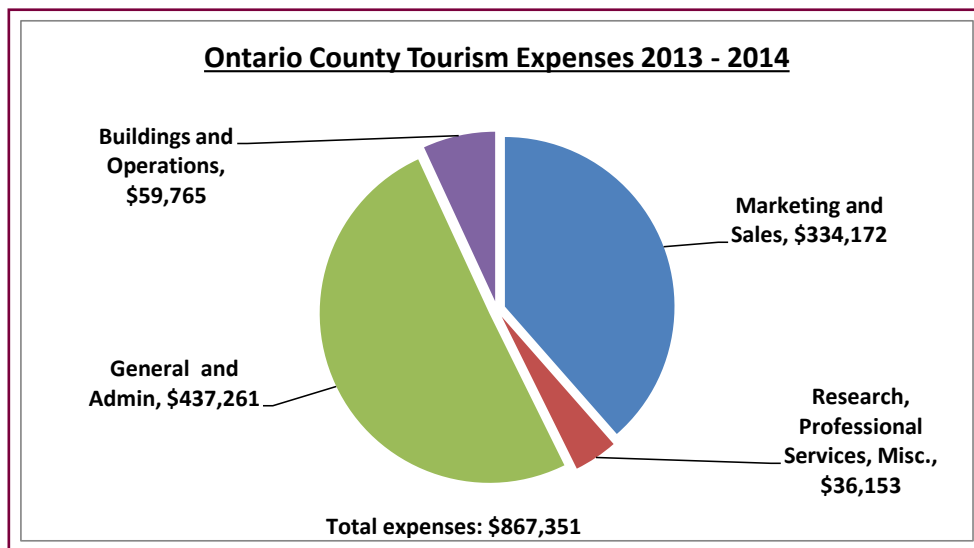
The charts to the right explain the variety of revenue sources, as well as expenses – including a detailed description of marketing expenses. Each year, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection is audited, and copies of the audit are provided to the Board of Directors, the banks with which we do business, and Ontario County. To view the complete audit, visit the “Local Development Corporation” section of our web site at [www.visitfingerlakes.com/about](http://www.visitfingerlakes.com/about)



Data Source: Financial year end audit, Mengel, Metzger, Barr & Co. LLP



Data Source: Financial year end audit, Mengel, Metzger, Barr & Co. LLP



Data Source: Financial year end audit, Mengel, Metzger, Barr & Co. LLP



# FLVC rings in its 30th year

In 1984, the Finger Lakes Visitors Connection story began. Finger Lakes Visitors Connection started with one employee, Valerie Knoblauch, on a one half year contract. Valerie is still our president 30 years later. Over the years, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection and Ontario County tourism continued to expand.

Much has changed over 30 years! In 1984, Ontario County had 844 hotel/motel rooms. In 2014, there are 1,902. The budget in 1984 was \$44,999; in 2014, it was \$1,081,098.

In honor of our 30th year, we celebrated with an anniversary open house in May. We reminisced with the tourism industry about the last 30 years of tourism promotion and celebrated with 30th anniversary cookies. An alpaca from Lazy Acre Alpacas even joined in the festivities!



## Saying thank you to Board Member Lois Kozlowski

In 2014 we showed our appreciation to long-time board member and Wizard of Clay owner Lois Kozlowski. Lois retired from the board on Dec. 4, 2013 and moved to Trumansburg, NY with her husband, Jim, a.k.a “The Wizard”. Lois began serving on the Ontario County Tourism Board in 1983, and served as President of Ontario County Four Seasons from 1987 – 1990. In total, Lois devoted her expertise to Ontario County tourism for 32 years.

We honored Lois and her dedication to Ontario County with a special celebration in May.

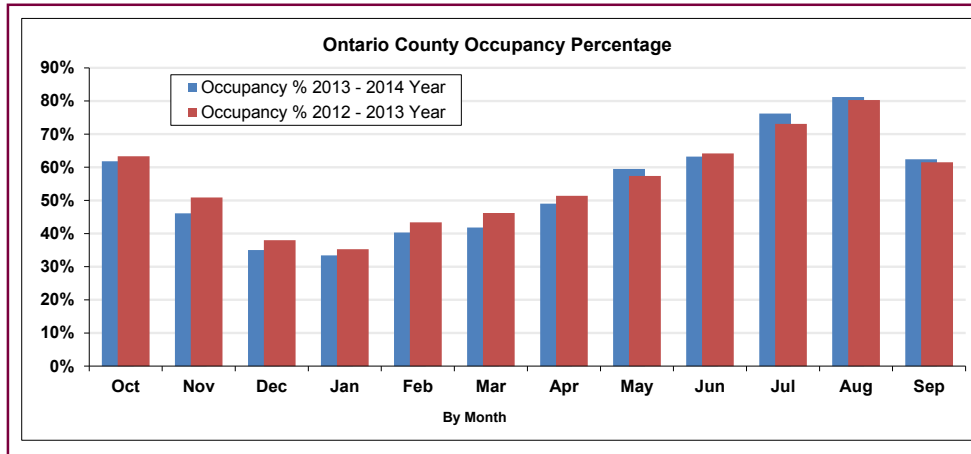


# Visitor Data

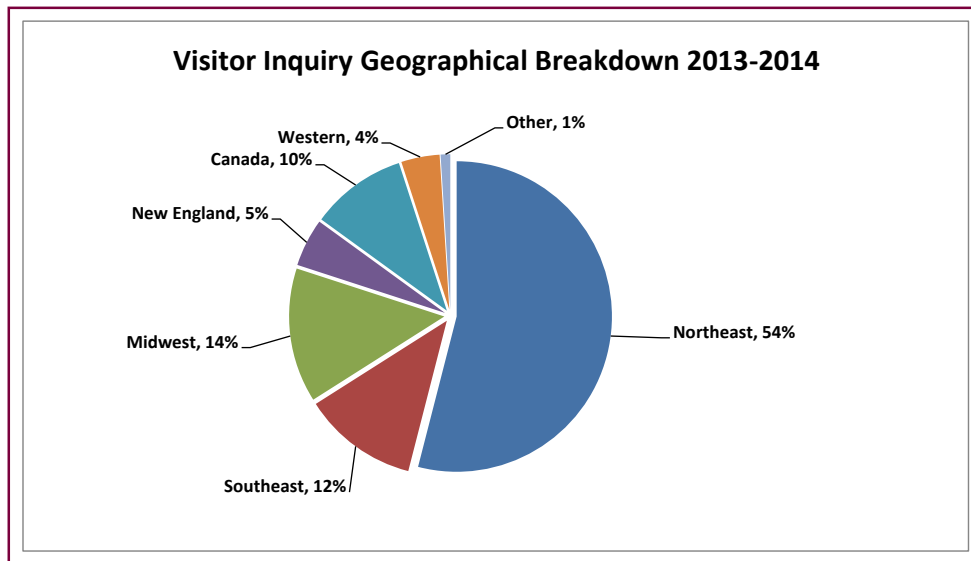
## Ontario County Occupancy

Occupancy for 2013 – 2014 followed a similar trend to occupancy during the 2012 – 2013 year. The occupancy percentage fared slightly better during May – September and slightly less during other months compared to the previous year. One reason why occupancy was down was due to the poor weather during the winter months. As spring arrived, people were ready to travel again, hence the increased rate of occupancy.

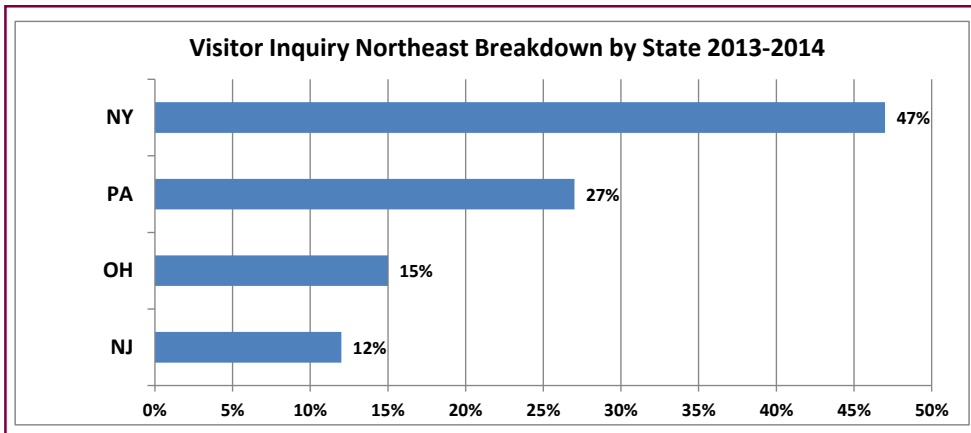
Knowing the origin of our visitors allows us to better target our marketing endeavors. To the right is a geographic snapshot of our consumer base. The geographic origin of Finger Lakes visitors was consistent with the previous year, with a slight decrease in New England visitors and a slight increase in visitors from the Northeastern states outside of New England. There was a slight uptick in visitors from Pennsylvania, up 3 percent from the previous year.



Data Source: Smith Travel Research 2012 – 2013, 2013 – 2014



Data Source: Finger Lakes Visitors Connection data collection



Source: Finger Lakes Visitors Connection data collection

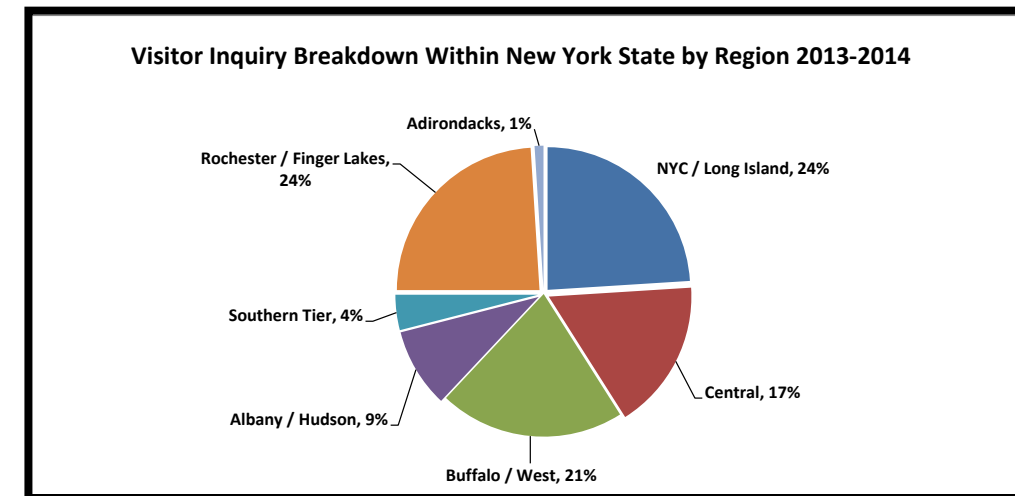


## VIP Guests

The Visitors Connection hosted 38 international travel influencers with familiarization visits for travel agents, tour operators, group travel journalists and photographers. Our visitors were from the United Kingdom, Germany and China, and were accompanied by I LOVE NY international tourism representatives.

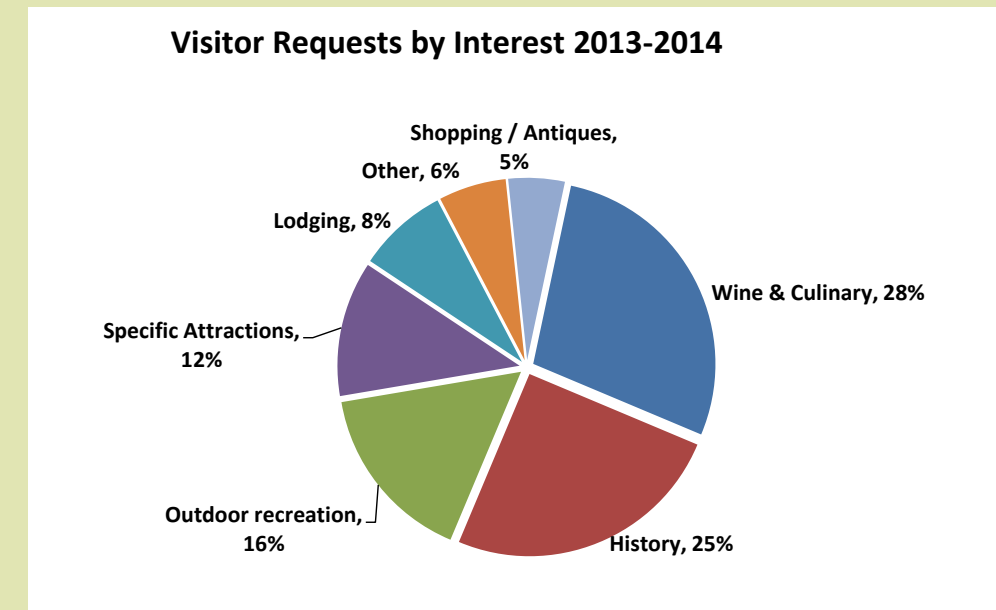


# Visitor Data



Source: Finger Lakes Visitors Connection data collection

Visitor interests not only shape the marketing endeavors of Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, they also shape future product development. As evidenced below, visitors to Ontario County have a broad set of interests. Wine and culinary, outdoor recreation, and history lead the way. We are fortunate to have a diverse product set, which includes iconic historic attractions like Ganondagan and Sonnenberg Gardens, internationally known culinary attractions such as the New York Wine & Culinary Center, and outdoor recreation like Bristol Mountain Winter Resort, our lakes and state parks.

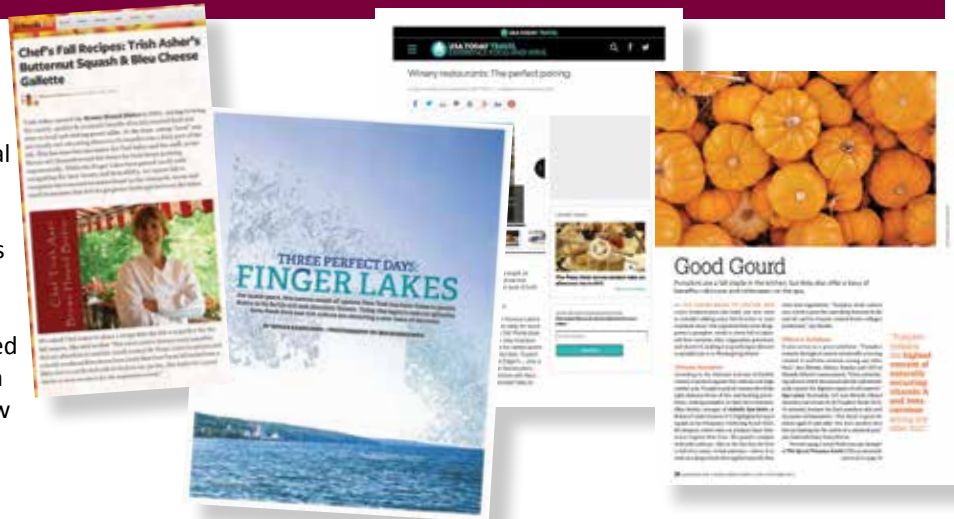


Source: Finger Lakes Visitors Connection data collection

# Success in Public Relations

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection netted 29.1 million media impressions focused on the touristic assets of in Ontario County. This was a 7 percent increase from the previous year, attributed to a multi-faceted regional public relations thrust. PR leadership was provided with the regional contract with New York City-based public relations firm Quinn, I LOVE NY's public relations firm Finn Partners, Finger Lakes based Dixon Schwabl, and direct media outreach by Finger Lakes Visitors Connection. The Finger Lakes Region as a whole secured 3.2 billion media impressions with a total of 214 media placements in publications such as USA Today, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal.

## Media highlights include:



## The Business of Tourism

Tourism is big business with big benefits and FLVC put an emphasis on getting that message out in 2014. Data showed that visitors to Ontario County spend more than \$191 million a year. Just as important is the jobs created. There are 4,283 people employed in the Ontario County tourism industry, directly and indirectly, according to the Oxford Economics, Economic Impact of Tourism in New York report.

FLVC shared the economic value message through press conferences with local and state politicians such as Senator Ted O'Brien. We also had media placements in publications including the Daily Messenger and Finger Lakes Times, as well as a feature story in the Rochester Business Journal.



## FLVC Making Friends

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection has an ongoing goal of increasing our consumer database – we call them our friend base. In 2014 we added 828 friends, a 96 percent increase. Friends were made via our website and public relations outreach, as well as at consumer travel shows such as the Toronto Snow Show. We reach out to these friends according to their interests and communicate with them about events, new product developments and deals.

## Awards

### Finger Lakes Visitors Connection Awards

- Sustainable Tompkins Sustainability Award – Finger Lakes Food Revolution

### Regional Tourism Awards

- Public Relations Society of America PRism Award – Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council public relations program
- Public Relations Society of America PRism Award – “I Love Fresh Air” program for the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council.



# 2014 Happenings at a Glance

I LOVE NY launches a nationwide, \$4.5 million winter tourism advertising campaign promoting travel via print, television, radio and digital marketing.

Construction begins at Bristol Mountain Aerial Adventures.

Arbor Hill Grapery goes green with the addition of 32 new solar panels installed to the Brew & Brats restaurant.

A significant portion of downtown Geneva is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Phase 1 of the Access Improvement Project on the north shore of Seneca Lake is complete. Phase 1 included a variety of improvements such as shoreline protection, pier access and landscaping.

## January February March April May June July August September October November December

The New York State TPA Council and the New York State Travel & Vacation Association merge to form the New York State Tourism Industry Association.

FLVC debuts a new cycling brochure highlighting biking routes in close proximity to the Erie Canal in Geneva. This was achieved through a grant with the New York Biking Coalition.

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection launches the #FLXperience social and digital marketing campaign.

Bristol Valley Theater kicks off its 50th summer season.

The New York State Canal Conference is held in Geneva. Our president is a featured speaker at the conference.

Governor Andrew Cuomo announces that 335 acres are being added by New York State to the Harriet Hollister Spencer State Park Recreation Area in Ontario and Livingston counties.

October – The Smith Opera House debuts the biggest movie screen in the Finger Lakes, 30 by 40 feet!

## New Tourism Products are Launched

### Geneva Visitor and Events Center

The Center on the shores of Seneca Lake features an 850 square-foot visitors center and an almost 5,000 square-foot event space that holds up to 300 people.

### 1961 Vodka

The Victor-based Stonehurst Brands released their first product, 1961 Vodka. Made with soft white wheat grown in the Finger Lakes, the ultra-premium vodka quickly became known for its “classic taste.”

### Twisted Rail Brewing Co.

This new brewery opened in Canandaigua in the same building as The Beehive Brew Pub and focuses heavily on New York State ingredients.

### Roseland Family Fun Center

Roseland Bowl expanded to include the Roseland Family Fun Center. In addition to 44 bowling lanes, Roseland features laser tag and bumper cars, Atomic Bowling and 30 brand new arcade games.



### Bristol Mountain Aerial Adventures

Bristol Mountain Aerial Adventures consists of seven courses with different levels of difficulty. Each course is made up of 12-15 elements with each element being suspended between platforms that are secured to the trees.



### Bristol Mountainside Bed and Breakfast

This new bed and breakfast features five rooms and is just minutes south of Bristol Mountain Winter Resort on Route 64.

### Nick's Chophouse

Nick's Chophouse in Canandaigua features fresh meat and seafood, along with 12 signature martinis and local craft beers.

### Lake Drum Brewing

Lake Drum Brewing in Geneva has beer and wine from around the Finger Lakes and will be making craft beer, cider and cold-brew coffee.



### Holiday Inn Express Geneva

The Holiday Inn Express in Geneva includes 75 rooms and is conveniently located near downtown Geneva and Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

### Nedloh Brewing Company

This new 3,500 square-foot brewery in Bloomfield features a tasting room, retail space and museum dedicated to the history and process of local 19th century hops production.

## Meetings and Groups – By the Numbers

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection conducts monthly meetings with hotel sales managers and directors to achieve the goal of generating off-season and weekday visitation. We welcomed the 2014 NYS Canal Conference in Geneva – hosted by the Ramada Geneva Lakefront and also featured events at the Events Center, Belhurst and Smith Opera House.

**337** – Contacts with key influencers in the groups and meetings market – such as American Bus Association, Ontario Motorcoach Association and Empire State Society of Association Executives.

**8** – Requests for Proposals (RFPs) generated for the tourism industry.

**3** – New ski clubs visited as a result of sales calls with Bristol Mountain in Canada. (Additional groups from Ohio and Pennsylvania)

**37** – Niche market inquiries on skiing, antique cars, cycling, running, hiking, military, reunion, therapeutic retreats and weddings were responded to.

# Digital



VisitFingerLakes.com reaches a broad audience and consistently ranks among the top websites for “Finger Lakes” searches. We strive to consistently share up-to-date content including blogs, videos, photos and news about what there is to do in the Finger Lakes. Potential visitors find the site a valuable resource in pre-trip planning and for verification after they are on the ground in the Finger Lakes.

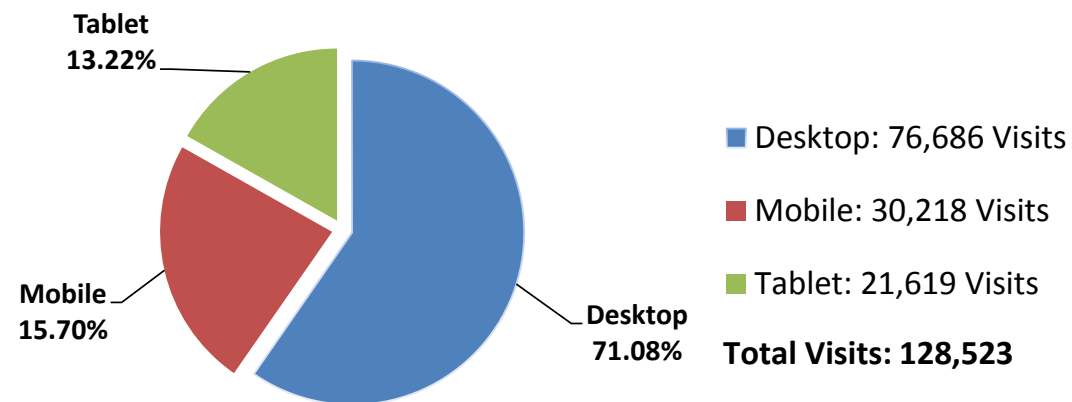
**128,523** total visitors – A 3 percent increase over the previous year.

**2:28** The average amount of time a visitor spends on VisitFingerLakes.com.

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection launched a mobile version of VisitFingerLakes.com in 2012 and throughout the year reached a total of 19,586 mobile visits. In 2013 – 2014, we saw a trend of increased mobile and tablet users to VisitFingerLakes.com including a 31 percent increase in tablet visitors and a 54 percent increase in mobile visitors.



VisitFingerLakes.com - Total Visits and Share 2013-2014



Data Source: VisitFingerLakes.com Google Analytics

# Digital

Some of these resources include:

- [TripAdvisor.com](#) (Finger Lakes destination page, in cooperation with Cayuga County Tourism)
- [FLXperience.com](#)
- [FingerLakesTrails.com](#)
- [AWelcomeSurprise.com](#)
- [FLXGetaway.com](#)
- [HauntedHistoryTrail.com](#)
- [FingerLakes.org](#)

## Using Our Resources for More Exposure

As the official tourism promotion agency for Ontario County, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection manages all Ontario County content for the I LOVE NY web site and print materials. Increasingly savvy travelers not only look to destination marketing web sites like VisitFingerLakes.com, but they search out information from a variety of sources online. Finger Lakes Visitors Connection research shows the importance of Ontario County tourism information being easily found in a variety of places that visitors see as potential resources.



## Social Media

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection put an emphasis on growing our social media presence in the 2013 – 2014 year. We worked with local public relations and marketing firm Dixon Schwabl to achieve this goal. We created social media engagement via contests, shared photos, stories, videos and news about tourism in Ontario County.

As a result of our efforts, our social media following grew by 30 percent over the previous year.

**Facebook Friends – 7,193** [facebook.com/VisitFingerLakes](https://facebook.com/VisitFingerLakes)

**Twitter followers – 4,235** [@VisitFingerLake](https://twitter.com/VisitFingerLake)

**Instagram followers – 406** [@VisitFingerLakes](https://instagram.com/VisitFingerLakes)



On June 9th, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection hosted a social media educational seminar at the Finger Lakes Community College Victor Campus. The event explained how tourism businesses can better utilize social media and how the industry can work together to raise the profile of Ontario County tourism through these marketing channels.

**Finger Lakes Visitors Connection also hosted a number of Lunch and Learn programs throughout the year on topics like Google+, Instagram and Twitter.**



# The year of the #FLXperience!

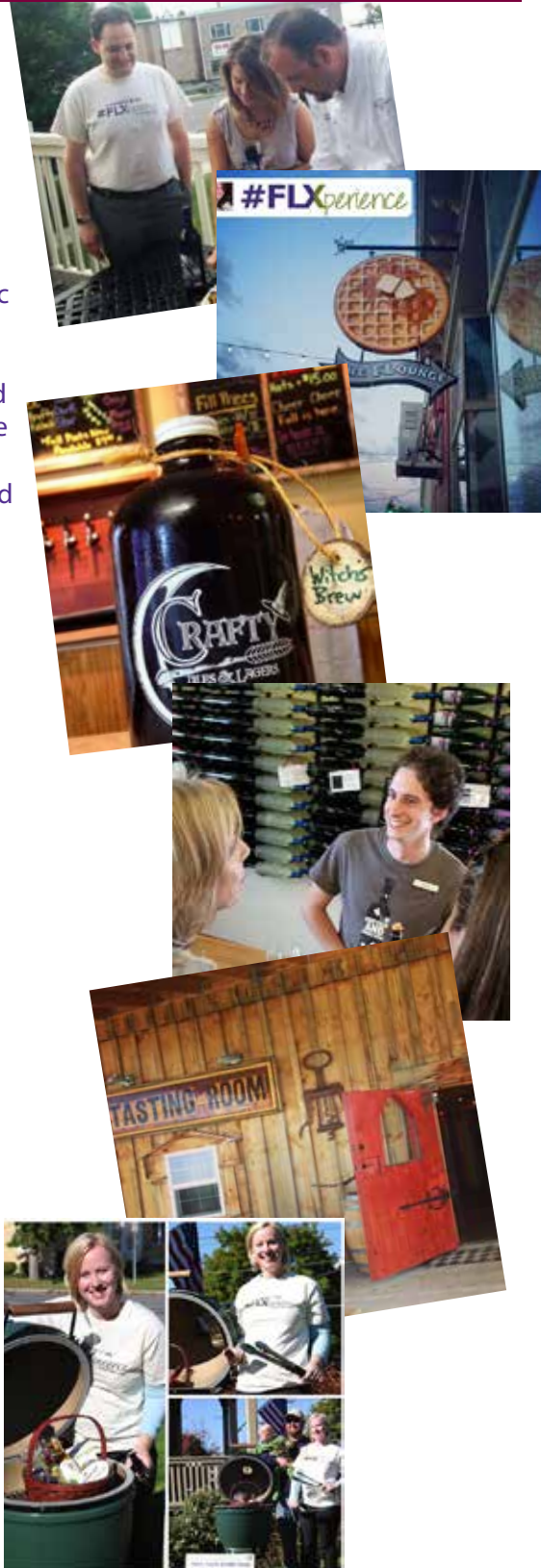
## #FLXperience

### It was a year of experiences for FLVC staff and visitors!

In the spring, we launched the Finger Lakes #FLXperience campaign with the assistance of a \$37,500 grant through the New York State Department of Economic Development. The #FLXperience campaign encouraged visitors and locals to share their favorite foodie experiences in the Finger Lakes via Instagram and at FLXperience.com using the hashtag #FLXperience. The tourism industry embraced the #FLXperience and the New York Wine & Culinary Center, Simply Crepes and the community of Naples were especially strong ambassadors. Each month, we gave away cool prizes for our favorite photo and a grand prize of a trip to Naples, NY and Naples, Italy!

**1,362** #FLXperience photos were shared by visitors and #FLXperience was featured by local media and national bloggers.

Our grand prize winner was Instagram user Sweetiepunk, also known as, Canandaigua resident Julie Andzulis. Here is her winning photo!



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