



INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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Buffalo is about more than snow

TOURISM EXPERTS SAY ALL FOUR SEASONS WORTH MARKETING



JIM COURTNEY

Changing Buffalo's reputation is important to drawing more visitors, said veterans in the tourism and hospitality industry at a Business First roundtable Jan. 15. And that's beginning to happen.

BY JAMES FINK
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When it comes to tourism and hospitality, Western New York has an impressive array of assets.

But while the region's attraction pool is significant, it needs to be better marketed and local residents need not be afraid to tout such things as snow.

Snow isn't a four-letter word, according to hospitality insiders who gathered at a Business First industry roundtable Jan. 15 at Hodgson Russ LLP.

In other words, stop apologizing for the Blizzard of '77.

"We have to embrace our region as a snow belt," said Dennis Eshbaugh, president and CEO of Holiday Valley Ski Resort.

"Get a sweater. Get over it," said Eddie Friel, director of the Niagara Global Tourism Institute. "Reputation management is the key."

Visit Buffalo Niagara has undertaken a more aggressive marketing approach when snow does come to the region.

Even as the record-setting November snowstorm was taking place, the tourism and hospitality

promotion and marketing agency released a video on several social media outlets that showcased Buffalo and its snow.

Similar plans are in place for when future snowstorms hit the area.

"We do have better stories to tell when it snows," said Patrick Kaler, Visit Buffalo Niagara president and CEO. "Let's celebrate the snow."

VBN Chairman Dennis Murphy, who owns InnVest Lodging Services, agreed.

"It's not about what happens to us; it's how we deal with it," he said. To better promote the region,

more marketing dollars must be allocated from public sector sources, participants said.

Erie County, on average, collects \$10 million annually in bed tax dollars, yet less than 40 percent goes back to VBN, even though the tax was originally created to solely fund the bureau.

Peer cities such as Pittsburgh have tourism marketing budgets that are more than double what Erie County allocates.

"The Clevelands and Pittsburghs have the same story (as Buffalo) to tell, but they have much larger budgets," Kaler said.

► TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY BY THE NUMBERS

64.1%

Erie County hotel occupancy rate in 2014 (65.9 percent in 2013)

\$228.3M

Revenue generated by Erie County hotels in 2014, up 4.4 percent from 2013

29,635

People in Erie County employed in the tourism/hospitality industry — 6.5 percent of the county workforce

\$2.3B

Annual economic impact of tourism industry in Erie and Niagara counties

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► What's the most important thing this community needs?

DAVID CHIAZZA

Executive vice president and partner, Iskalo Development

I've been here for 55 years and been doing this business for 30 years. It's over the last five or six years that I've finally seen a shift in attitude and commitment and kind of actionable results that have really changed in attitude here. So the most important thing the region needs to do is just kind of respect the fact that it has momentum. Momentum is not an easy thing to create and once you have it, if you lose it, it's hard to get it back.



► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE

The Hospitality Roundtable is the 17th in an ongoing series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Each month, decision makers from diverse industries meet for a discussion moderated by Business First. Excerpts from the conversation are published two weeks after the roundtable.

Upcoming topics include higher education, transportation and manufacturing.

Roundtable discussions, sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and Freed Maxick CPAs, are held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

GARY ROULEAU

Director of development, Riviera Theatre and Performing Arts Center

One of the main things this region needs to continue to do and improve upon is just the overall climate from the government, treating businesses and nonprofit organizations in a more fair way. Taxes, regulations – all of that stuff is linked together. Private businesses surrounding me help us as a nonprofit, right, because we can't do it without donations and support from the community. And I really believe, especially in the Upstate New York area, just with all of my experience over the years, that we have to do a way better job having our federal, state and local governments support small businesses and the nonprofits in art and culture sectors. And I think if we all start working in an even harder and better fashion, linking all of us together from the

top down, from the bottom up, we can see a lot of potential growth. It's not all just around one central area – Buffalo-centric, Canalside. It's a great development, but there's a lot of us around all of Western New York and together, linked together, I think we bring in 100,000 visitors a year. We're doing over 175 events as a small nonprofit. We're bringing people from Southern Ontario, Canada, all across New York state, Ohio, Pennsylvania, even some internationally. And they stay at the hotels. They go to the restaurants and shops around us. Those small Main Street areas, the traditional old Main Street areas, need more investment from the state, from the federal government, from other businesses, even.

DENNIS MURPHY

President, InVest Lodging Services Inc.; Chairman, Visit Buffalo Niagara

I work across the United States and I have the opportunity to watch where people accelerate and people don't get traction in the community, and I think our next step is Collaboration 2.0. Not only in the private sector but in the public sector. As you look at our involvement, we had a lot of the Lone Ranger approaches to a lot of different things. Those days are done if we want to continue to develop more traction.

EDDIE FRIEL

Director and professor, Niagara Global Tourism Institute

I have been here now almost eight years and I think my perspective as an outsider is one that says this is not the same place that I came to eight years ago. And one of the most important things that has happened is the development of self-confidence within the



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community, which didn't exist when I first came here. And I think the business of reputation management in respect to a place, in terms of how that place is perceived by an external audience, if you start with the fact that people were apologizing for this place eight years ago, today there is now a discussion about how proud people are of being from Buffalo and Western New York. That's a dramatic change in perception. And I think what has caused that and what has started that is there has been a major change in the way in which Buffalo goes about its business and the Western New York region goes about its business, by the creation of the Western New York Regional Economic Development Council, which has got us all onto the same page. I think that was a very important issue. So that we together work in partnership in an agreed strategy moving forward rather than apologizing for the place and fighting amongst ourselves, because there's plenty of competition out there. And the unit of analysis of economic performance in the 21st century knowledge economy is an urban region. How that urban region defines itself and how we define our competitive advantage over other places is a key component of how we move forward. We've begun that process. ... All of the indicators are that we are going in the right direction. The question of how people are perceiving Buffalo now is completely different from the way it was eight years ago, and I think that's encouraging, but we have to keep at it. It's never, ever going to be finished.

DENNIS ESHBAUGH

President and CEO, Holiday Valley

I think it's very simple: We need to believe, starting with believing in ourselves, our capabilities, our communities. We can be successful.

JANNE SIREN

Director, Albright-Knox Art Gallery

I've been living in Buffalo now for almost two years – moved here from Finland. I've lived in seven different countries and nine different cities over the past four decades. ... I think the notion of how we turn the ship around – meaning, how do we go from kind of managing decline to managing growth – is a matter of turning the ship around. But it's a matter of how fast we can do it because we're competing with other regions and other risk takers. So we need to be very courageous about our ability to take risk. Time plays a role in this. There are many cities and regions around the world that are competing with similar topics and we need to be sensitive to that competition. ... Each region needs to identify what they need to do next

with the assets that they have. It's a competitive situation.



MARY ROBERTS

Executive director, Darwin Martin House

I think that we are doing many things right. I think we could continue the momentum and the strategy that we have, investing

in our strengths, our assets, our architecture, our art collections, our waterfront. We need to market this community even better. Bringing in out-of-town guests is critical to the overall industry and hospitality and tourism, and I think the time has come to begin thinking about visitor amenities a little more specifically. When people get here, how they are accommodated. ... I think we can be a little bit more strategic about that, about transportation issues and how people get from place to place and what makes it a welcoming experience and the infrastructure of hospitality and tourism here. The other thing that I thought in a flip sense was, gee, I'd like to clone Howard Zemsky. Because there's a guy who has embraced what we've done so well and to continue that momentum of public and private investment in what exists, what are our current strengths, build on those strengths.

THOMAS DEE

President, Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

I think it starts with jobs and school reform. But after that, I think it's attitude. I think we really need to change our attitude. We're a great waterfront city. I don't think a lot of people recognize us as a great waterfront city and I think we need to develop that attitude. And it really is an attitude. We need to change the way we think about Buffalo, the way we think about the story of Buffalo, the way we think about the history and the great natural resources that we have. Last night I went out skating, which was a real treat and I invite everybody to do that. This weekend I'll be out skiing, so I embrace the winter. I always say that I can run outside every day of the year. And I really think that we should start with an attitude and think about the fact that this is a great city, has some great bones, has some great history. We should build off of that.

BRIAN MCFADDEN

Executive director, Ellicottville Chamber of Commerce

Two years ago if I was at this meeting, I wouldn't know five people at the table. Because of the Regional Economic Development Council, this brought us all together. We're starting to think the same and work together. So my challenge for the next few years is we've got to learn to communicate as a group better in the tourism industry we have here. We're in the middle of a branding study now for Western New York. John Percy heads up our subcommittee, our tourism subcommittee on the RDC. It's got an opportunity to really communicate what we do. We're primed for it with the waterfront, our Bills, all of our sporting events. Down into Ellicottville and the Southern Tier, we have a lot going on here. All our folks come from flatlands. We've got mountains. We've got something different to sell and we've got a value proposition here. So I think communication and collaboration is the No. 1 plan for us for the next two years.



CATHY WALKER

President and CEO, Seneca Gaming Corp.

There really are two words I'd like to focus on: one is region and the other is yearly. I think there is great momentum and that there has been cooperation and collaboration – you can see who's here today for this event. I think that has to continue, but it has to continue to grow and have a regional focus because there's so much here that we could work together on that would help increase the length of stay for those coming to visit. And then the second piece of it is yearly. One of the things that I just did recently over the holidays was kind of do an informal count – how many people come to see Niagara Falls in the winter. Now, granted, we had a pretty good week of weather, but you would be astonished at the number of new visitors that came to that region just to see the falls. Now, I hope they didn't just come to the falls, maybe they got down to Buffalo, but that's something we need to work together on to make sure that's happening.



JOHN PERCY

President and CEO, Niagara Tourism & Convention Corp.

In order to accomplish all that has been discussed and what we'll discuss this morning is really to solidify and lock in our

governments, because much of our funding, if not all of our funding, for tourism comes through many of the governmental entities that we deal with on a daily basis. So we must solidify and get them to recognize that tourism funding is crucial for our future success and for the success to promote this region. And so from the executive branch at the federal government to our governor, who is now seeking tourism for the first time from these executive branches, we need to lock that in and get it to be more concrete in the future because our funding is always susceptible to these governments dipping into it and using it for general fund purposes and deficits that are appearing.

DONNA FERNANDES

President and CEO, Buffalo Zoo

I think we have to embrace our snow belt image. When I first came here, everything was about being a Rust Belt city and we get a lot of snow. I don't know why we always apologize for it. They don't apologize in Colorado. They don't apologize in Vermont. It's nice, fun, powdery snow. It's so much lighter than the snow I grew up with in New England. And we're developing some great assets like the skating at Canalside and all the ski amenities and the Sabres, what's happening with them. I'm trying to build a four-season zoo. I'm tired of my relatives saying that they'll only come to visit me from May until October. I think a lot of people have that – that we seem to focus on all the things to do in the summer. We have to broaden our perspective and make sure people recognize that we're a four-season tourist destination, as Kathy said, and try to build a whole slew of amenities and attractions that are worth seeing all year round so that we get people coming four seasons.

PAUL SNYDER III

CEO, Snyder Corp.

We've always seen the greatness of this community focused and centered from the families that have invested and taken the risks to build this community: the Jacobs family, the Rich family, certainly Bob Wilmers and the development

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of M&T Bank, most recently rgw Pegula family and many, many others – people who believed that they would make their home the greatest place to live in the country. And despite whatever the swinging tides of politics were or economics or recessions, they would invest to build their home. That’s what my father did; it’s what we do to make this a great community. And what’s special about the time we’re living in now is it appears that we’ve got the winds blowing in the same direction of government and private investment, public leadership, certainly people like Donna and Tom and others who have taken institutions or new initiatives to a very, very different level. It’s a special time.



PATRICK KALER

President & CEO, Visit Buffalo Niagara

This is important: to have our local media recognize the importance of our industry and to help put that message out into our

community that we are an important economic driver for the region – not just Buffalo and Erie County, but for the entire region – that tourism does matter, that it does create jobs, that it does have a significant impact on the sales taxes that are collected and how that trickles down to our residents, that it does provide a tax relief to our residents through these visitors that come in. They leave their money behind and then they leave. So they’re not using our schools, they’re not using our public services, but it is important.

► **Why do we apologize because it snows in Buffalo? Shouldn’t we embrace the winter, embrace the four seasons?**

DAVID CHIAZZA

Iskalo Development

Well, I think that’s kind of left over. I think that’s still going to be there, that time will resolve that. When you’re apologizing for things for a number of years, it isn’t going away overnight. That momentum that we talked about earlier will continue to carry through as people here get to experience more about what the city and region have to offer, as they get out there and actually explore beyond their own suburban community or whatever it may be and they hear the collective force of

the community speaking positively.

GARY ROULEAU

Riviera Theatre and Performing Arts Center

I don’t think we need to apologize for anything. We live on the East Coast and we have seasons and so does everybody else who lives in half the country.

... We run our area around the Riviera Theater as a whole-season area. There’s a lot of development around it. In the winter months we run the majority of our shows, where our revenue comes in. People do not complain about coming in during snow and weather events. Believe me, we have enough days where we have an event and there’s snow. People are still going to the restaurants, the shops. They come into the theater. In the summer, they visit the canal on the river. We’re a year-round attraction and a destination and we certainly don’t apologize for it.



JANNE SIREN

Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Apologizing for snow – that’s not something that really exists in the mentality of a Finn, you know. Helsinki, when you draw a latitude line over to North America, it’s in a place in Canada where the only roads are those made by wolf and bear. And Buffalo is in the same latitude line as Barcelona and Milan, so we enjoy the Southern European life. We also have a saying in Scandinavia that has to do with weather, which is that it’s not that it’s cold, it’s how you dress. I think it is the media largely that makes this weather thing into something negative. It’s a blessing to have four seasons. ... Another thing I think we need to really embrace as a positive, unique facet of Buffalo is this is a great city for walking. America spends billions of dollars on health care and sports facilities and whatnot. But yet we hunker down in our cars. I walk every day to work when I can. It’s 4.5 miles every day and people look at me like I’m an insane person as I’m trying to cross Delaware Avenue because the lights



don’t even permit you to cross the street. So I have to run across, and I’m a fast runner, but imagine if somebody else were to walk to work who walks slower or who’s disabled in some way. And we should embrace walking in this amazing city with the Olmsted Parks System as a privilege and a benefit.

PATRICK KALER

Visit Buffalo Niagara

I grew up in Illinois. I lived in Chicago. I lived in Lake Tahoe and, clearly, snow destinations. In Tahoe, when we would get a snowstorm there, we would get 5 feet. We would get maybe 10 to 15 snowstorms a year. When I got here, I moved on Jan. 1 (2014) in the middle of the first blizzard and then on my second day on the job, I actually got to close the office because of the snow. And all during last winter everyone kept saying, “We’re so sorry, we are so sorry that you moved here with the snow.” I said, I don’t think it’s that bad. I’m fine with it. And that started my thinking: Why are we apologizing for the snow? Unfortunately, yes, there was a storm in 1977 that Johnny Carson picked up on. And back in 1977, what, there were maybe four channels that people watched on TV, so he had a very captive audience

back then and he could talk about how bad it is in Buffalo. I think the good thing, too, about the snow that we had in November, they didn’t take potshots at us. Even Kelly Ripa on her morning show said, “Look, if it’s going to snow like that, it better snow in Buffalo because they can handle it. They know how to deal with the snow.” So I think that those days of making fun of Buffalo and the snow are going away slowly. And Ellen DeGeneres had the same type of mentality in what she was saying. So that’s why I charged my marketing department with we have to embrace snow, especially with what’s taking place down at Canalside with the HarborCenter. ... So that’s why when we did have the November snow, we came out with the “Let it Snow” video. And that was, again, a celebration of our people coming together and helping each other during this time of crisis, for the emergency responders who were out, for everybody that was putting something out there. As the destination marketing organization, our job is to tell the happy stories, to tell the good news, and I think we succeeded on that. As now we move forward with the rest of our winter, we have our #WinterBuff campaign. Again, getting our locals and our visitors to share photos of their winter experiences.

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CATHY WALKER

Seneca Gaming Corp.

This is our third year of sponsoring a major snowmobile snowcross event at Allegany. That event brings in over 12,000 people to Salamanca. So there is a market for people who like the winter. They come from all over the country to not only view this but also to participate in it, and they stay outside the entire time. So I think that, again, it's an opportunity that we still have the ability to capitalize on further.

THOMAS DEE

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

We don't need to apologize. I think it's the national and local media that kill us and it's totally undeserved. ... Our weather's not that bad. I traveled from LA a couple months

ago. We come into Chicago and the steward gets on the phone and says, "OK, all those going to Chicago, you're here, congratulations. Those going to Buffalo, I feel sorry for you." I'm like, why would somebody do that? And that's kind of a national thing that we have to change our perception. We have to do a better job in our media campaign and embrace the weather, embrace what we are. I don't think we have bad weather; I think we just have ill-dressed people.

EDDIE FRIEL

Niagara Global Tourism Institute

It's not just the weather. When I first came here and I watched WGRZ, the news begins with the weather, the middle is the weather and it ends with the weather. Buy a sweater, get over it, all right? As somebody who for 11½ worked for the Northern Ireland Tourism Board, proving that I'm a masochist apart from anything else. But during some of the most difficult times in the history of that region, where 100 percent of what was being said about that place was negative and destructive, you have two choices: You can give the media a free hand and let them get away with whatever they have to say if it's true. If they are creating a perception which is wrong, you have a responsibility on behalf of your community to challenge that perception and to try and demonstrate that it is not as they say it is. ... If the perception of your place is that you are a war zone or, in the case of Glasgow, it's an industrial slum or in the case of Buffalo, it's a Rust Belt city. If the external audience



is being told things about your city or your region which are not accurate, and over 45 years you've been subjected to the fact that you've lost your industry, you've lost your economy, you've lost your population base, you've lost, lost, lost, lost, then you have to start to try to establish a base where you start to win. You start to focus on the issues where you can win, and then you start to communicate that to your external audiences so that you challenge the perceptions.

GARY ROULEAU

Riviera Theatre and Performing Arts Center

With the quality-of-life venues and attractions that we have that tie into industry and tourism and the state's investment, we want to bring in these high-tech jobs. Well, when people with high salaries want to move to a location, they want to know what they can do. And where are those spots? The Buffalo Zoo, the Martin House, the Riviera Theatre, Canalside – these are quality-of-life destinations that we should all be promoting together in unison to bring in better-paying jobs. ... And weather, it shouldn't be an issue. It really is: What are the quality-of-life venues in your region that can attract growth and people?

MARY ROBERTS

Darwin Martin House

We all know what's good here. We all know what's important. We all know what we've got as strengths, but how do we get that message to the residents of Western New York? So many people don't know anything about our architecture. We would be well-served to help people develop the elevator speech, to do specific training for our taxicab drivers to get the people that engage with out-of-town guests and regulars to buy into the messaging on it. I know it's a lofty goal and not everybody cares about it, but if we help give them the tools – I'm not saying go back to Terry Licata singing "Buffalo, Talking Proud." I'm saying let's tell them now what we already know so that people on the streets understand it, so that your server in a restaurant, if you're here from out of town, if you're skiing from Ellicottville, they know what it is that Buffalo has to offer, what Western New York and Niagara have to offer.

PATRICK KALER

Visit Buffalo Niagara

We have created a whole new department within our organization of Industry Relations and Destination Development. And this came out of our five-year strategic plan that we went through this last summer that

we needed to have more industry relations. So we have created a front-line staff training certification program that we will be launching in March/April of this year to educate the taxi drivers, to engage and certify all of our front-line employees, as well as anybody else who would like to go through this program. And again, it will be a certification, it will be online. There will be experiential aspects that are part of it, as well. But we did see this need and so we are putting this into place.

► How do you work collaboratively to get the region's message out?

DONNA FERNANDES

Buffalo Zoo

I think one of the things is data. We do a lot of visitor surveys to see when you've come to the zoo what else were you interested in doing or what have you done. Because I do think that there's some populations of tourists, some might be the family audience that would like to visit the zoo, might like to go down and see the Navy ships and do the Science Museum or the new Children's Museum when that opens. There might be the empty nesters, which is a whole different thing. So I think as we start to see which audiences or how we can segment them, then you can prepare targeted packages because right now we don't make it very easy for you. Yeah, you do come and see a site, there's 50 things to do. And when you visit other cities sometimes they have the family package. They have the history package. They have this package and it's very obvious as soon as you enter the site that you can see a subset of things and then delve deeper. So I'd like to see a little bit more coordination in looking at which of the destinations might have certain affinities and develop packages that would pair visitors with certain groups of packages just to simplify it. Then you can introduce the joint ticketing or discounts for seeing multiple attractions.

JOHN PERCY

Niagara Tourism & Convention Corp.

The Regional Economic Development Council gave us a platform in which we all didn't recognize that we were coming to the table. And I think since then we have been coming to the table more often. I think we have



realized that, due to that process, we do have to work more on a collaborative nature moving forward. I know that, ourselves, we have really broadened our perspective through our publications, through our electronic and digital formats and promoting the region. We have just taken on an eight-county writing initiative. It's a huge mountain to climb, but we are looking at that through the (Consolidated Funding Application) process, and many of us I don't think take advantage of the CFA process that is available to us. ... I think there's 12 or 14 different areas in which you can apply for dollars through the state Economic Development Agency and the state office, to get marketing funds or infrastructure funds. We need to tap into that more. That one process has allowed Patrick and I to work together on the Canadian initiative. We're now on our, I believe, third CFA application and funding source for us to go into the Canadian market together, to work together.

► Does everyone track where their visitors are coming from on a regular basis?

DENNIS ESHBAUGH

Holiday Valley

In an average year, 35 to 37 percent of our visits are Western New Yorkers and the next largest market would be Ohio, basically the Columbus area, followed by Ontario and then Pennsylvania brings about 11 percent. And it varied over the years, so we're dramatically outside of Western New York.

► And you've created a template to be a 12-month destination. What are some of the lessons you've learned along the way?

DENNIS ESHBAUGH

Holiday Valley

Well, the company actually somehow or another was founded as an abbreviation of the Winter-Summer Ski Corp, Win-Sum Ski Corp. I'm not sure how the forefathers in '57 saw that, but they forecasted what happened. And we've been fortunate. We have a great relationship with the community. We've recognized that there are limits to everything that



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you do in business, and broadening out as we've built the resources to where we have access to a year-round clientele is really important. We're based on kind of outdoor activities, but today a lot of our customers are coming for conferencing, meetings, events, etc., as well as just a moment of respite to get away from their normal life. And we've supplemented that with other things, whether it's just being outdoors in the woods or on a mountain bike or on a golf course in an adventure course, which is a pretty special experience. And so it's all part of it, but we also recognize that the customers, their views today are very different obviously than 30, 40, 50 years ago. And we need a lot more diversity, shorter time periods of what they're doing. I think we have done a good job in the community of that. There's a lot to be done, but we're excited that now we actually had enjoyed as many summer customers as winter customers. That's a huge transformation in our business.

► **How did you get to that point?**

DENNIS ESHBAUGH
Holiday Valley

I think it started with a vision of what we could do, but it was all done over years. A commitment year after year to build and to look for different activities of work. And we had a base to begin with. We had a wonderful, charming little community for people to visit. We worked very hard at keeping a relationship as a private business with our community. We were fortunate to have people like Brian McFadden and the others that saw the willingness and the ability to collaborate, and I think that's huge.



BRIAN MCFADDEN
Ellicottville Chamber of Commerce

One of the things we did when we started trying to develop ourselves as a four-season community was inventory our assets. We had

to know what we were all about first and we brought in the hired guns, set a course for ourselves. We stuck with it and it's worked well. We didn't go after silver bullets. Our plan was to put feet on the street because when you do that, developers just follow. So I think what we have to do is make sure we know what our assets are and to communicate them.

DENNIS ESHBAUGH
Holiday Valley

You go to Portland, Ore. – it's a beautiful area, gorgeous, just like our region. If you don't like rain, it's a terrible place to live because it rains there all the time. But when you go to Portland and you see the vibrancy and youthfulness and the attitude, and the fact is everybody has a Gore-Tex jacket and they don't carry umbrellas. But they endorse what they have and that vibrancy is wonderful. We can have that here, and I think we have that in this room right now.

DENNIS MURPHY
InVest Lodging Services Inc.; Visit Buffalo Niagara



I've been conducting business in Portland and Seattle since 1988, so I can give you a quick frame of reference as to why the answers are different. And the way I see it is because the families that are bringing up the children that grow up there and live there have been told it's a wonderful community. This is how we operate here, since they go to kindergarten. And they begin to learn that, just like we learned how to apologize since 1977 in another way about snow. We have to unlearn what we've learned, and I think we can accelerate that process. I think the traction, what we've shown in the past three years here, goes a long way to reversing that attitude and trend.

BRIAN MCFADDEN
Ellicottville Chamber of Commerce

We also don't have to wait to get everybody in the same room to have a collaboration. I think we should each individually look to see who's around us who would be good to collaborate with. Cathy has a great program in place with us now and is doing a joint marketing campaign. It's going to be very exciting and we both have the same needs. We're in the same region. We didn't have to wait to get everybody together to collaborate. Just pick and choose your collaborations. It will grow quickly.



PAUL SNYDER III
Snyder Corp.

Hotel occupancies and hotel average rates on the Canadian side of the border far exceed what they are on the U.S. side. That is, in our view, principally the result of a coordinated marketing and funding policy between the government and the private sector with gaming. We lack that in New York state. ... We for years have fought amongst ourselves on the New York side between Buffalo and Niagara, for all kinds of reasons that really shouldn't be relevant today. Tourism is our greatest growth opportunity and it's really from Canada. The second thing we need to do, in our view, there's a lot of talk about a new bridge, a new Peace Bridge. I've been told by members of the Peace Bridge Authority Board that our problem isn't as much the new bridge, it's that we can't get the Customs Bureau to fully staff the bridge. So we need our federal representatives, our senators and our congressmen to demand that the bridge be fully staffed at all times. We crossed over a billion dollars of retail sales from Canadians in this region. But we all know that Canadian volume is starting to slip. It has to do with the strength in the U.S. dollar. It has to do with the friction at the bridge. ... If we get that border to open up – putting aside the security matter because that's never going to go away – by fully staffing that bridge seven days a week, 24 hours a day, we will make this an open border again, as open as it could be. And we will bring businesses and tourists from the Canadian market into the United States. It could double the amount of economic impact we have if they would simply staff the bridge.

MARY ROBERTS
Darwin Martin House

We see the net results. We've got 12 percent Canadian visitation. We're constantly dealing with people that are calling to say, "We're so sorry, we're stuck at the bridge. Our tour bus is stuck at the bridge. We'll be late."

BRIAN MCFADDEN
Ellicottville Chamber of Commerce

A billion dollars of cross-border shopping. Most of those people come from a higher income level, which was surprising for all of us to see. Most of them spend the night. For the most part, they do nothing else. So they're here sitting in the hotel

room, waiting for the next day to go shopping again.

► **What do you think our biggest assets are right now?**

PAUL SNYDER III
Snyder Corp.

I think our two greatest assets remain our location – location to Canada – fresh water, all of those elements that go with it. ... And I think the second part of it is the business that we're in is the emergence of Western New York as a health care center, a worldwide health care center.

DONNA FERNANDES
Buffalo Zoo

I'm a biologist, so I love the outdoors and I would say our natural history, our natural resources, are one of the best assets that you have, from Letchworth to all of the parks we have.

CATHY WALKER
Seneca Gaming Corp.

I think that the greatest resource that we have is the natural resources here. Whether we go to the mountains, we go to the lakefront or whether we go up to the Falls. And in five years, I think that that is going to be the real hub that helps to drive more business and tourism into this region.

THOMAS DEE
Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp.

Our goal is to develop Buffalo as a waterfront city. I think our biggest asset is that right now we have the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes represent about 84 percent of North America's fresh water. That's something that needs to be advertised, needs to be told to the public. And our history also needs to be told. ... So many great stories that can be told from where we are.

DAVID CHIAZZA
Iskalo Development

One of the things we talk about in the office a lot is the rediscovery and re-establishment of our neighborhoods. Elmwood Village, North Buffalo, Williamsville, Lewiston, East Aurora, Webster Street. What does that have to do with tourism? It's part of our quality of life. Of course, we all live here. But in the advent of the Anthony Bourdain shows – highly popular – and other shows, a lot of travelers now want to get below the surface. In other words, they want to go to the Darwin Martin House. They want to go to the zoo, but they want to understand the makeup, the psyche of the community.