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Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau

Irene Pijuan

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Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau

Abstract

The CVB is currently drafting a five-year strategic plan that will guide its sales and marketing efforts on behalf of the local tourism industry. The plan, when complete, will serve to refine the CVB's mission as a destination marketing organization and the official tourism promotion agency for Erie County. Focus groups have been conducted with a variety of partner organizations representing the hotel, restaurant, retail, attraction, sports, cultural and philanthropic communities. In-person interviews with key stakeholders and written surveys will supplement the focus group data that has been collected. The entire CVB board will participate in drafting the plan and approving its final recommendations. A draft plan is expected to be submitted by September 1, 2008. As of October 2, 2008 no drafts had been released to the public.

Keywords

Buffalo, Government, Local Government Bodies, Economic Development, Policies and Programs, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF



Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau
Irene Pijuan
University at Buffalo Law Student



1. What is the agency's website and contact information?

<http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/>

617 Main Street, Suite 200 • Buffalo NY 14203
1 800 BUFFALO or info@buffalocvb.org

2. What is the agency's mission?

The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau (“CVB”), as the marketing leader of the local hospitality industry, promotes the region worldwide as a convention, tourism, leisure and business destination for the economic benefit of the community.¹

The CVB promotes the region as a desirable destination statewide, regionally, nationally and internationally. Its promotional efforts include orchestrating convention and tourism advertising campaigns, designing convention and tourism promotions, attending travel and trade shows, sales campaigns, tours, site inspections and public relations efforts.²

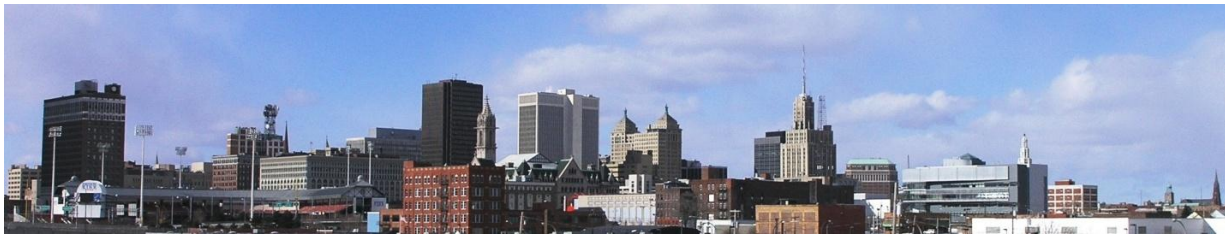
3. How are the directors appointed?

The Board of Directors is comprised of 21 community volunteers, including appointees of the Erie County Executive, representatives from the Erie County Legislature, and an appointee of Mayor of the City of Buffalo.³

4. How is the agency staffed?

The agency staff of 24 is broken down into several divisions and departments⁴:

- Convention Sales and Services
- New York State Sales
- Visitor Center
- Communications
- Sports Development
- Tourism
- Creative Services
- Multicultural Sales
- Buffalo Niagara Film Commission



5. What services does the agency provide?

The CVB currently:

- Attends tradeshow to promote the region.
- Hosts familiarization tours and site inspections for tour operators to attract the tour group market.
- Develops the 72-page Buffalo Niagara Visitors Guide, which is the primary tool utilized by staff and available to anyone upon request.
- Creates a Group Tour Planner guide.
- Creates an African-American Heritage Guide.
- Advertises in regional and national publications including Better Homes and Garden, Preservation Magazine, Ladies Home Journal, Country Living, Family Circle, USA Weekend, The NY Times, and Great Vacation Getaways to attract leisure market.
- Maintains an online press room that provides access to information about the Buffalo Niagara area including press releases, background reports, story ideas, and images.
- Conducts focus groups with a variety of partner organizations representing the hotel, restaurant, retail, attraction, sports, cultural, and philanthropic communities.
- Conducts SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the hospitality industry and in turn evaluate the CVB's role as an economic development agency.

6. How does the agency accomplish its goals?

The CVB aims to bring consumers and tourists into the Buffalo Niagara region. The convention sales and services staff works to promote the city as a meetings and competition destination to convention, meeting and amateur athletic planners. The

tourism development department sells Buffalo as a place to visit. The communications department places stories with a variety of national and international media.

The staff of the CVB works daily to persuade planners of major events and conferences to make Buffalo their event destination. The bureau goes through a process that includes several steps:⁵

- 1) Make contact with convention, meeting, and amateur athletic event planners.
- 2) CVB collaborates with local hotels and attraction partners to assemble proposal and presentation to the organization.
- 3) Meetings, discussions, and negotiations regularly take place.
- 4) Signed contract is produced.
- 5) Hosting event.

7. What are some examples of the agency's projects?

The staff of the CVB is currently very focused on making Buffalo the location of the 2011 International Ice Hockey Federation World Under-20 championships.⁶

Representatives from USA Hockey participated in a three-day tour of the Buffalo Niagara region September 10-12 of 2008. Buffalo is one of three finalists to host the 12-day international tournament.⁷ The CVB estimates the tourney could have at least a \$6 million economic impact while occupying 3,200 hotel rooms at a slow time of the year.⁸

The tournament is set for Dec. 26, 2010 to Jan. 6, 2011. USA Hockey will decide what city will host the event by early October.



The CVB has begun work with hospitality partners to review current environmental practices and establish a more comprehensive green plan for the industry.⁹ The hospitality industry will look to improve in the areas of waste management, energy savings, food production and disposal, water savings, environmentally safe cleaning products, paints, and office practices.

Another large project is the Architecture and Art Marketing Initiative, which lists numerous short- and long-term objectives one of which was the launch of the www.wrightnowinbuffalo.com website in 2006. The website lists all of the “Restoration, Redevelopment and New Architecture in Buffalo” affiliated as CVB projects.¹⁰



8. How does the agency measure its success?

Richard Geiger, President and CEO, believes that the bureau is doing an excellent job because, among other things, hotel occupancy rates rose from 2006 to 2007 and hotel revenue grew by 12%.¹¹ The Buffalo Niagara Convention Center is managed by the CVB, and hosted 178 events in 2007.¹² Hotel room bookings, out-of-town attendees, number of conventions held, media exposure, and general revenue are all used by the CVB as indicators of success.¹³

The Sports Development department of the CVB claims to have brought over 40,000 out-of-town attendees to Buffalo for the following events:¹⁴

- 1) NCAA Basketball Division 1 Men's 1st and 2nd Rounds
- 2) USA Hockey Tier 1 & Tier 2 Supersite
- 3) United States Bowling Congress
- 4) NCAA Swimming and Diving
- 5) ESPN Bassmasters Elite Series Fishing Tournament
- 6) Atlantic 10 Swim Championships

9. What is the annual budget? How is the budget funded? How is the budget spent?

The CVB is a 501(c)(6) non-profit corporation, and receives funding from many private foundations including Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.¹⁵

In December 2007, the Erie County Legislature cut \$886,000 from then County Executive Joel Giambra's proposed 2008 budget for the CVB. The Buffalo Niagara Film Commission lost its entire \$150,000 budget. Giambra proposed \$5.2 million, and the legislature action brings the number down to \$4.2 million, which is a slight increase from 2007, but far below what had been hoped for.

The CVB has been fighting to receive the full revenue generated from hotel bed taxes, which is expected to be about \$7.1 million in 2008.¹⁶ The Hotel Occupancy Tax ("Bed Tax") initiated by the Legislature created a dedicated funding source for the CVB for the purposes of marketing and promoting the area to travelers, conventions, and businesses.¹⁷ The bed tax is charged to any hotel or motel with more than 30 rooms. The tax generates about \$6 million dollars annually.¹⁸ The funding stream was diverted during Erie County's fiscal crisis in 2005.¹⁹ In October of 2007 the CVB was receiving an amount equal to 53% of bed tax revenues.²⁰ Many in the community have lobbied for the CVB to receive 80% of the bed tax revenue immediately, with a plan for 100% to be directed to

the CVB by 2010.²¹ Legislators Mills, Razenhofer, and Weinstein have submitted a resolution to redirect all Bed Tax funds to the CVB.²²

The funds become available when the County Executive and the CVB sign the annual contract that outlines expectations.²³

10. How does the agency report to the public?

The agency produces an annual business review in which they detail successes and projects underway. The review includes who is coming to Buffalo, what conventions and sporting events have taken place in Buffalo or are scheduled to and what the CVB did to recruit such events to the area. The review includes charts depicting convention sales and revenue, examples of media exposure, and quotes from guests and tourists. The review is available online on their website.²⁴



11. Who benefits from this agency's work?

The CVB hopes that the hospitality industry, local business and restaurants, and therefore local and regional economy benefits from their efforts to bring in outside consumers to Buffalo.

The CVB reports that tourism in Buffalo is a \$1.2 million dollar industry that creates 20,000 jobs and generates \$350 million dollars in direct labor income. According to the CVB's website, an additional 10,000 jobs are created by suppliers of goods and services to businesses directly involved in tourism.

12. What controversial issues has the agency faced?

When Erie County Executive Chris Collins took office in 2008, he questioned the skills and leadership of current President and CEO, Richard Geiger.²⁵ The County Executive added new provisions to the annual contract signed between the Executive and the CVB.²⁶ The provisions included:

- The county executive appoints six members, up from three, of the 22 member board.²⁷
- The bureau no longer can claim the "bed tax" revenue. Collins says that money belongs in the government's general fund, and decisions about county aid will not be linked to the rise or fall of bed tax income.²⁸
- The bureau will draft a 5 year strategic plan for running the convention center and drawing conventions and tourists to the region's attractions.²⁹
- Six of the 22 board members will constitute a special panel to Judge Geiger's performance and decide whether or not to select a new leader. Collins wants three of the six to be his appointees, with a four vote majority to vote Geiger out.³⁰

13. What steps has the agency taken to better accomplish their mission?

The CVB is currently drafting a five-year strategic plan that will guide its sales and marketing efforts on behalf of the local tourism industry.³¹ The plan, when complete, will serve to refine the CVB's mission as a destination marketing organization and the official

tourism promotion agency for Erie County. Focus groups have been conducted with a variety of partner organizations representing the hotel, restaurant, retail, attraction, sports, cultural and philanthropic communities.³² In-person interviews with key stakeholders and written surveys will supplement the focus group data that has been collected. The entire CVB board will participate in drafting the plan and approving its final recommendations. A draft plan is expected to be submitted by September 1, 2008.³³ As of October 2, 2008 no drafts had been released to the public.

¹ Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review, pg. 18

² Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review, pg. 18

³ Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review

⁴ <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/visitors/cvb/>

⁵ Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review, pg. 4

⁶ Fink, James. "Welcome mat for hockey group." Business First of Buffalo 11 September 2008.

⁷ Fink *supra* note 3

⁸ Fink *supra* note 3

⁹ <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/meetingplanners/green/>

¹⁰ "Restoration, Redevelopment and New Architecture in Buffalo" <http://www.wrightnowinbuffalo.com/information/timeline.pdf>

¹¹ Spina, Matthew. "Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau Under Attack from New Erie County Executive Chris Collins." The Buffalo News, N.Y. McClatchy-Tribune Regional News. 20 May 2008.

¹² Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review, pg. 8

¹³ Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review

¹⁴ Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2007 Annual Business Review, pg. 5

¹⁵ Smith, Chris. "The Bed Tax." The Buffalo Geek. 18 December 2007. <http://www.buffalogeek.wnymedia.net/2007/12/18/the-bed-tax/>

¹⁶ <http://www.buffaloideas.com/buffaloideas/2007/12/they-have-no-re.html>

¹⁷ Resolution Submitted by Legislator Mills, Razenhofer and Weinstein, RE: Providing Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau with a dedicated funding stream.

http://www.erie.gov/legislature/district04/res_bed_tax.asp

¹⁸ Resolution Submitted by Legislator Mills, Razenhofer and Weinstein, *supra* note 17

¹⁹ Resolution Submitted by Legislator Mills, Razenhofer and Weinstein, *supra* note 17

²⁰ Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Businesses of United Growth, Position Statement, October 5, 2007

http://www.thepartnership.org/files/POLICY_-_Bed_Tax.10.5.07%5B1%5D.pdf

²¹ *Supra* note 20

²² Resolution Submitted by Legislator Mills, Razenhofer and Weinstein, *supra* note 17

²³ Spina *supra* note 11

²⁴ http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/visitors/cvb/BNCVB_ABR_2007.pdf

²⁵ Spina *supra* note 11

²⁶ Spina *supra* note 11

²⁷ Spina *supra* note 11

²⁸ Spina *supra* note 11

²⁹ Spina *supra* note 11

³⁰ Spina *supra* note 11

³¹ <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/visitors/cvb/StrategicPlan.asp>

³² <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/visitors/cvb/StrategicPlan.asp>

³³ <http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/visitors/cvb/StrategicPlan.asp>



Partnership for the Public Good
237 Main St., Suite 1200, Buffalo NY 14203
www.ppgbuffalo.org
