

# *Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance*

## 2016 Annual Report



**Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance**  
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# 2016 Staff and Board of Directors

## 2016 FLTA Staff

President - Cynthia Kimble - [CindyK@FingerLakes.org](mailto:CindyK@FingerLakes.org)  
Director of Marketing - Jessica Robideau - [JessicaR@FingerLakes.org](mailto:JessicaR@FingerLakes.org)  
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Grants Administration Assistant - Natalia Kivimaki - [NataliaK@FingerLakes.org](mailto:NataliaK@FingerLakes.org)

## 2016 FLTA Board of Directors

Heather Davidson – Chair – Inns of Aurora – Cayuga County  
Coleen Fabrizi – Vice-Chair – Gaffer District – Steuben County  
Sarah Wiles – Secretary – Mid-Lakes Navigation – Onondaga County  
Gene Pierce – Treasurer – Knapp Winery – Seneca County  
Ken McConnell - Past Chair - Barrister's Bed & Breakfast - At Large Representative  
Sheila Thomas – Holiday Inn Elmira – Chemung County  
Jim Dempsey – Cortland County CVB – Cortland County  
Tom May – Beachcomber of Conesus Lake – Livingston County  
Jimmy Wilmot – Wilmorite Management Group – Monroe County  
Nick Violas – Nolan's on Canandaigua Lake - Ontario County  
Michelle Hyde - Clute Park/Village of Watkins Glen - Schuyler 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  
Joe Gober – Americana Vineyards – At Large Representative  
Neil Morris - Indus Group - At Large Representative

**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 98 years of age, the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance is one of the longest standing destination marketing organizations in the nation.

## A Message from Our President and 2016 Chairman of the Board

In 2016, 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 fourth 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 2017/2018 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. A Bill has been drafted by Senator Gillibrand to authorize the National Park service to cover the cost of the required feasibility study, which is step one in this lengthy process. In May 2016, this legislative bill was on Capitol Hill and received favorably by the Department of the Interior. In the fall of 2016 the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor also offered their support of FLTA's efforts on this front.

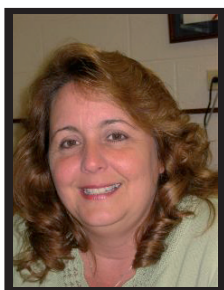
The FLTA's website saw 704,648 visitor sessions! During 2016, a careful review of the website resulted in a lengthy RFP to do a major overhaul of the FingerLakes.org site in 2017. To monitor the overall effectiveness of FingerLakes.org FLTA uses Alexa.com. FLTA continued to focus on its Alexa score and works to improve this score. In looking at other regional, tourism websites, FingerLakes.org scored better through 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 to avoid duplication of efforts with other entities promoting the region. Investment in public relations was an example of this deliberate decision. Although FLTA invested little by way of funds into public relations due to the investment by others, FLTA had 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 from FLTA.

The 2015 Tourism Economic reports from the State indicate visitor spending held constant **making tourism a \$2.9 billion dollar business** for the Finger Lakes region. The State as a whole posted a growth rate of 1% for the same period and as we execute our 2017 plans we will work to gain more of the state's market share. The results for the 2016 Tourism Economic report should be made available by April of 2017 and once provided, can be found in the research section on 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 **76,861** referrals were made to participating accommodation partners, resulting in an estimated **4,980** room nights that were booked in the Finger Lakes tourism region during 2016 as a direct result of this booking engine.

As we look to 2017, we plan to deliver cooperative marketing programs focusing 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, as well as the Best of New York consumer show services 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 designated media such as 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



**Heather Davidson**  
2016 FLTA Chairman of the Board

## Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Welcomed the Following Organizations as New Partners in 2016

10 Perfect Rentals  
34 State Historic Luxury Suites  
A Curio Hotel, Spa and  
Conference Center by Hilton  
Adam Baker Photography  
Andy's BBQ/BBQ Shack - Donuts  
Done Right  
The Apex Inn  
Arc of Yates  
Atlas Bowl  
Auburn Downtown BID  
BeauVine Chophouse/The  
Refinery  
Besemer Station B&B  
Booking.com  
Boathouse Printing, Proforma  
Boundary Breaks Vineyards  
Busy Bee Lake Rentals  
Busy Bee Wine Shop  
Captain Jim's Wine Cruises  
The Cedar Lodge  
Corn Hill Navigation/Sam Patch  
Boat Tours  
Cortland County Music Park



Cozy Cottage  
Crystal Lake Café at Americana  
Curcio Printing  
del Lago Resort & Casino  
(Dining/Hotel)  
Elmira Corning Regional Airport  
Fairfield Inn & Suites Geneva  
& Finger Lakes  
Fairfield Inn/Carrier Circle  
Finger Lakes Candy Emporium  
Finger Lakes Fantastic Tours  
Finger Lakes Fiber Festival  
Finger Lakes Food Tours

The Finger Lakes Hotel	National Warplane Museum
Finger Lakes Land Trust	Olde Country Store & More
Finger Lakes Preserve	Pinnacle Rental Centers
Finger Lakes Wine Festival	Pleasant Valley Inn
Genesee Country Village & Museum (Rochester Listing)	Pole Position Raceway - Rochester
Gentle Giants Bed & Breakfast	Primitive Pursuits
Hammondsport Hotel	Ravines Wines Cellars
Best Western Plus	Rohrbach Brewing
Hampton Inn - Penfield	Rustic Log Cabins
Hampton Inn - Brockport	Skaneateles Lake Cottage Vacation Rental
Hampton Inn - Syracuse	Snake Oil Glassworks
Holiday Inn Express - Victor	Springwater Music Fair
Homewood Suites	Sutherland House Victorian B & B
Ithaca Marriott Downtown on the Commons	The Treman Center
KeyBank Rochester Fringe Festival	Torrey Ridge
Kindred Fare	Village Tavern Inn
Kingsbury Cemetery	Vinifera Inn at Belhurst Castle
Haunted House	War Horse Brewing Co.
Lehman House and Wedding Venue	Waterloo Restoration & Revitalization
Lloyd's Pub	Watkins Glen Promotions
Longs' Cards and Books	White Springs Manor Guesthouse by Belhurst
MVP Bar & Grill	The Windmill
Main Street Designated Drivers	Worthog Cidery
Marriott Syracuse	Wrap It Up Gift Shop & Café

# By the Numbers

In 2016...

- Attendants at the Thruway Information Centers at Warners and Pembroke greeted **61,165** visitors to the Finger Lakes and distributed **131,045** pieces of partner literature.
- **19,586** Finger Lakes Travel Guides and **13,094** Finger Lakes Map and Mini Guides were handed out at the Thruway Information Centers.
- A total of **150,000** Finger Lakes Travel Guides and **75,000** Map & Mini Guides were produced.
- Through Issuu.com, the 2016 Travel Guide was viewed **8,087** times, the Finger Lakes Group Tour Planner was viewed **1,215** times and the New York's Finger Lakes Fishing & Hunting Guide was viewed **1,111** times.
- FingerLakes.org received **704,648** visits. These visits led to **2,705,128** total page views on FingerLakes.org.
- FLTA trained **1,110** AAA/CAA agents from **157** AAA/CAA offices. The AAA/CAA campaign covered 12 states in the Northeast U.S. as well as Ontario, Canada.
- A total of **78** new partners joined FLTA as partners.
- FLTA referred **76,861** FingerLakes.org visitors to FLTA accommodation partner websites through Book a Room Now.



## 2016 Consumer Shows Through New York's Best Experiences Tour

In 2016, FLTA was represented at a number of consumer shows through Josiah Brown and the New York's Best Experiences Tour. At each show, Josiah Brown was able to speak about everything the Finger Lakes has to offer and the Finger Lakes Regional Travel Guide was available to attendees of each show. Josiah Brown attended the following shows on FLTA's behalf:

### February

Northeast RV Show in Suffern, NY

Northeast Outdoor Show in Springfield, MA

### March

World Fishing & Outdoor Show in Suffern, NY

Philadelphia Travel Show in Philadelphia, PA

### April

Leadership Orange Charity Basketball Event  
in Newburgh, NY

### May

Hartford Travel Show in Plantsville, CT

Penn Station Travel Show in New York City

Grand Central Travel Show in New York City

### July

New Jersey Balloon Festival in Readington, NJ

### September

New York State Fair in Syracuse, NY

Hudson Valley Wine and Food Festival in Hyde Park, NY

### October

Warwick Apple Festival in Warwick, NY

Hartford Travel Show in Hartford, CT

Partner businesses also participated in this program. Participants were featured on the New York's Best Experiences Mobile Visitors Center and recommendation guide as well as had their brochures available at the above consumer shows. Overall, this program had a value of over \$32,000 for FLTA.

# 2016 Highlights



## New Logo for FLTA

At the 2016 FLTA Holiday Party, the new Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance logo was unveiled. The new logo brings a new spin on design keys from the previous FLTA logo. There are two versions of the logo, one square and one horizontal rectangle logo. The logo can also be displayed in color or in white, depending on the background color.

## 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.



With direction from the FLTA Marketing Committee, FLTA decided to use funds awarded in the 2015/2016 NYS Budget to attract visitors from the Cleveland, Ohio market. Using Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) certified business Tipping Point Media, potential visitors were targeted using traditional and streaming radio advertising, digital banner ads, social media ads and search engine marketing.

The campaign was successful, with an overall click through rate of 1.60%, far exceeding industry standard .05%. The campaign led to 410 Travel Guide requests and an overall ROI of over \$400,000.

## Concierge Package

For the first time in 2016, FLTA offered an all-inclusive concierge package to partners. This package not only includes a number of advertising spots through FingerLakes.org, social media and newsletters but it also offers creative support with ad creation and PR/writing support provided by FLTA to help clearly and effectively convey a marketing message for the participating businesses.

This package helps our partners who do not have a large creative team to advise marketing strategy or create marketing materials. A significant number of partners have taken advantage of this offering and are seeing the results!

# Help Desk Opportunities

Another new effort in 2016 was the Help Desk program. Every FLTA partner has access to their own account on FingerLakes.org. Partners can use this account to post news, events, packages and more on FingerLakes.org. The Help Desk program educated partners on best practices while maximizing their partner account.

Hosted with a different county every month, an FLTA staff member conducts 1-on-1 appointments throughout the day, assisting partners on how to use their account, as well as discuss other ways they can work with the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance to promote their businesses. To date, over 70 partners have had an appointment to improve their presence on FingerLakes.org.



# Email Marketing

Using two separate newsletters, FLTA informs the general public and our over 700 partners on what is happening in the region and what is going on at the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance. The FLTA Public Newsletter goes out to the over 38,000 people who have shown interest in visiting the Finger Lakes and the FLTA Partner Newsletter goes out to our over 700 business points of contact. FLTA continues to meet or exceed the industry standard 21% open rate while blowing away the industry standard 2% click rate.

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, released every month, keeps our partners 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	11%	31%	19%
Q2	7%	17%	7%
Q3	2%	18%	15%
Q4	2%	16%	12%
2016 Average	6%	21%	13%

## Partner Newsletter

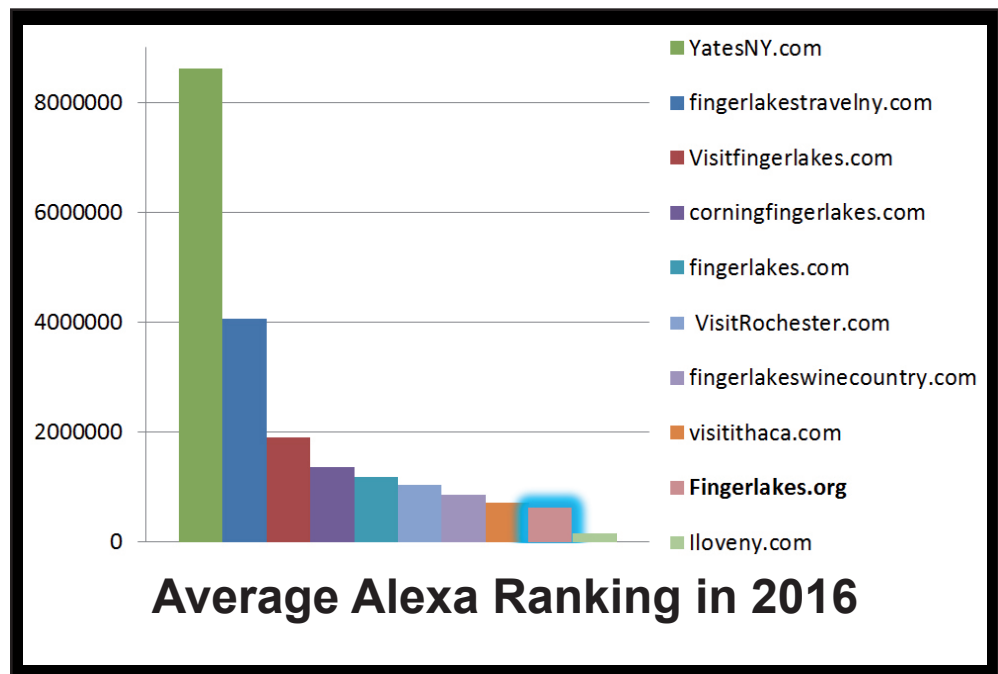
Time Frame	Bounce Rate	Open Rate	Click Rate
Q1	10%	15%	10%
Q2	5%	30%	16%
Q3	2%	22%	12%
Q4	3%	26%	8%
2016 Average	5%	23%	12%



# Alexa Ranking for FingerLakes.org

FingerLakes.org is a comprehensive collection of organizations located in the Finger Lakes region and is the premier source of Finger Lakes travel information on the internet. In 2016, there were 704,648 visits to FingerLakes.org. There were also 2,705,128 page views.

In 2016, FingerLakes.org continued to lead other area travel websites in website effectiveness and web traffic. According to Alexa rankings, a website ranking system that grades the performance of all websites, FingerLakes.org is outpaced only by ILoveNY.com when compared to other tourism websites in this region in website effectiveness. The Alexa ranking system is counter intuitive in that the lower the number for ranking, the better a website's overall score.



## Social Media

FLTA continued to use Facebook and Twitter to promote itself and partner organizations throughout 2016. This year, FLTA continued to use giveaways to drive traffic to both the FLTA social media sites and those of our partner businesses. FLTA also continued to use a social media calendar to coordinate content between outlets without duplicating.

### Facebook

Facebook continues to be the top performing social media outlet for FLTA in both followers and growth. The FLTA Facebook page grew from 12,196 page likes at the beginning of 2016 to 14,755 page likes at the end of 2016. This growth shows a 21% increase in likes in the 2016 year.

### Twitter

The FLTA Twitter handle, @TourFingerLakes, also showed a significant increase in followers, going from 6,918 followers to 7,812 followers in 2016. This represents a 13% increase through 2016. Key hashtags for FLTA 2016 were #Flx and #Flxwine; these hashtags as well as others were used to attach the FLTA Twitter handle to larger movements in the region and beyond.

# 2016 Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance Achievements

## January

FLTA's Director of Marketing, Jessica Robideau met with 37 operators and group tour planners, at the American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace in Louisville, Kentucky to discuss group travel opportunities and group friendly businesses in the Finger Lakes.

## February

Distribution of the 150,000 2016 Finger Lakes Regional Travel Guide begins.

## March

FLTA's President, Cindy Kimble 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 at Legislative Action Days.

## April

FLTA was mentioned on Canadian travel website [ca.travelpulse.com](http://ca.travelpulse.com) in their article "More Love for Your Loonies in New York's Finger Lakes". The article focused on organizations throughout the region who were giving discounts to Canadian travellers.

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

## May

Daniel Stokes, FLTA's Communications Specialist appeared on Community Focus on WETM. The show focused on the history of FLTA, what FLTA does and how FLTA helps those visiting the Finger Lakes region.

Jessica Robideau attended the Empire State Tourism Conference in Clayton, NY to network with tourism peers and attend educational seminars regarding industry trends.

FLTA held its Annual Literature & Brochure Exchange in the parking lot of Waterloo Premium Outlets. FLTA raffled off a tile ad on [FingerLakes.org](http://FingerLakes.org), distributed two pallets of Travel Guides, premiered the 2016 Map & Mini Guide and gave partner businesses a chance to network and exchange collateral material.

FLTA coordinated a familiarization trip for Joanne Michaels, author of "Let's Take the Kids", a book series highlighting kid-friendly activities in tourism regions such as the Finger Lakes.

## June

Wine, Water, and Wonders, an international marketing organization of which FLTA is a founding partner, was featured on the second page in an Aviation & Tourism International brochure which reaches over 50,000 consumers from international markets.

FLTA worked with Road Trip Masters, a television show filming its first season. Road Trip Masters filmed at a number of FLTA partner businesses for an episode about the Finger Lakes region. Road Trip Masters airs on Discover America and features a different region with each episode focusing on regional culinary specialties, things to do and places to stay.

Cindy Kimble escorted German representative, Veronika Bulowski, as part of a familiarization tour through the Wine, Water, and Wonders program to increase German market awareness of the Finger Lakes Region.

## **June (Continued)**

Graham Shelby of the Tennessean newspaper visited the Finger Lakes to do research for a travel article about the Finger Lakes.

The Rochester Business Journal featured an article about the proposed Finger Lakes National Heritage Area designation and the large but gradual economic boost this distinction would provide the region.

## **July**

Jessica Robideau met with group travel planners from BK Adventures to help them plan a 30 day camping/RV caravan trip for approximately 50 people through the Finger Lakes in 2017. This meeting was a direct result of a connection at January's American Bus Association Marketplace.

## **August**

Cindy Kimble hosted and escorted a group of Chinese group travel decision makers through the Finger Lakes as part of the Wine, Water, and Wonders program educating them on Chinese friendly destinations.

Daniel Stokes hosted Michael Grosberg of Lonely Plant for a familiarization tour to write a contributing piece about the area in upcoming articles.

## **September**

Cindy Kimble of FLTA attended the I Love NY International Seminar in Syracuse, NY.

Daniel Stokes accompanied French representative and writer for the Michelin Green Guide, Rachael Zerdoun, through the Finger Lakes as part of the Wine, Water, and Wonders program and its French market outreach.

## **October**

The episode of Road Trip Masters filmed in and featuring the Finger Lakes region aired on Discover America.

FLTA hosted Shawn McMullen, a video producer who works on online productions. He shot 4k video at a number of scenic locations and partner businesses throughout the Finger Lakes.

FLTA and Optima Benefits gave a workshop focused on changes to open enrolment for health and dental insurance coming in 2017. The workshop gave attendees a first look at insurance rates for 2017 and reviewed strategies to maintain benefits for employees.

## **November**

FLTA and Hancock Estabrook, LLP provided a free presentation to businesses to educate them on the upcoming changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act and how to avoid penalties resulting from these changes. The presentation covered the changes coming to the Fair Labor Standards Act and compensation requirements for exempt status and overtime eligibility.

## **December**

FLTA held their annual Holiday Party December 13th from 3-6pm with roughly 212 partner businesses in attendance alongside key legislative representatives. Due to the large turnout in 2015, 2016's Holiday Party was relocated from the FLTA offices to the Lakeside Country Club to accommodate a large volume of people.

At the Holiday Party, FLTA unveiled their new logo and handed out the Exceptional Customer Service Awards for the second year. This year's winner was Darryl Hill from the Radisson Hotel in Corning as selected by the 2015 winners of the FLTA Exceptional Customer Service Award.

