



403 Main Street, Suite 630 ■ Buffalo, New York 14203 ■ 716-852-0511 ■ 716.852.0131 fax

Jan. 11, 2023

Dear friend of tourism,

As I look back on 2022, my favorite example of the new era ahead was the NCAA basketball tournament last spring. Throngs of fans filled the arena to its capacity of 18,000.

The city teemed with people. Our hotels, bars and restaurants were packed. It was the perfect opportunity to continue Visit Buffalo Niagara's tradition of random acts of kindness. We surprised about 30 visitors by welcoming them to Buffalo and paying for their lunches. The fans we met told us they were delighted to be here.

Happily, the travel press reached the same conclusion. Some of this year's terrific coverage started at the beginning of 2022 with a bucket-list "Best Things to do in Buffalo" guide by the millennial-focused website Fifty Grande. Architectural Digest put Buffalo on its post-pandemic-getaway list and on its [list of 23](#) places to visit in 2023.

Dave LeBlanc, a Toronto Globe and Mail columnist and "architourist," wrote two features about our new "Great Wright Road Trip" itinerary from Buffalo to Pennsylvania.

To help visitors have an easier time exploring Buffalo, VBN took a new approach to sharing maps and touring guides. We debuted "Seymour," a van and mobile visitor center, designed to help people "see more." It got started with stops at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center's Auto Show, Home Show and Motorama show and continued through the summer season's festivals and happenings: From the Chiclets Cup street hockey competition in July, which drew 5,000, to the National Buffalo Wing Festival, which counted 22,000 from nearly every state and some foreign countries, at Orchard Park's Highmark Stadium.

Online, VBN has also increased its reach. In 2022 we worked with Madden Media to reorient the website and make finding information easier with a focus on telling the unique stories of our region. The redesign won an Adrian Award, a hospitality industry recognition for innovation and excellence. The results are impressive: We tracked 1.5 million web sessions, which was a 31 percent increase from last year.

VBN's updated web design also made it easier for us to support and re-launch Restaurant Week after a pandemic hiatus. It was a resounding success: 80 restaurants signed up, shared





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prix fixe menus and captured the attention of diners. Sunshine Vegan Eats and Park Vue Soul Food were featured in interviews with Spectrum and WIVB Channel 4. The region-wide feedback we got – from downtown’s Osteria 166 to the East Aurora’s Roycroft Inn – was that this year’s promotion influenced a remarkable uptick in dining out.

This successful effort will return next year along with another new initiative: Buffalo Theater Month, with ticket price savings that spanned the September opening of the season through October. It led to 6,500 landing page visits and 37,000 theater video plays. Stay tuned. Next year the promotion will expand to include the World Theatre Day celebration on March 27.

The newly retooled website is also helping us tell more stories that capitalize on Buffalo’s humor, spirit and authenticity with short-form video.

This year’s social media innovations included TikTok video stories. Since we started posting on TikTok in the fall 2021, we’ve been celebrating Buffalo’s new places and happenings. Audiences found us quickly. We went from 4,000 followers in January 2022 to 18,000 followers this winter. Our story about the milkshake-style mixed drinks at Mr. Sizzle’s, a new burger and cocktail joint, was the year’s viral hit, with 243,000 views.

Our success attracted industry attention, too. Visit Buffalo Niagara was invited by Simpleview, the company that handles our content management system, to explain our TikTok approach to colleagues in the industry. It was their most well attended education session to date, with 350 people joining the call.

Our traditional, in-person outreach also yielded solid results. In September, the Sales Department hosted a familiarization, or FAM, tour with 19 operators and meeting planners for a weekend of stops at places, like RiverWorks, the Martin House and a suite at KeyBank Center to watch the Goo Goo Dolls concert. The scheduling of more group tours and meetings followed.

Finally, this year, the VBN team was proud to win a series of professional accolades. In addition to the Adrian hospitality award for the website, the New York State Tourism Association recognized our Upstate Eats Trail and our new book club for tour operators with Tourism Excellence Awards.





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Four of our videos, produced in collaboration with Paget Films, won Telly Awards, the premier recognition for excellence in video and television. [Watch](#) our wins for features about Frank Lloyd Wright's Buffalo legacy, a shop-local video that celebrated pandemic recovery and Buffalo as the perfect mid-sized city for meetings and conventions.

We're extremely pleased with the recognition. These wins captured the energy and creativity of our community and help spark the imagination and curiosity of potential visitors.

The VBN team loves sharing the keys to discovery and the best our hometown has to offer. The revelations capture hearts. The year ahead is full of promise and opportunity to do what we do best: Getting visitors, and locals, to explore our community's abundant art, culture, history, outdoor fun, and meet interesting people as they discover Buffalo's great stories. With the May opening of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum on the horizon, media and visitor interest has already started to surge. We will continue our collaborations and make sure Buffalo's comeback soars in 2023.

Sincerely and with many good wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous year ahead,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick J. Kaler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Patrick Kaler
President and CEO

