

Strategies and Action Steps for Tourism Development in the SOUTHTOWNS OF ERIE COUNTY

Tourism Toolkit: Strategies and Action Steps for Tourism Development in the Southtowns of Erie County

A report submitted to the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute

October 19, 2007

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The Regional Institute acknowledges the valued support and guidance of the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition, especially Lori A. Szewczyk, Coalition Coordinator and Town of Evans Director of Community Development, as well as the input and participation of municipal leaders and community members in the Towns of Brant, Eden, Evans and North Collins, and the Villages of Angola, Farnham and North Collins.



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Tourism in the Southtowns of Erie County

Located about 20 miles south of Buffalo along Lake Erie is the Southtowns area of Erie County, including the towns of Brant, Eden, Evans and North Collins and the villages of Angola, Farnham and North Collins. A largely rural region rich with natural resources, parks and beaches, agrarian heritage, historic sites and small-town charm, the Southtowns has tremendous tourism potential, especially given growth trends in rural tourism. A 2001 study by the Travel Industry Association of America found that nearly two-thirds of all U.S. adults, 87 million individuals, have visited a rural destination within the past three years. Factors pushing this trend forward include increased travel by car and retiring Baby Boomers with the wealth, physical health and desire to travel. Moreover, American tourists in general are increasingly seeking authentic, engaging and nature-based experiences that offer an escape from the stress of daily life and often uniform urban and suburban landscapes.

The area's tourism potential is even greater considering the broader Buffalo Niagara region's cultural, agricultural and recreational tourism appeal, defined by world-class

architecture and other cultural attractions, wine trails, ski country and Niagara Falls. The Southtowns' opportunities in tourism development are also fundamental to diversifying an economy troubled by a threatened agrarian lifestyle, industry loss and population decline.

In an effort to leverage the region's destination appeal, the seven Southtowns municipalities, together the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition, initiated in 2005 a comprehensive strategic planning effort for tourism development. The Coalition commissioned the Regional Institute, a research and public policy center of the University at Buffalo, to 1) conduct a detailed inventory of the area's tourism assets and 2) develop in partnership with the community an action plan, or toolkit, for tourism development.

The asset inventory, completed in fall 2005, identified more than 300 tourism assets in the seven Southtowns, including historic sites, farms, arts and cultural venues, natural and recreational assets, entertainment venues and hospitality services such as shopping, dining and lodging. An analysis of the area's tourism strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was conducted in spring 2006 based on inventory findings and community input.

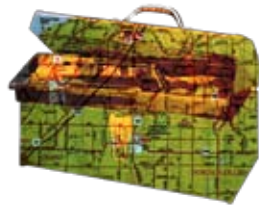
The initiative's final deliverable, a Tourism Toolkit, integrates two years of research and community engagement

into a series of practical action steps toward tourism development. The toolkit addresses the Southtowns' tourism "system," including transportation, visitor infrastructure and marketing, as well as the Southtowns' niche areas with the most tourism potential – agritourism, heritage tourism, recreational tourism and arts, antiques and retail.

In addition to tourism growth, the initiative ultimately seeks to spur related economic development, contribute to cultural, agricultural and environmental preservation and support sustained intermunicipal collaboration.



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{HOSTING THE VISITOR}

Current Picture

Successful tourism destinations are welcoming and prepared to accommodate and serve visitors' diverse needs. Not only do the assets themselves need to be equipped to offer pleasant, interesting visitor experiences, but the overall community must be attractive and pleasant, and provide visitor amenities such as dining, lodging, parking and public restrooms.

The North Collins Hotel, a restaurant in the Village of North Collins

dining, lodging, parking and public restrooms

The Southtowns area has strengths and challenges in each of these areas.

This report's sections on specific tourism development areas examine asset readiness in detail. However, a general review of the inventory reveals the Southtowns' visitor assets are in need of investments before they are ready to accept visitors, especially with respect to façade and signage improvements, interpretation of historical sites and increasing public access (see *Asset Readiness in the Southtowns*, p. 2). However, many of the municipalities have made significant progress in this area providing matching grants to businesses for façade refurbishments and investing in streetscape improvements such as potted flowers, bike racks and new sidewalks.

Public restrooms are scarce in most Southtowns communities, although they are available on larger park grounds and in some smaller parks in the area. Parking in village and town centers is not a major challenge for the area, although larger-capacity parking for recreational vehicles and buses is not adequate at this time. Some assets along major rural roads do not have parking lots, which can put customers in danger. Additionally, as visitor traffic increases, parking capacity may need to be reassessed.

Asset Readiness in the Southtowns

A preliminary analysis of approximately 150 of the area's assets was conducted using information collected for this effort's Phase 1 inventory. Assets were rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the most visitor ready and 1 being the least visitor ready.

Assets Totals	Rating
10	4
67	3
78	2
47	1

Those assets that earned a "3" or a "4" tend to have experience serving the visitor market (e.g., established historic site, farm stand, well-tended park and restaurants), while those with a "2" or "1" include historic sites that lack public access or interpretive elements, some parks, retail shops and restaurants.

More than 100 assets were not able to be assessed without additional information – these included some churches, parks, restaurants and farms.

The availability of visitor support services such as dining and lodging varies by community. **Eden** offers a range of dining choices, from takeout and diners to pubs and fine dining. **Angola** features cafes, fast food and formal dining. **Evans** offers casual fare for beachgoers and a variety of visitor services along the more developed sections of Route 5. **North Collins'** town and village, **Farnham** and **Brant** are more challenged in these areas, with very few or, in some cases, no dining choices. There is a gap in lodging amenities across the area, with the only options including a campground and small motel in Evans and camping at Evangola State Park in Brant.



Improvements to the streetscape, from installing benches and new street signs to placing flower pots at business entryways, welcome visitors to the community

Although a formal assessment of the area's front-line staff in terms of their friendliness and knowledge of the area was not conducted as part of this study, it is likely that development in this area will be needed as part of the effort to build broader community awareness of the area's tourism amenities. The Town of Evans recently launched a tourism training program for employees of state and local parks, which could serve as the foundation for a broader program in the area.



Lodging in the four-town area includes a motel, RV resort and campground.

CASE STUDY

Main Street Rogers (Rogers, AR)

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

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Approach advocates the principles of community self-reliance, local empowerment and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on their distinctive qualities – unique architecture, pedestrian-friendly design, personal service, local ownership and sense of community.

One successful example of this approach has occurred in Rogers, Arkansas. Main Street Rogers, a pilot program of Main Street Arkansas, was launched in 1984 to spur downtown revitalization in this former railroad boom town, population 42,000. Since then there have been 95 rehabilitated facades and almost \$12 million in downtown investment, including a \$4 million transformation of the vacant Harris Baking building (pictured below) into a retail complex.

Main Street Rogers addresses all components of revitalization, including image building, business assistance, design guidelines and heritage tourism. For instance, it partners with nine banks to provide a revolving loan program, offers a mini-grant program for façade renovation and provides consulting services to businesses in the districts. With a staff of two and a 14-member board, the group coordinates events ranging from the Rogers Farmers' Market to the annual Frisco Railroad Festival, film and music series and several holiday and season-themed events. Its partners include city government, the planning and parks departments, the regional chamber of commerce and the Main Street Arkansas program.

Harris Baking Building



Before



After

Copyright: Main Street Rogers

CASE STUDY

Robinhood Free Meetinghouse, Georgetown, ME

<http://www.robinhood-meetinghouse.com/>

This haute cuisine restaurant is nestled in the woods about an hour from the nearest population centers and six miles from Bath, population 9,000. Yet owner and chef Michael Gagne has an opt-in mailing list of 10,000 customers. His secret centers on quality, homemade food, including sauces, stocks, sorbets, ice cream and spreads. The restoration of the restaurant's 1855 church building retains historic charm and warmth. Developing a personal relationship with his customers is also key. He walks the tables during dinner and knows his customers by name. "I'm vested in their enjoyment of the event," he says. The mailing list is the foundation of his marketing plan, with a newsletter going out twice a year. The meetinghouse also caters and hosts events, including weddings, in its 2nd floor chapel. The restaurant hosts a Web site, while some of its homemade products, from biscuits to jams, are featured in food markets across the greater Boston area.

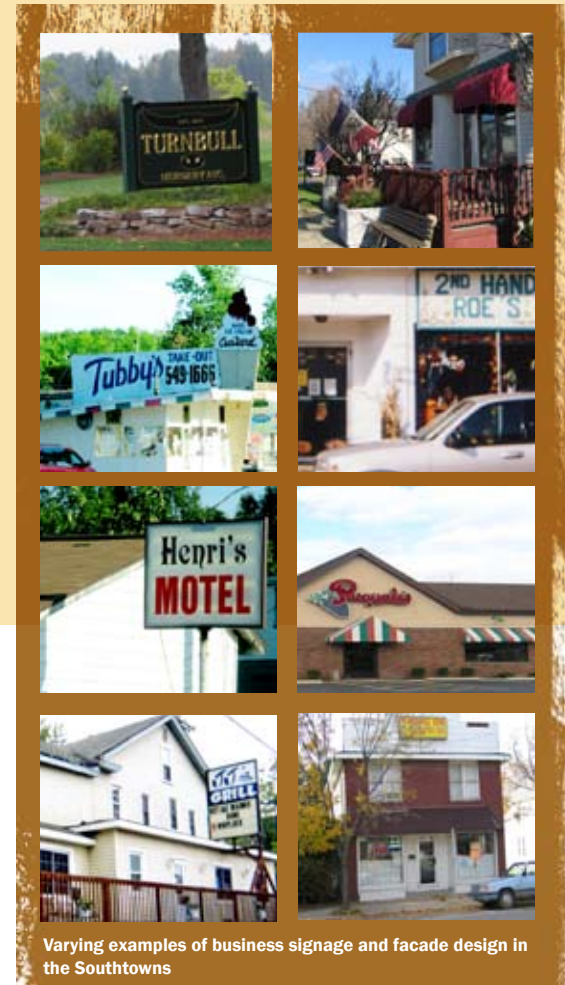




Step 1: Invest in Asset and Community Infrastructure

Strong first impressions are critical in tourism, a standard which applies to the community as a whole as well as the individual assets within. Are gateways attractive, and streets clean, pedestrian-friendly and well maintained? Are buildings in good condition, with their signage welcoming? Investments in this area leverage large returns, while skipping this step can turn visitors away. For example, positive first impressions often carry throughout the visit and spill over to good word-of-mouth promotion by the visitor. On the other hand, poor first impressions may do away with a return visit and keep others away. Poor “curb appeal” can be doubly damaging if the visitor is drawn to the area by advertising that is not reflected by reality (see *Case Study: Main Street Rogers, pp. 6/7*).

Investments in village and town centers, from streetscape improvements to gateway signage to façade redevelopment, are identified as goals in the comprehensive plans for Evans, Angola, Brant, Farnham and Eden. These should continue to



guidelines as the communities pursue their downtown and Main Street revitalization programs.

In terms of tangible progress, significant investments in building and streetscape improvements in the town and village centers of Eden, Angola, Farhnam and Brant have been supported through the Erie County-administered Commercial/Village Center Improvement programs, which provide matching grants to businesses via the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants. Streetscape investments have included the installation of planters, lampposts and sidewalk pavers, significantly improving the appearance of and increasing community pride in these downtown areas. Eden has seen seven businesses receive matching grants for façade and building exterior improvements. These investments are already leveraging returns in terms of new business development, as several restaurants and cafes have opened in recent years in the centers of Angola and Eden.

Given the success of this program, all seven municipalities should seek to engage or continue involvement in the process. Community leaders should encourage business owners to invest in façade improvement and should commit additional town or village resources to downtown revitalization. Municipal governments should provide small businesses with information on various grant, loan and technical assistance programs. For instance, the New York State Main Street program provides financial and technical assistance to support mixed-use downtown business districts for streetscape and façade improvements and even the expansion of downtown anchor businesses (see *Tools for Implementation*, p. 14).

Community leaders should also promote consistent design guidelines for commercial revitalization in the downtown centers through zoning and historic renovation policies and guidelines (see also report's sections on *Transportation and Wayfinding* and *Heritage Tourism*).

Step 2: Develop Key Visitor Support Services

Services such as dining, lodging, parking and public restrooms are fundamental to providing the visitor with a comfortable, convenient and complete experience. Visitors expect these amenities to be in place in those areas that promote themselves as a visitor destination.

Assess Additional Parking Needs:

Parking capacity is largely sufficient in the municipalities' downtown retail areas, although two-hour parking limits can be an unnecessary nuisance for visitors. Investments in larger parking areas may be needed as tourism volume increases in the area. Recreational vehicle-friendly overnight parking is also beneficial in accommodating this critical market for the Southtowns (see *RV-Friendly Parking*, p. 8). Although campgrounds in the Southtowns are suitable for RVs, these vehicles are prohibited from parking in the area's large retail parking lots, a service frequently offered in other regions either by order of local ordinances or store policies. Recreational vehicle publications and magazines promote those areas where free overnight parking is available in parking lots, on park grounds or even along select streets. Some regions even provide electricity and dumping stations in their parking areas to better serve the RV market. Each municipality should consider amending their village or town code with more RV-friendly parking policies. These policies should then be clearly communicated to the visiting RV-user through signage and informational brochures.

RV-Friendly Parking

Short-term parking must have at least two spaces **12 feet wide** and **65 feet long** with a radius of **50 feet** at both entrances and exits.

Campgrounds must have at least two spaces **18 feet wide** and **45 feet long**.



Accommodating bus tours with parking is also a challenge. Motor coaches are often challenged by municipalities that require them to circulate area streets while waiting for group tours to conclude. Where tourism assets lack sizable private parking lots, as in the village and town centers, designate motor coach parking areas that are proximate to retail and tourism assets. When promoting or publicizing information on individual assets, clearly note whether parking for motor coaches is available. Tourism coordinators in the Southtowns should clearly state where this type of parking is available to enable motor coach tour operators to effectively plan a trip to the area. Some of the tourism assets along busy rural highways do not provide parking lots, often requiring customers to pull off the road. Where parking areas cannot be created, the road should be widened to more safely accommodate visitors traveling by car.

Assess Public Restrooms

Access to restrooms is a critical amenity for visitors to the area. Municipalities in the Southtowns should assess their capacity to provide this resource to visitors. While comfort stations in business districts come with public safety concerns and maintenance costs, there are other solutions, including encouraging businesses and restaurants to provide their restrooms for public use and directing visitors to available facilities in parks or other public areas through signs, maps or visitor brochures. Restroom facilities, whether managed by the municipality or a private business, should always be clean and well maintained.

Support Improvements to Existing Dining Establishments

The lack of diversity in dining amenities is a common complaint of visitors to and residents of rural areas (see *Support Services – A Rule of Thumb*, p. 9). In the Southtowns area, there are more opportunities for casual dining than there are for fine dining, although this is not necessarily a liability for an area that seeks to attract families for agritourism and recreational activities. For instance, Connors' Hot Dog Stand has catered to the beach community for decades, while ice cream and pizza shops and other casual restaurants help meet the dining demands for this market. Coffee shops, cafes and diners reflect the character of the community, and are popular with visitors.

Meeting the needs of visitors looking for a finer dining experience is more of a challenge for the area, especially as it attempts to reach out to heritage tourists, who tend to be older, travel with a spouse or friends and seek out unique, higher end dining. Although options in this area are increasing – some formal dining operations have opened in the center of Eden – more offerings will be needed to cater to a growing, diversifying visitor audience.

Filling the fine dining gap will be difficult in that the development of new restaurants must be driven by demand. A formal market assessment of the residents in the area should be conducted to determine if there is adequate demand among residents. Such information may provide a basis for entrepreneurs to pursue development of a new, high-end restaurant. Anecdotal feedback received from the community as part of this planning effort reveals a need for this type of amenity. As visitor volume in the Southtowns increases, additional opportunities for specialty restaurants may arise.

Support Services – A Rule of Thumb

To take advantage of tourist preferences for dining and shopping in pedestrian settings, experts estimate that rural communities should offer at least nine retail stores and four dining or “treats” establishments, with such activity concentrated to facilitate critical mass.

Source: Brooks, Roger A. and Maury Forman. *The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism*

There are also opportunities for immediate action, as the Southtowns has a strong foundation of dining amenities which can be enhanced to better serve visitors. It is recommended that leaders of the Southtowns tourism effort work with existing restaurant owners to improve service as well as food quality and diversity (see *Case Study: Robinhood Free Meetinghouse*, p. 6/7). Specifically, Chambers of Commerce or hospitality training organizations in the area can be of assistance in developing business seminars oriented to restaurant service and management training.

Speak directly with the restaurant manager and encourage him or her to take advantage of grant or loan programs for improvements to their building's exterior. Encourage the manager to use national trade associations, such as the National Restaurant Association, for resources and publications on menu ideas and trends in restaurant service and marketing. Finally, include the area's dining amenities in tourism packaging and marketing for the Southtowns area.

Facilitate Bed & Breakfast Development

The most powerful economic returns from tourism are generated by overnight visitors. With significantly limited lodging amenities, these returns have largely passed by the Southtowns area. As explored in this report's section on *Reaching the Visitor*, opportunities abound for tapping the overnight visitor market. While hotels and motels are available in surrounding municipalities, the Southtowns area has the potential to develop unique lodging amenities that enhance the visitor experience and keep tourists, and their dollars, in the four-town area.

Attracting hotel or motel developers to the Southtowns is likely to be a challenge during the early stages of tourism development. A general industry standard states



Dining in the Southtowns includes casual and formal settings, from food stands and beachfront restaurants to cafes and pubs

that if overall occupancy at nearby lodging amenities is below 50 percent, the market system is not likely to respond. A more targeted strategy for adding lodging to the area might explore the development of bed and breakfast establishments or boutique-style lodging. Such amenities showcase the character of the community and offer a quaint lodging experience that would appeal to the types of visitors sought by the Southtowns – history and architecture buffs or those seeking an escape to a rural setting (see *Case Study: Genesee Country Inn*, p. 12). Locations for bed and breakfast amenities in the Southtowns include town and village centers and farms and homes in wooded or rustic settings, where activities such as farm chores, hiking or site-seeing can easily be combined with the lodging experience (see also p. 56). For instance, the hamlet of Clarksburg in Eden features a creek, hills and woodlands, as well as a historic mill, cemetery and schoolhouse. Homes with unique architectural features are also well suited as a bed and breakfast.

In addition to assessing interest among area entrepreneurs, municipal and tourism leaders in the area should provide information on establishing such an amenity, from permitting requirements to potential funding opportunities (see *Tips for Starting a Bed & Breakfast*, p. 11). Municipal officials should also review their zoning codes with regard to bed and breakfast establishments. Local zoning issues frequently

Tips for Starting a Bed & Breakfast

Recognize the endeavor involves a commitment of time and money, and income from the B&B is likely to be only supplemental (occupancy during first year usually only 30%)

Operators should be sociable and friendly, and able to welcome strangers into their home – e.g., greet visitors at the front door

B&B guests are often interested in local culture, history and scenery – stay informed, have brochures on the area available

Keep rooms and common areas clean and provide top-quality amenities, especially mattresses, linens and the breakfast meal

Clearly state for guests policies on pricing, minimum length of stay, parking, pets and smoking

involve guest parking, signage, lighting, length of stay and the appearance of building exteriors. State policies regulate food and lodging licensing as well as fire safety and building codes. For instance, there may be limitations on serving homegrown produce, eggs or slaughtered meats, or there may be requirements for the number of bathrooms. Water quality may also be an issue, especially on farms.

CASE STUDY

Genesee Country Inn, Mumford, NY

<http://www.geneseecountryinn.com/index.html>

A working mill for 100 years, the Genesee Country Inn bed and breakfast offers “quiet country elegance and hospitality.” Built in 1833, the inn promotes its proximity to the Finger Lakes wine tours and its rustic grounds. It is situated on Spring Creek with mill ponds and a waterfall, which also are ideal spots for brown trout fishing. Within walking distance are the Genesee Country Village and Museum and a nature center; nearby are the Oatka walking trail and Letchworth State Park.



Copyright:
Genesee
Country Inn

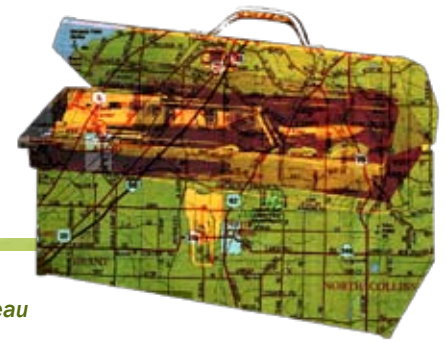
Step 3: Develop Training Programs for Asset Managers and Front-Line Service Staff

The area's tourism employees, from historic site managers and volunteer tour guides to beach lifeguards and gas station attendants, can serve as the area's most effective sales team, reflecting a strong sense of community pride and serving as a helpful resource. Such front-line staff should be well informed of and encouraged to promote attractions and amenities located in the four-town area and the broader region. They should be familiar with tourism resources, such as maps and visitor information centers, and be able to provide directions. Such employees also should have basic training in customer service.

It is recommended that the Southtowns pursue a comprehensive front-line staff training and tourism education program. This could include a periodic local program, as well as regular use of tourism training resources provided by tourism networks and hospitality colleges in the region (see *Tools for Implementation*, p. 14).

With respect to a local program, the area will not be starting from scratch. The Town of Evans implemented in 2005 a pilot training program to provide customer service and education about the area's tourism amenities for employees of town-, county- and state-operated parks. The program – “Enhancing Our Competitive Edge” – was implemented in cooperation with the Lake Shore Central School District, which provided customer service training, and the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, which assisted with cross-promotional training. The Southtowns municipalities should work together to secure funding to implement this program on an annual basis, with front-line employees in all seven municipalities and across all tourism sectors considered as clientele. The program should seek to inform employees of the region's tourism amenities as well as related services, such as transportation, dining, lodging and visitor information.

Tools for Implementation



Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau
(<http://gobuffaloniagara.com>)

As the tourism promotion agency for Buffalo and Erie County, the visitors bureau could serve as a resource for the design and implementation of a front-line staff training program in tourism, providing educational materials on regional assets and counsel on tourism training.

Community Development Block Grant Program for Erie County

All seven municipalities in the Southtowns have experience in applying for Erie County's allocation of CDBG funding. Broadly speaking, the program supports such activities as the acquisition of real property, relocation and demolition, rehabilitation of residential and non-residential structures, and construction of public facilities and improvements including streets and neighborhood centers. One of Erie County's funding priorities continues to be infrastructure improvements within low- to moderate-income areas, including sidewalk replacement and street improvements such as those funded through Commercial/Village Center Improvement programs.

National Restaurant Association (<http://www.restaurant.org/>)

National membership organization providing information on industry trends, finance and marketing, as well as legal resources. Its publications include “103 Great Ideas for Reaching out to Your Community,” and “How to Market Your Restaurant.”

New York Main Street Program (<http://www.nymainstreet.org/>)

Program provides funding for façade renovation, building renovation, establishment or expansion of downtown anchor businesses and streetscape enhancements. Eligible applicants include nonprofit community-based organizations and business improvement districts which would assume administrative responsibility for evaluating and selecting projects to be assisted. Maximum grants are \$200,000. The program must be carried out in a concentrated target area that has experienced sustained disinvestment.

See also *Tools for Implementation* in report's section on Heritage Tourism (p. 79) for funding related to preservation of historic buildings, including programs of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

TRANSPORTATION AND WAYFINDING

Current Picture

Accessing the Southtowns.

Transportation systems bring visitors to an area and facilitate their movement between the destinations and services within that area. Given these two key roles, it is important to understand how the existing transportation network functions in order to maximize the effectiveness of all other components of the tourism development process.



Three distinct corridors carry the bulk of daily traffic and serve as the backbone of the region's external and internal connections (see p. 18 for map of travel corridors in the Southtowns). Route 5 and Lake Shore Road represent a lakeshore access corridor, connecting communities and attractions close to Lake Erie. To the east, Route 20 and the New York State Thruway (I-90) combine to form a heavily travelled through-traffic corridor featuring the region's lone Thruway exit. And further east is an inland agricultural corridor, formed by Route 62 and Route 75 as they meander through Eden and North Collins. These roughly parallel corridors are connected to each other by a few less-travelled east-west routes, including Eden-Evans Center Road in the north—serving the Thruway exit—and Route 249 in the south.



20

249

Though travelled primarily by motor vehicles, bicycles and transit also utilize this transportation infrastructure. No formal bicycle routes currently exist, but the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council has rated some roads in the Southtowns for their biking conditions. Extreme caution is advised for bikers on segments of Lake Shore Road, especially near Wendt and Bennett Beaches, while large sections of Routes 62 and 75 have been rated as suitable for biking. Regular bus service is currently limited to the NFTA's route 76 rush-hour express service along Route 5 to downtown Buffalo and the new route 216 service between Hamburg and Gowanda along Route 62.

INTERSTATE

5

90

62

EIGHT POINTS



STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Maximize Seaway Trail exposure

Establish agricultural trails

Designate and mark bike routes

Bolster existing signage system

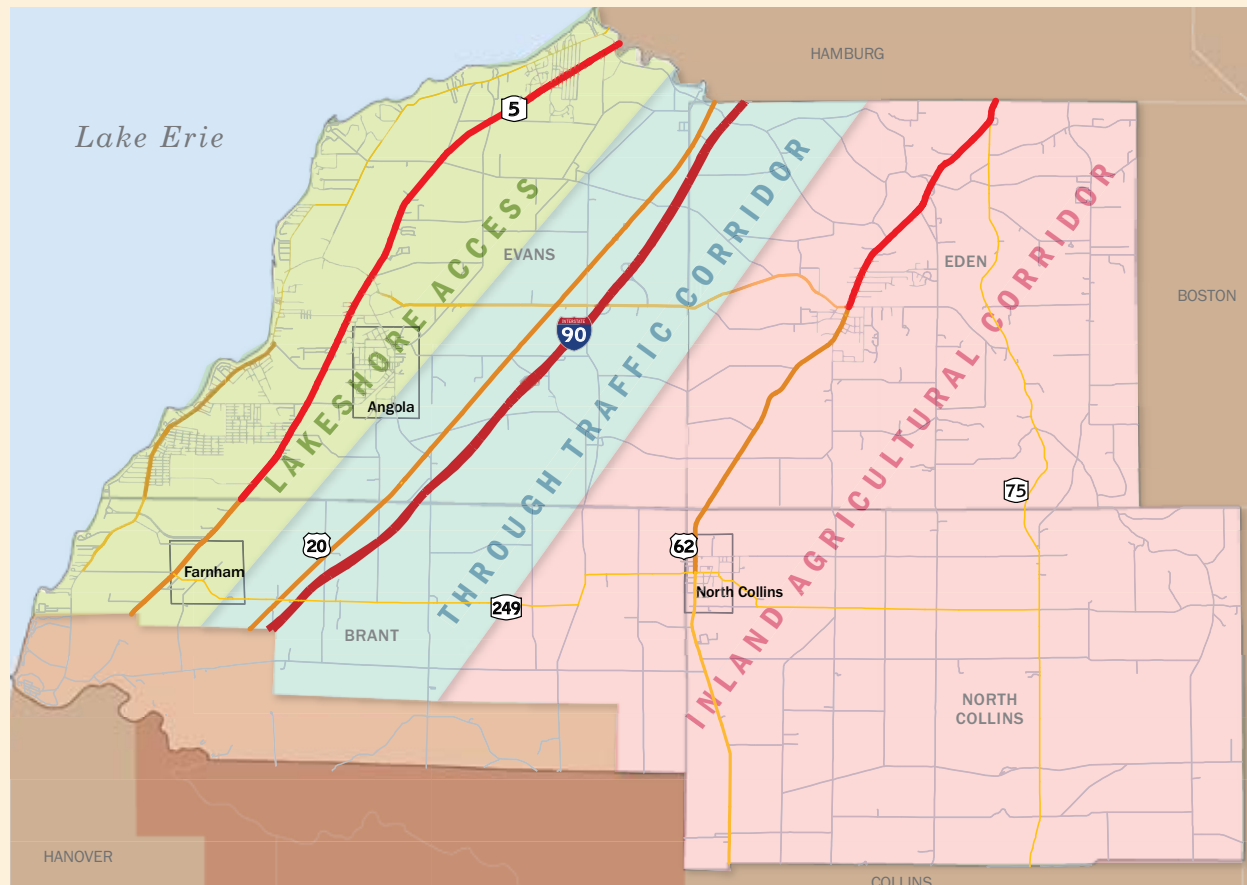
Plan for a coordinated signage program

Designate signage districts

Develop appropriate signage guidelines

Provide incentives for sign replacement





Navigating the Southtowns.

Signage and other tools to navigate the region's roads are as important as the roads themselves. Along the major routes in the Southtowns, standard highway signs (green signs with white lettering) mark the entrance to municipalities and provide directional guidance at key intersections. This system is supplemented by custom-made gateway signage of varying styles and quality, as well as wayfinding signage to designated historic sites such as the Graycliff Estate in Evans and the schoolhouse in North Collins. In Eden and Angola, banners and decorative lighting serve both a gateway and place-making function in business districts.

Largely absent from the current stock of signage are tourist oriented directional signs (or TODs), a state-sanctioned brand of rural highway signage

(with blue background and white lettering) that allows tourist attractions and related businesses to advertise their presence at nearby intersections. In return for advertising space on a state right-of-way, proprietors must erect and maintain the signage according to state standards and pay an annual permit of \$50 per sign. Currently, much of the directional signage for attractions in the Southtowns—especially agricultural ones—are custom and homemade signs that point the way from primary routes. As with these directional signs, destination signs vary considerably in design quality and the information they provide.



Strategies for Success

The following action steps and referenced case studies outline three major strategies for enhancing the Southtowns' transportation and wayfinding infrastructure, including developing transportation as a tourism asset, developing an area-wide signage program and improving the area's gateways.

Step 1: Treat Transportation as Tourism

Whether it's the subway in New York City or a steamboat in St. Louis, transportation is often a key part of the tourist experience. In rural areas, popular ways of engaging visitors in this way include scenic attraction byways and the promotion of bicycling (see *Case Studies in Transportation as Tourism*, p. 21). The Seaway Trail along the lakeshore—part of a 450-mile federally designated scenic route—is the most prominent form of transportation tourism in the Southtowns, offering visitors a marked scenic route, as well as maps and literature of attractions along the trail. Encouraging bicycling along the Seaway Trail and other corridors in the region would promote day-long trips and visits to commonly bypassed places like cemeteries, historic sites and other wayside destinations.



Maximize Seaway Trail exposure:

Graycliff Estate, Evans Town Park and Evangola State Park—all of which have Seaway Trail information kiosks—are the only Southtowns attractions currently featured on the Seaway Trail's official map. In Hamburg, Orchard Park and other places, inland attractions such as farms, museums and festivals are included in trail literature.



Establish agricultural trails: New York State has instituted a Farm, Apple and Cuisine Trail Designation Program, an idea that could be pursued—with or without official designation—to promote agricultural tourism and general sightseeing.



Designate and mark bike routes: Select one or more routes that connect hamlet and village centers with scenic areas and a variety of attractions, starting with areas that currently provide relatively safe biking environments, such as Route 62 and Route 75. Although rail corridors in the Southtowns are still active, explore the potential for future rails-to-trails projects.

CASE STUDIES IN TRANSPORTATION AS TOURISM

Cooperstown Beverage Trail

<http://cooperstownbeveragetrail.com/>

Established in 2007 as New York State's first official cuisine trail under the Farm, Apple and Cuisine Trail Designation Program, the Beverage Trail stretches along the Route 28 corridor between Cooperstown and Oneonta and includes two breweries, a winery and a cider mill.



Lake Champlain Bikeways

<http://www.champlainbikeways.org/index.htm>

A nonprofit group that promotes biking along the nearly 600 miles of Lake Champlain shoreline in New York, Vermont and Quebec, Bikeways raises awareness about biking opportunities by publishing route maps and linking bikers to information about accommodations and tourism activities. It also lobbies for public improvements to bike facilities by demonstrating the benefits to the regional economy.



Explore Maine by Bike

http://www.exploremaine.org/bike/bike_tours.html

Part of an effort by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to stimulate bicycle tourism in the state, Explore Maine provides prospective bikers with maps, route descriptions, and links to services and accommodations along the routes. These efforts are complemented by significant investments in route infrastructure by MDOT, supported by findings of economic impact.



Step 2: Establish Regional Wayfinding

As tourism economies become more regional in scope, a growing number of places are attempting to ease visitor navigation and build regional identity by developing coordinated signage programs (see *Case Studies in Regional Wayfinding*, p. 23). These systems, often tied together by a common design theme, usually feature three layers of signs: gateway signs that mark entrances to the region and communities within the region, trailblazer signs that lead visitors from gateways to primary destinations, and proximity signs located near secondary destinations.

While a coordinated signage program might be a long-term project to pursue once a tourist economy is further developed, short-term actions can be taken to bolster wayfinding, such as encouraging the use of tourist oriented destination signs (TODs) by businesses and attractions, better utilization of the region's Seaway Trail kiosks and installing a Southtowns kiosk at the Thruway exit.



Bolster existing signage system:

Encourage existing tourism assets and visitor services to participate in the state's tourist oriented destination (TOD) signage program by distributing information and, if necessary, providing seed money to erect the signs. Establish kiosk at Thruway exit for regional maps and tourist information (see also p. 44).



Plan for a coordinated signage program:

As assets develop and the Southtowns brand gains momentum, plan for regional gateway signage at key entrances and associated signage leading to tourist assets.



CASE STUDIES IN REGIONAL WAYFINDING



New York State Barge Canal System

<http://www.nyscanals.gov/busdevel/signage-guidelines.pdf>

To unify signage along the more than 500-mile canal system, the New York State Canal Corporation established a set of design guidelines, which includes standard colors, typefaces and logos for all trail markers, historical markers, regulatory signs, site identifiers and wayfinding signage.

Pennsylvania Signing Regions Program

<http://www.spstonline.org/index.html>

Taking advantage of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Signing Regions program, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Signing Trust was established to develop a tourist-oriented wayfinding system in the Pittsburgh region. The Trust developed design guidelines in 2004 and installed 230 signs during the program's first phase. This included signage for 25 participating attractions and tourist-related businesses in the region, including Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. The program is administered for the Trust by the Pennsylvania Tourism & Lodging Association and maintains eligibility requirements for participating entities. These entities pay a one-time fee for inclusion, ranging from \$900 to \$1,400 per mention, followed by annual fees thereafter of \$275 per mention.



Step 3: Create Gateway Corridors

In addition to regional wayfinding efforts, many communities are implementing special signage guidelines for individual properties to promote cleaner and more consistent aesthetics in a defined area (see *Case Study: Route 62 Hamlet Overlay Zone, Town of Eden, p. 24/25*). When properly implemented, the guidelines—often in the form of zoning overlays—can assist in establishing a strong identity for hamlet and village centers, as well as commercial arteries that have little cohesion presently. In agricultural areas with markets and farms, consistent signage with good information can provide visitors with a greater sense that the numerous businesses are all part of a wider destination, thus encouraging visits to multiple locations and removing doubt as to whether a location welcomes visitors.

Although existing signage is typically grandfathered into a new signage overlay district, an area's transition to new signage can be expedited by grants and other financial tools to assist the owners of non-conforming signs.

Designate signage districts: Determine corridors—or larger areas—that would have their tourism development potential enhanced by the establishment of signage guidelines. These might be hamlet or village business districts—as with Eden's Route 62 hamlet zoning overlay—scenic areas or agricultural areas with existing or latent tourism potential.

Develop appropriate signage guidelines: Create signage guidelines for chosen signage districts that reflect the aesthetic and practical needs of the area, taking into account the speed of passing traffic, the density of development and the level of information that particular businesses and attractions have to communicate to passersby.

Provide incentives for sign replacement: Although signage guidelines will influence the erection of signage after they are implemented, existing signage will be grandfathered. If municipalities want to expedite the transition to the desired signage standards, they must be willing to make money available to assist property owners in addition to making the case that improved signage will assist with tourism development.

CASE STUDY

Route 62 Hamlet Overlay Zone, Town of Eden

Implemented on recommendation of the town's comprehensive plan, the overlay zone establishes guidelines to regulate development and redevelopment along Route 62 in the hamlet's core. These guidelines include signage, but extend to architectural design, landscaping, traffic and site planning. The overlay seeks to preserve and enhance the hamlet's character by promoting pedestrian-scaled development.



CASE STUDY

Route 62 Hamlet Overlay Zone, Town of Eden

Sights and signs along Route 62



Tools for Implementation



Erie and Niagara Counties Bicycle Route Guide

An up-to-date map of the bicycle network in Erie and Niagara Counties showing signed bicycle routes and existing multi-use trails. Produced by the Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council, the map also rates the suitability of biking on major routes throughout the region, including Lake Shore Road, Route 62 and Route 75.

Guide to Municipal Control of Signs

<http://www.dos.state.ny.us/lgss/pdfs/municipalcontrolofsigns.pdf>

Produced by the New York State Department of State, the guidebook explores best practices in local sign regulation, as well as the wide range of legal issues that arise when municipalities undertake various forms of signage regulation.

New York State Scenic Byways Sign Manual

<https://www.nysdot.gov/portal/page/portal/programs/scenic-byways/files/signmanual.pdf>

This sign manual explains the signage regulations and standards along scenic byways in New York—such as the Seaway Trail—as well as opportunities to promote local assets through byway signage.

New York State Sign Program Manual

<https://www.nysdot.gov/portal/page/portal/programs/nys-signs>

This guide to highway signage from the New York State Department of Transportation provides an overview of regulations that apply to state and federal highways. It also explains programs that promote tourism navigation, including Tourist Oriented Directional (TOD) signs.

Niagara Frontier Bicycle Master Plan

<http://www.gbnrtc.org/Pdf/Bike-Ped/bikemast.PDF>

Though dated (1998), the master plan outlines numerous on- and off-road biking facilities that were proposed for the region in the 1990s—including several in the Southtowns. The plan also offers implementation strategies for completing and maintaining the proposed system.

Recreational Trails Program

<http://nysparks.state.ny.us/grants/programs/recreation.asp>

A matching grant program funded by the Federal Highway Administration and administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the program provides funding for motorized and non-motorized recreational trails.

Seaway Trail, Inc.

http://www.seawaytrail.com/05_index.asp

Oversees marketing efforts along the Southtowns' scenic byway; its Web site and staff provide marketing information and promotional materials, including information for businesses or organizations interested in promoting their entities through Seaway Trail materials.

REACHING THE VISITOR

Current Picture

One of the fundamental rules of tourism is to prepare and polish the visitor products and experiences before investing heavily in their promotion. An effective tourism marketing program also needs to be built upon a strong brand that promotes the destination as a distinct experience. Flashy marketing will not attract visitors if the product does not match up to those expectations – and those that are enticed to visit and are disappointed are likely to more than cancel out those marketing dollars with negative word-of-mouth advertising. Still, many communities are eager to jump into marketing before they are ready, often investing their entire budget in advertising before addressing product quality. Strategic preparation is also critical since marketing can be costly.

Brant's summer
concert series
(photo courtesy of the
Town of Brant)

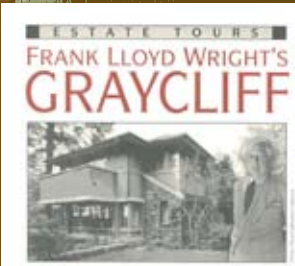
The Southtowns

has much to sell, but it is hampered at this point by the investment needs of its existing and potential tourism assets, the lack of information on its visitors, an undefined destination brand, and the general fragmentation and lack of coordination in tourism promotion for the broader Buffalo Niagara region. For example, although some assets are visitor ready, more needs to be done to cross-promote and creatively package assets to draw visitors for longer, ideally overnight, stays. Also, the area lacks knowledge of its current visitor base – who are they, where are they coming from, and how long are they staying – which is necessary to target marketing dollars. The Southtowns, collectively, lacks a destination brand, or a message portraying a truly distinctive experience that will resonate with visitors within and beyond the region. Finally, tourism promotion entities for the broader Buffalo Niagara region are challenged by a lack of resources and competition for the same visitors.



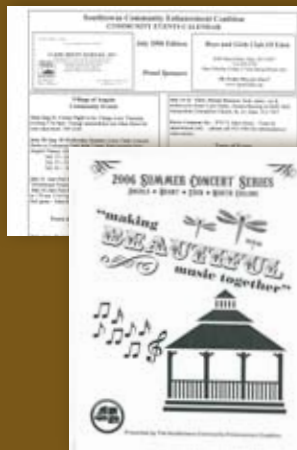
Southtowns
BRAND

Despite the major marketing tasks ahead, the Southtowns is not starting from scratch. Eden has developed an image as the “garden spot” of the region through its annual corn festival and the successful branding of Eden Valley’s vegetable farms. Evans and Angola as well as Brant draw visitors from around the region to enjoy their Lake Erie beaches and parks. The Graycliff Estate alone attracts national visitation. A collaborative infrastructure has developed out of the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition, which coordinates promotion across the seven municipalities, compiling regular community events listings for local newspapers and jointly purchasing advertising space in regional tourism publications. Additionally, the Coalition and its promotion of the area’s amenities have earned positive press in some of the region’s larger newspapers. Some of the Southtowns’ higher-profile amenities, such as the Graycliff Estate, Eden’s kazoo museum and Evans’ beaches, are also incorporated in regional and state tourism promotion efforts.



This brochure for the Graycliff Estate provides historical information as well as details on tours

The North Collins Schoolhouse #8 History Center and Museum placed this brochure at the Seaway Trail visitors' center on Route 5 in Hamburg



Collaborative marketing initiatives undertaken by the Coalition include joint promotion of summer concert series and other community events

Strategies for Success

The following strategies address the incremental steps required of the Southtowns in its development of a successful tourism marketing program. These include collecting information on the existing and potential visitor base, defining and building a destination brand, crafting compelling marketing tools and forging strategic partnerships in the region to implement the program.

Eden Corn Festival
Copyright Carl Modica

Step 1: Understand the Visitor

Develop a Profile of Area's Current Visitors

Very little data exist on the Southtowns' current visitor base, although visitor surveying has been conducted at the Graycliff Estate (summer 2006) and some venues and events track general attendance figures. Ongoing regional visitor survey efforts are useful for deciphering general trends in visitation to the region (see *Regional Visitor Survey Efforts*, p. 32/33). However, more specific data are needed to design a marketing program for the Southtowns. A more comprehensive system for visitor analysis – regular surveying and tracking of visitor demographics, motivations, expectations and levels of satisfaction – would help the area's tourism planners monitor trends in visitation, identify target markets and appropriately design programs and services to better meet visitor needs and demand.

To develop a snapshot of the area's current visitor base, it is recommended that a standard visitor surveying tool be designed for periodic administration at select venues across the four-town area, including heritage, recreational, agricultural and retail attractions. Visitor spending information – such as expenditures on dining, lodging and shopping – can also be collected to conduct an assessment of tourism's economic impact in the area, which can be helpful in tracking growth in the industry as well as building community and political support for tourism investment (see *Designing the Visitor Survey*, p. 32/33). At a minimum, all venues should be encouraged to monitor attendance levels and collect basic visitor data such as Zip codes or addresses, with this information submitted to a central resource, such as the Coalition, on an annual basis.

In terms of survey administration, sample coverage error, or not capturing a representative sample of the area's visitor population, is the most common mistake in survey research. A cross-section of all visitor categories – daytrip vs. overnight, local vs. out-of-area, summer vs. winter, weekend vs. weekday – should be obtained to ensure the resulting analysis is as statistically accurate as possible. Sample selection is especially critical when conducting visitor economic impact analyses. Survey methods include mail, telephone and onsite interviews. Although onsite interviewing

typically garners the highest response rate, it is also the costliest method and is difficult to implement when visitation volume is low. Surveying visitors by phone or mail after their visit costs less, but may take more time to collect a representative sample.

Define and Target Potential Visitor Markets

Based on general trends in the tourism industry and an assessment of existing information on visitation in the Southtowns, a strategy for reaching out to potential markets should be developed. Preliminary assessments suggest several possible markets for the Southtowns area. Each of these markets is defined by different demographics, preferences and needs, which will require targeting the groups with different tools and messages.

Resident vs. Out-of-town Visitors: Tourism industry standards suggest a “4-times rule” in determining the distance visitors are willing to travel to a destination. For instance, visitors will drive 15 minutes if the destination offers at least an hour of activities. Reaching out to markets beyond the Buffalo Niagara region – within a three-hour drive, for instance – requires a more substantial collection of activities which, at this point, the Southtowns may not be able to offer. Therefore, initially it may be most effective to target regional residents as the Southtowns builds and invests in its base of assets. This may be especially effective given the size of the region's “visiting friends and family” market (according to the 2003 One Summerlong Sensation assessment, 24 percent of overnight visitors stayed with friends and family). Building familiarity and satisfaction with the region's residents in turn lures visiting friends and family, who then spread the positive word when they return home. The Southtowns may also reach the out-of-town visitor market by packaging its amenities with broader regional attractions, including Niagara Falls, the cultural amenities of Buffalo and attractions in Chautauqua County and points south (see *also Step 3: Assemble Asset Packages*, p. 38).

Bus Tours: Motor coach tours are an attractive target market, bringing a captive audience of 30-40 people to the area to pursue several activities. Many of the region's larger tourism promotion agencies have established relationships with tour operators – tourism planners in the Southtowns should work closely with these groups to include the area's activities and amenities in existing and developing tours and packages. It is also important to learn about each tour's unique customer interests and needs for attractions, dining, shopping and lodging. For instance, senior citizen tours may be most interested in heritage and historic sites and dining. Also, provide the tour operator (or the regional promotion agency coordinating the tour) with the

Regional Visitor Survey Efforts

The region's tourism promotion agencies conduct visitor surveys on a fairly regular basis to monitor visitation trends for the broader region. For instance, the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corp. partners with Niagara University's College of Hospitality and Tourism Management to assess on a quarterly basis the visitor demographics of visitors to Niagara Falls and Niagara County attractions. The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau conducts follow-up surveys of those visiting its information centers or requesting visitor information, with results compiled annually. The Chautauqua County Visitors Bureau conducts conversion studies periodically.

Past one-time research efforts of interest to the Southtowns include:

Buffalo Niagara CVB's Architecture & Art Destination Marketing Initiative: Demographic analysis of 500 visitor surveys conducted during summer 2006 at Darwin D. Martin House Complex, Graycliff Estate, Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the Roycroft Copper Shop and Roycroft Inn.

One Summerlong Sensation Economic Impact Assessment: Buffalo Niagara CVB study conducted by the UB Regional Institute to assess the economic impact of a series of tourism assets and events in Erie and Niagara Counties promoted as part of the 2003 One Summerlong Sensation marketing campaign.

Americans for the Arts' Arts & Economic Prosperity III report: Administered by the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County and the Niagara Erie Regional Coalition as part of a national study, this report assessed the economic impact of 61 arts organizations in Erie and Niagara Counties.

Designing

the Visitor Survey

Questions should be short, worded clearly and without bias.

Information typically collected includes:

- Demographic (age, income and education levels)
- Point of origin
- Length of stay
- Accommodation type (if overnight)
- Purpose of trip
- Number of people in travel group
- Mode of transportation
- Other activities and attractions included in visit
- How they learned of the venue/area
- Resources used to prepare for the trip
- Per-day spending on food, lodging, shopping
- Level of satisfaction with visit
- Suggestions for resources, activities

information they need to sell the tour. Motor coach tours require at least a year's notice in preparing packages.

Recreational Vehicles: Nearly 8 million U.S. households, up 15 percent from 2001, own a recreational vehicle, or RV. The market is diverse, including retirees and young families, with those between age 35 and 54 comprising the largest ownership age group. RV ownership will only increase as the baby boomer generation heads into retirement. The RV market has unique needs and interests and tends to be interested in experiencing the local culture of the communities they visit. RVs also have specific parking and clearance requirements and need access to electricity and dumping stations (see *also report's section on Hosting the Visitor*). The RV-Friendly logo (yellow circle with blue outline) is increasingly appearing on highway signs across the U.S., advertising communities and stop-offs that meet these needs. Also, RV owners are part of a close-knit community that networks and shares information on RV-friendly, and RV-unfriendly, destinations (see *Reaching Out to RV Owners*, p. 33).

Reaching Out to RV-Owners

A resource for RV owners, *Rest Areas & Welcome Centers* provides information on RV-friendly amenities provided by welcome centers, roadside turnouts and scenic visits across the U.S.

Also, publications like *RV Companion* and *Trailer Life* promote RV-friendly destinations and alert RV owners to those that are not.



Tourists by Interest: The Southtowns has strengths in three key tourism segments – agriculture, heritage and recreation. Although the interests of each market overlap, initially attracting visitors or expanding these audiences will require marketing strategies that account for each group's distinct characteristics. For instance, agritourists tend to travel with families and children, while heritage and recreational tourists do not. Heritage tourists also tend to be older, suggesting an opportunity to tap into a growing population of retirement-age visitors. Agritourists are overwhelmingly day-trippers, while heritage tourists are more likely than the typical traveler to stay in a hotel or motel (see *Southtowns' Visitor Profiles*, p. 34/35). The similarities among these markets are also notable. For example, all three visitor markets enjoy shopping, especially for antiques. Agricultural tourists frequently include recreational activities in their visit. Visitors to agricultural and recreational sites also have an interest in historic sites.

Southtowns' Visitor Profiles

Agritourists

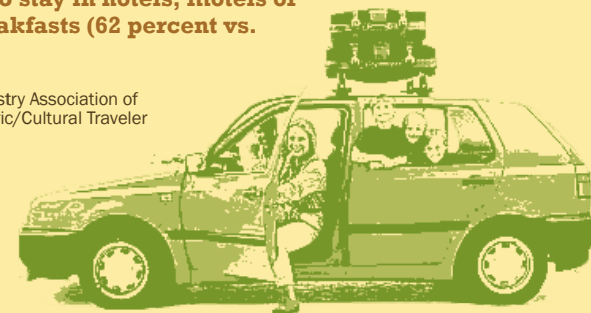
- **Local (more than half come from either the home-county of the business or adjacent counties)**
- **Travel with family and/or friends (72% travel with family members and 31% with friends)**
- **Mixture of young and old (59% between age 20 and 54; 12% under age 12)**
- **Only spend the day (79% did not plan to spend the night)**
- **Repeat customers (48%)**
- **Informed via word-of-mouth (39% learned from friends or family)**
- **Include range of activities in trips: parks (39%); festivals (34%); camping (32%); historic sites (31%); fishing (31%); hiking (27%) and antiques (16%)**

Source: Hilchey, Duncan and Diane Kuehn. Agritourism in New York: A Market Analysis

Heritage Tourists (compared to typical U.S. tourist)

- **Older and more likely to be retired**
- **Travel longer (5.2 nights vs. 3.4 nights)**
- **More likely to stay in hotels, motels or bed and breakfasts (62 percent vs. 55 percent)**

Source: Travel Industry Association of America. The Historic/Cultural Traveler



Southtowns' Visitor Profiles

Heritage Tourists in Buffalo Niagara

- Travel largely as couples or with friends (only 4% traveled with children)
- Over age 50 (48% between age 51 and 65)
- Well educated (44% with graduate degrees)
- Earn high incomes (40% earn annual household incomes \$50,000 to \$100,000 and 26% earn \$100,000 to \$150,000)
- Lodge in hotels more often than with friends and family (20% vs. 13%)
- Interested in home improvement activities, including shopping for antiques, and visiting artisan or craft shops, gardens and special events

Source: ArtsMarket. 2006 Marketing, Communications & Branding Plan Recommendations

Recreational Tourists

- Young (nearly half are between age 26 and 45)
- 43% travel with spouse and 42% with friends
- Like to include dining (85%), shopping (64%) and arts and culture (54%)

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Survey on Recreation and the Environment 2000



Step 2: Define the Brand

A successful regional brand includes an attractive logo and catchy slogan and conveys the area's experiences in a way that distinguishes it from other destinations. Brands have become increasingly important in the fiercely competitive world of destination marketing. The tourist's process of selecting a destination is risky, involving uncertainty and the outlay of significant resources. A region's image is crucial to the tourist's research and final destination selection. A compelling brand will resonate equally with potential visitor markets within and outside the region. A strong Southtowns brand would also enhance marketing strategies employed by the region's larger tourism promotion agencies in Niagara, Erie and Chautauqua Counties that pitch the Buffalo Niagara region as a destination.

Based on its collection of assets, geography and culture, the Southtowns area has a unique experience to offer. Conceptualizing and visualizing this experience for the visitor helps shape the message and brand, but also sets the standard for the level of quality and type of products offered. Given trends in rural tourism development, the Southtowns should capitalize on its authenticity, its preservation of a rural way of life and its collection of natural assets and experiences that take the visitor "away from it all." For instance, the concept of "escape" and "explore" could be incorporated into the Southtowns brand and its various elements.

In developing a brand, it is important that each of its elements – name, logo, slogan as well as asset packages and marketing tools – reinforce one another and reflect a consistent concept (see *Case Study: Bellingham-Mt. Baker, Washington*, p. 37).

Especially in the realm of destination branding, the name is critical, which is likely to be the biggest challenge for the Southtowns. The "Southtowns" is a fairly familiar term in the Buffalo region that identifies municipalities south of Buffalo. However, the term describes many other municipalities beyond those participating in this effort. Thus, the "Southtowns" may be confusing not only to those outside the area that have no familiarity with the term, but also to residents of the region. The seven municipalities should consider other unifying features or characteristics, including geographic or natural elements, that could serve as a destination name that reinforces the overall branding concept (see *An Example of the Southtowns Brand*, p. 36/37). Additionally,

AN EXAMPLE OF THE
Southtowns Brand



Boundaries:

Municipalities generally bordering the Lake Erie shoreline and surrounding valleys, including the seven municipalities that are the subject of this report and possibly the Town of Hamburg

Slogan:

Lake and Valley Region – Where Western New York Escapes

OR

**Lake and Valley Region –
Escape, Explore, Experience**



Partnerships, Partnerships

Tourists are not concerned with boundaries, just finding the most complete and diverse experience.

In many cases, this will require the Southtowns to look beyond the borders of the seven municipalities as it develops its brand, assembles packages and markets the message. Partnerships also lead to a more efficient use of limited resources. The Southtowns should find the boundaries that make the most sense for the products and experiences being marketed, with partners including:

- Neighboring towns, villages
- Erie County, Western New York
- New York State and state tourism promotional efforts
- Regional tourism promotion agencies
- Cross-promotion with other regional assets



the incorporation of other nearby municipalities into this destination area should be considered to reduce confusion for the visitor and enhance the branding and promotional process for all involved (see *Partnerships, Partnerships*, p. 36/37).

The process of brand formation should be participatory, engaging the community and tourism leaders (the owners of this brand), the recipient of the brand (visitors) and marketing and design experts that can help develop the brand.


C A S E S T U D Y

Bellingham-Mt. Baker, Washington

<http://www.bellingham.org/>

Located in northwest Washington amidst Mt. Baker, crisp lakes and unspoiled wilderness, Bellingham and surrounding Whatcom County tourism was paralyzed in that visitors found it difficult to identify the area's attractions and its exact location. With broad community participation, the county engaged in a branding exercise to capture the essence of its destination experience, rephrasing the region's name and developing the tagline, "A refreshing change." The brand is now incorporated across all of the county tourism promotion materials.

Source: "Success Stories: Bellingham-Mt. Baker, Washington." Total Destination Management, Inc



Step 3: Assemble Asset Packages



The Southtowns area should develop asset packages that highlight the region's strong points. Given the synergies across the area's key tourism markets – agritourism, heritage tourism and recreational tourism – there are ample opportunities for cross-promotion and packaging. Asset packages should be named and promoted to build upon and reinforce the destination brand (see *Potential Southtowns Packages*, p. 38/39).

Include Dining and Shopping: Especially given the growth in the culinary tourism market and the perennial attraction of shopping, these amenities should be included in all visitor packages developed for the Southtowns. Highlights on a farm tour could include antiques and craft retail. A historic homes tour or visit to the Graycliff Estate could conclude with antiques and crafts shopping and lunch or dinner in a town or village center. Bicycle route maps could point out the unique retail experiences and dining options in the area, both in the downtown areas and along rural highways.

Take Advantage of the Graycliff Estate:

The Graycliff Estate attracts several thousands of visitors annually. Capitalize on this visitor hook by linking Graycliff visitors to other attractions in the area that may be of interest, including historic home tours or a heritage sites tour, antiques and crafts shops, garden tours, special events such as arts and crafts shows, and dining.

Build on Special Events: The Southtowns has a variety of special events that already are effective in drawing visitors to the area. Tap the opportunities presented by this captive audience by promoting attraction packages related to the event



Special events in the Southtowns include concert series, an art festival, recreational tournaments and a country weekend with music and events

POTENTIAL Southtowns PACKAGES

Voyage through Vegetable Valley

Farm museum

Horseback riding

Lunch at the farmers' market

Historic sites

Eden Corn Festival Etc. (overnight)

Corn Festival

Camping or farm bed & breakfast

Historic sites

Antiques

Farmers' market

Ladies' Escape

Graycliff Estate

Historic homes tour

Antique and boutique shops

Lunch or dinner

POTENTIAL Southtowns PACKAGES

Beaches to Berries

Evangola State Park (beach and hike trails)

Berry farm tour (Brant and North Collins)

Lunch at the farmers' market

Hike and Bike for Heirlooms

Bike tour (Evans Hike/Bike Trail) or hiking trails

Farmers' market

Lunch or dinner

Antique and boutique shops

Graycliff, Gardens and Gifts

The Lord's Garden (Eden)

Antique and boutique shops

Historic homes tour

Farmers' market

visitor. For instance, there are several events tied to the area's beaches and parks, including a regatta and fishing tournaments, which could be linked with other activities in the area. Attendees of the Annual Evans Arts and Crafts Festival may be interested in antique shops and a historic homes tour as well as lunch in Angola. Visitors to the Taste of Evans might be interested in farm tours. Those attending the Tomato Fest in Brant could extend the visit with a farm tour, hiking and camping.

Link to Broader Regional Assets: Many of the Southtowns' assets are strong complements to attractions north in Buffalo and Niagara County and south in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties, providing opportunities to tap into even broader visitor markets. For instance, agritourism is a strategic complement to the region's package of family-friendly tourism attractions, including Niagara Falls, the Buffalo Zoo, the Buffalo Museum of Science and other beaches and parks in the region. Alternatively, the Southtowns can tap a different visitor market by linking agritourism-related activities with culinary and cultural tourism. For instance, regional packages could connect the Southtowns' farmers' market with a select farm and food-tasting tour, a food festival, art galleries in Buffalo and wineries in Chautauqua County. Visitors to arts and cultural attractions in Buffalo or to the Chautauqua Institution may be interested in a daytrip to the Southtowns to see Graycliff, visit other historic sites, shop for antiques and take a farm tour.

Step 4: Develop Marketing Tools

The process of building the brand and promoting the destination requires the development of various marketing tools and products. Complementing brochures, Web sites and advertising should be a professional public relations strategy, as publicity in local and broader news media is a valuable source of promotion with high credibility.

The marketing tools used to communicate the messages are many and will vary in scope and scale. Some will be implemented on a scale broader than the "brand" area, with such tools including New York State's Heritage New York program or the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau Web site. Products such as a map of farm retail stands may be suitable to a smaller area. Others may apply only to the individual town, such as an information kiosk in the village or town center.

From printing, design and photography to advertising costs, marketing can be expensive. However, this is not an area to cut corners. For instance, high print quality does not hide poor design or confusing text. These materials convey an important first impression to the potential visitor and must help set the area apart from the

myriad competing destinations (see *Marketing Tip: Design and Photography*, p. 40). Initially, the Southtowns should focus its resources on a few high-end promotional products to begin building the brand and selling the area's most visitor-ready products.

Brochure

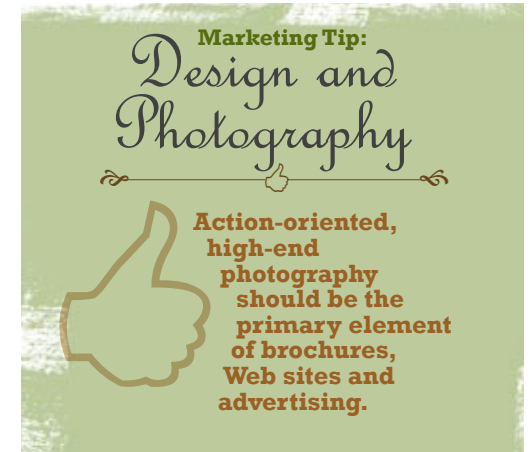
Initially, the Southtowns should invest in a single, high-end brochure promoting the area.

Clearly written, simple copy and professional photography are keys to brochure design. As with all marketing pieces, the destination's brand should be reinforced. Contact information, including a Web site and a locator map are also useful. It may be necessary for the Southtowns to consult with a graphic designer to produce the brochure. Such a resource could also assist with photography, coordinating brochure printing and ensuring the brochure, Web site and other promotional pieces are integrated and complementarily designed.

The brochure should be distributed widely and placed in all of the region's major visitor information centers and related attractions (including Seaway Trail visitors' centers and kiosks, Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau visitors' centers, Niagara Falls visitors' centers, New York State Thruway rest stops, Graycliff Estate, Buffalo Zoo and the Chautauqua Institution).

The Southtowns should also be more proactive in ensuring its assets are included in brochures produced by other entities (see *Sampling of Tourism Brochures*, p. 41). For instance, the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau produces an annual visitor guide with assets listed by theme and an events calendar. New York State's Seaway Trail produces a map and brochure promoting attractions along the trail. Currently Graycliff Estate, Evangola State Park and Evans Town Park are included. However, the map also includes smaller history sites and even individual farms for other municipalities on and off the trail. Finally, brochures should also be available at the area's tourism assets, including historic sites, farm stands, retail outlets, parks, gas stations and grocery stores.

As resources permit and needs arise, brochures may be developed to promote the Southtowns' niche areas, including a farm tour, hiking and biking trails or antiques. However, partnering more broadly might be more cost effective while reaching a larger



audience. For instance, a map and brochure could feature all Erie County farms (see *Case Studies: Farm and Food Tours in the Region*, p. 42/43). New York State publishes a “Nature Tourism in Buffalo Niagara” brochure, complete with maps and suggested itineraries. The state also publishes “I Love NY” seasonal visitor guides, while the state Department of Transportation provides foldout maps for bicycle routes across the state.

<p>Sampling of Tourism Brochures ...and potential marketing partnerships</p>	<p>The Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau promotes tourism packages, including the African American Experience in Western New York</p>	
<p>The Southtowns should seek to include its assets in the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau's annual visitors' guide</p>	<p>NYS Department of Transportation produces maps on bicycle routes, including this one for Route 17. The map highlights lodging, cultural sites and bike shops</p>	
<p>New York State publishes a brochure on Nature Tourism attractions in the Buffalo Niagara region</p>	<p>The Niagara County farms brochure includes a map and chart detailing the products and amenities offered by the county's 80 farms</p>	
<p>New York State's I Love NY autumn visitors' guide</p>	<p>Heritage New York provides various promotional tools, including a brochure, to highlight sites participating in its heritage trails</p>	

Web Site

The Internet is the primary tool for tourists in planning their vacations. A well designed site with access to critical visitor information and a user-friendly navigation system can go a long way in distinguishing a destination and building recognition around the area's brand (see *Case Study: Menomonie, WI*, p. 42). Although Web site design, administration and maintenance require significant investment of resources, this resource can also be a more cost effective approach for distributing visitor information to a wider audience. For instance, linking visitors to a map of the area's farms or historic sites costs significantly less than printing brochures and maps. Also, with a digital asset inventory for the Southtowns already developed for Phase I of this effort, an important element of a visitor Web site is already in place. The Web site should feature simple navigation and clean and consistent design that portrays the destination brand through images and language. A web master should maintain site content and handle technical issues.

C A S E S T U D Y

Menomonie, WI

<http://welcometomenomonie.com>

Portraying a simple but attractive design, this Web site immediately demonstrates high quality and distinction. Maintained by the Greater Menomonie Area Chamber of Commerce, the site promotes the small town of Menomonie (population about 15,000), located about an hour and a half from Madison, WI. It is separate from the municipal Web site for Menomonie.

Through professional photographs and well designed icons that fit with the overall brand, the site promotes five types of attractions (music and theater; family outings; the arts; history; and shopping). Asset listings include basic contact information with links to Web sites for more information. The site also features a map of its recreational highlight, the Red Cedar Trail, and a clickable calendar of events.



Farm and Food Tours in the Region

<http://www.niagarafarmmarkets.org>

Niagara County, NY Farm Trail

Niagara County partnered with its Cornell Cooperative Extension as well as the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Niagara County planning department to produce its county farm map, which provides information on 78 farms and agritourism businesses. Included is information on products grown, from wine to fresh turkeys, and activities offered, from llama rides to farm tours. The tour is promoted on the Niagara Farm Markets Web site, jointly supported by Niagara County, the county's tourism promotion agency and the county's office of the Cornell Cooperative Extension. A similar program has been developed around the Niagara Wine Trail, which is featured on a separate Web site (<http://niagarawinetrail.org>). The farm and wine tours are cross-promoted on both Web sites.



Farm and Food Tours in the Region

<http://niagaraculinarytrail.com>

Niagara, Ontario Culinary Trail

Niagara County partnered with its Cornell Cooperative Extension as well as the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Niagara County planning department to produce its county farm map, which provides information on 78 farms and agritourism businesses. Included is information on products grown, from wine to fresh turkeys, and activities offered, from llama rides to farm tours. The tour is promoted on the Niagara Farm Markets Web site, jointly supported by Niagara County, the county's tourism promotion agency and the county's office of the Cornell Cooperative Extension. A similar program has been developed around the Niagara Wine Trail, which is featured on a separate Web site (<http://niagarawinetrail.org>). The farm and wine tours are cross-promoted on both Web sites.



There are several existing Web resources of use to the Southtowns area in promoting its assets. For instance, four out of the seven municipalities feature official town or village Web sites, some of which already promote things to see and do in the area. These sites could be enhanced to include more detailed information on assets beyond the municipality's borders as well as information on tourism packages. The Web sites of state and regional tourism promotion agencies, including the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau, are also useful formats to promote select tourism assets in the Southtowns area (see *Collaborative Marketing Opportunities for the Southtowns*, p. 43). For instance, the Web site for the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau promotes a "Historic Southtowns Tour" that includes the Graycliff Estate and Eden's Original American Kazoo Co. Additionally, the bureau promotes a "Cultural Itinerary" which features the Graycliff Estate. Visitors to the bureau's site are also directed to information on "Where to Shop" in the region. Highlighted here are the region's unique shopping districts, including East Aurora, Clarence, and Elmwood and Hertel Avenues in Buffalo. Also, the Web site <http://niagaraculturaltourism.com> features a comprehensive inventory of cultural and heritage attractions, parks and tours across the binational region.

Collaborative Marketing Opportunities for the Southtowns

Shopping highlights in Buffalo Niagara as promoted by the Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau

The "Historic Southtowns" tour promoted by the bureau



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Advertising

Paid advertising – from newspapers to television to billboards – is an important component of any marketing program. Expense is obviously the greatest challenge in this area, though this can be mitigated by carefully choosing media and staging advertisements during key events (for example, radio or television advertising around the Eden Corn Festival or the opening of the Farm Museum or Farmers' Market in the Southtowns) or at strategic locations (a billboard before the Southtowns' New York State Thruway exit). Advertising costs can also be supported by businesses participating in or being promoted by the advertisement. Targeted publications are also effective tools for advertising. For instance, the *Western New York Family Magazine*, which is distributed regionally and includes features on family-friendly activities, could be used to promote agritourism and recreational tourism activities. *Western New York Heritage* magazine includes features on the region's historical events and figures, and special advertising sections for antiques and historic sites.

Visitor Information Centers

Many of the attractions in the Southtowns area have limited hours. One strategy of providing visitors information during off hours is to place an information kiosk in the centers of the respective towns and municipalities. The kiosks could feature a map of the area and hold printed brochures, maps and other visitor materials. The kiosk should be designed to fit with the historic character of the towns and villages (see *Cooperstown Visitor Kiosk*, p. 44).

Cooperstown Visitor Kiosk

This information kiosk in Cooperstown is staffed but also features a map and other information to serve visitors during off hours.



Copyright:
Cooperstown Chamber of Commerce

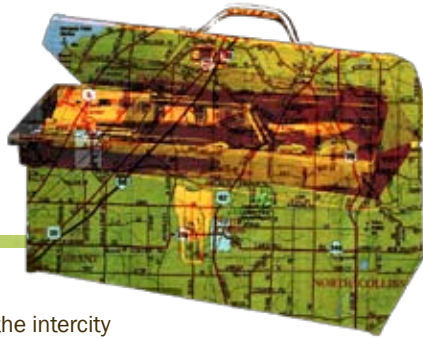
Given the Southtowns' strategic location off the New York State Thruway, there are several opportunities for capturing this market by providing visitor information at critical catch points. For instance, although a fully staffed visitors' center may be not be financially feasible at this point, the Southtowns could place a kiosk with maps and brochures at its Thruway exit. As resources expand and the area's tourism industry grows, investment in a fully staffed visitors' center at the area's Thruway exit may be warranted.

Promotional Video or DVD

The Southtowns area could partner with other municipalities in the region (e.g., Hamburg, Orchard Park, East Aurora) to produce a promotional video that highlights attractions proximate to the Graycliff Estate. Given the high cost of video production, broader partnerships will be critical in developing this promotional tool.

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Tools for Implementation



American Bus Association

(<http://buses.org>): The trade association of the intercity bus industry, ABA represents more than 1,000 motor coach and tour operations across the U.S. and Canada. Its other 2,300 members represent travel and tourism industry organizations. Its Web site provides access to data and trends related to the industry, although access is limited for non-members. Its bimonthly *Destinations* magazine includes features on group tour destinations and articles on how to attract niche groups.

Binational Tourism Alliance (<http://btapartners.com>): Membership-based tourism industry trade organization supporting tourism destination development in the cross-border region. Offers a range of services, including training and tours (Tourism Pro, modular training for cultural and tourism operators and organizations, and the Binational Niagara Media Familiarization Tour for news media and group tour planners). BTA also is a partner host of Binational Doors Open Niagara, a weekend-long event held each October providing free access to participating historic, architectural and heritage sites in Erie and Niagara Counties and the Niagara region of Southern Ontario.

Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau (<http://gobuffaloniagara.org>): The tourism promotion agency for Erie County, the bureau provides a range of destination marketing and convention planning services, including an annual visitors' guide, specialized publications and a Web site with asset inventories and suggested itineraries that span the entire Buffalo Niagara region.

<http://NiagaraCulturalTourism.com>: This relatively new Web site is a comprehensive inventory of the binational region's cultural, heritage and recreational offerings, including Underground Railroad sites, museums, architecture, parks and gardens.

Niagara University Hospitality Training & Research Center: Program within the university's College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, the training center provides a range of hospitality training programs for businesses within the region. Currently the center is partnering with the Binational Tourism Alliance to provide cultural organizations in the region with programs such as Excellence in Customer Service, the Cultural Concierge Program and Advanced Professional Development.

New York State Programs:

I Love NY (<http://iloveny.com>): New York State's central tourism resource administered by the state's Department of Economic Development. Its Web site is organized around 11 vacation regions, including the Greater Niagara Region. In addition to asset listings by region, the site also includes features on outdoor and seasonal activities across the state, as well as a narrative on each municipality and details on weekend packages and lodging offered. I Love NY also publishes a range of brochures, including seasonal visitors' guides and an annual visitors' guide.

Heritage New York: Program of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation established to create a series of thematic statewide trails. To date there are four trails – Revolutionary War, Underground Railroad, Women History and Theodore Roosevelt. Benefits of inclusion on the trail include eligibility for building grants to help interpret and present the historic site, as well as inclusion in promotional resources such as brochures, maps, a Web site, and listings of special events.

Seaway Trail: A National Scenic Byway, the 454-mile Seaway Trail parallels Lake Erie, the Niagara River, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Marketed as "a well-marked, scenic alternative to interstate highways and toll roads," the site winds through village and major cities and, in the Southtowns area, follows Route 5 and Lake Shore Road along Lake Erie in Evans and Brant. Along the way are Visitor Information Displays featuring maps and interpretive panels touting historic, natural and recreational places to visit. The trail operates a visitors' center in the Town of Hamburg on Route 5 just before the Town of Evans.

{ AGRITOURISM }

Current Picture

The lake-moderated climate and fertile soils of southern Erie County make this some of the most suitable land for agriculture in New York State. Brant, Eden and North Collins have from 20 percent to 46 percent of their land dedicated to agriculture, some of the densest agricultural land in Erie County. Major enterprises include dairy, fruits and vegetables, forage crops, nursery and greenhouses, horses and other livestock, making this area one New York State's most agriculturally diverse regions.

Scenic overlook
from a farm in Eden

Despite this bounty, agricultural conditions are depressed statewide, with farmers facing increased competition from both within the United States and abroad, in addition to development pressure locally from sprawling urban areas. To diversify and sustain their business base, many farms are increasingly turning to alternative enterprises, including agritourism. Incorporating farm retail stands, agricultural festivals and farm bed and breakfast operations, agritourism is one of the fastest growing tourism markets nationwide.

Growth in Agritourism

63 million people
age 16 and over
visited farms in
the past year

that's **31%**
of the U.S.
population!



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture,
National Survey on Recreation and the
Environment 2000

Farm businesses in the four-town area have begun to tap this burgeoning market. Dozens of farms feature roadside fruit, vegetable and flower stands, while others offer pick-your-own services or farm tours by request.

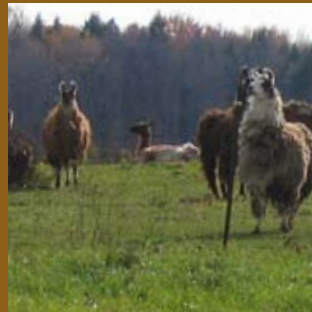
A North Collins business displays historic farm equipment for the public, while an Evans farm raises buffalo. Alpaca graze on a farm with alpaca yarns and fabrics for sale in Eden and a Farnham establishment offers horse riding trails. The annual Eden Corn Festival attracts more than 250,000 visitors from across the region, and Brant is known for its berries and annual Tomato Fest. Plans are underway to build a regional farm museum in Eden with interactive displays, demonstrations and historic exhibits.



Fall flowers for sale at Our Family's Harvest in Brant



The Siragusa farm in Evans sells fresh produce



Llamas in Eden



Awald Farms' giant pumpkins in North Collins

The area is not without its challenges, however. First-impression elements such as farm information and directional signage and access to safe parking are not always addressed. System-wide coordination is also lacking, as exemplified by the inadequate cross-promotion among farm retail businesses and a dearth of centralized visitor information on agritourism resources.

Additional obstacles include the limited financial resources and time farm operators are able to devote to building an agritourism operation.



Varying examples of agritourism signage in the Southtowns

Strategies *for* Success

Opportunities abound for the Southtowns to see greater gains in this expanding tourism niche market. The following series of action steps and best practices address the critical components of agritourism, including enhancing the area's existing assets and diversifying the range of agritourism activities offered.

View of Winter's Outdoor
Museum in North Collins

Step 1: Assess Vendor Interest and Capacity

To the extent feasible, planning for and implementation of agritourism initiatives should occur collaboratively. Community leaders can work with farm operators to gauge their interest in and capacity for agritourism, either through a survey of farm businesses in the area or community meetings. Such a system-wide assessment will help identify opportunities for collaboration among farms and the respective communities in agritourism development, especially for initiatives like a farm tour. Regional coordination will also facilitate the development of coordinated signage and marketing and collaborative funding proposals (*see Case Study: Dutchess County, NY, p. 60*).

With the prospect of impressive rewards, financial and otherwise, enterprises in agritourism also require a significant investment of time and financial resources and the assumption of considerable risk. For instance, agritourism activities may interfere with the main farm operation, require additional labor and present high liability risks.

It is recommended that the Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition hold a public session inviting farms, businesses and community members interested in learning more about agritourism opportunities and resources. This will enable the Coalition and related tourism planning entities to assess interest and capacity in agritourism, while also educating potential agritourism operators of the steps involved in planning and preparing for such an investment. Discussion of specific agritourism activities currently not offered in the area would also assist the Coalition and farm operators in strategically filling gaps in agritourism and complementing the different resources and expertise offered by each farm.

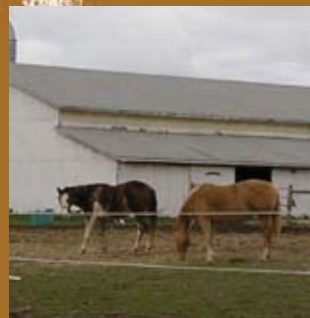
Some of the factors farm operators should consider before investing in agritourism include:

Personal Evaluation: Successful agritourism operators often require a healthy entrepreneurial attitude. They should enjoy working with the public and hosting visitors – from maintaining attractive and clean premises to welcoming questions from customers. The operator must also be willing to be flexible with the scheduling of regular farming tasks to accommodate tourists. Also, the farm operator must also consider his or her goals for the agritourism business. Whether agritourism is to serve as a major or minor source of supplemental income will determine which types of activities are pursued. Additionally, the different areas of expertise of family members can help identify suitable agritourism initiatives. It is not wise for farm operators to start enterprises that are inappropriate to their interests and skill sets.

Resource Evaluation: A review of the farm's existing resources will highlight areas of opportunity and limitations for agritourism development, and help identify niche products or services not offered by other operators. Resources to be assessed for their benefits and limitations include the type of crops grown and livestock raised; landscape features such as scenic views, wooded areas and ponds; buildings on the property; and plant and wildlife on the site.



A millwheel on display for the public at Winter's Outdoor Museum in North Collins



Pine Tree Riding Stables in Farnham

Developing a Business Plan:

Any sound venture must be backed by a business plan that identifies competitor businesses, capital and labor investments, and requirements for licensing, permits, zoning and site accessibility. The plan should also address marketing with an assessment of the current customer base, if any, identification of target markets, and the development of strategies for branding the product or service. Often the development of a logo and name and attractive packaging for produce are critical in distinguishing the agritourism business. Other promotional strategies include hosting business or community meetings at the farm, networking with local and regional tourism promotion agencies, and cooperating with local businesses, including other farms, restaurants, service stations and hotels. Many farm operators choose to start small, marketing to neighbors, friends and community groups, and then build the business incrementally.



Eden Corn Festival
Copyright Carl Modica

Regulations, Permits and Insurance:

These may be required at the local, state and federal levels of government, and typically fall in the areas of fire and building codes, health regulations and food safety, zoning, and liability insurance. Regulations affect everything from restrooms and signage to food handling and packaging. According to a 2001 study by New York State Sea Grant and Cornell University, liability and liability insurance tops the list of concerns for the state's agritourism business owners. Typically this can be added to the existing insurance policy or through a general liability policy. In addition to consulting qualified insurance agents and attorneys, farm operators should contact business or agricultural organizations, which often have arrangements with insurance companies. In addition to insurance, precautions such as adequate signage and regular repairs can help reduce liability.

Step 2: Diversify the Product and Enhance the Service

Though there is already a range of agritourism activities available in the Southtowns area, from farm tours to pick-your-own services to retail stands, diversifying the area's offerings would help to further distinguish the Southtowns from other agritourism destinations in the region (see *Agritourism Product Development and Marketing Tips*, p. 54/55). Furthermore, some of the more unique services in the Southtowns area, including farm tours, have limited accessibility (must be arranged ahead of time) or are not promoted (learned of only after asking the proprietor).

Although the core of agritourism includes farm stands and u-pick operations, the range of potential activities and amenities varies widely, with many farms in the Western New York region already offering a broader range of agritourism services. It is recommended that, in considering which services and activities Southtowns farms could offer, a tour of regional agritourism assets be arranged. This will also highlight areas of oversupply and opportunities to offer unique, niche activities. Farms in the Southtowns area should also consider providing additional visitor support services (see *Other Helpful Amenities for Agritourism Operations*, p. 54/55).

Recreational/Nature

Agritourism visitors are often seeking an adventure

Horseback riding
Hayrides
Bird watching
Hiking and biking
Hunting and fishing
Cross-country skiing
Kayaking and canoeing
Petting zoo

Processing Demonstrations

Visitors enjoy engaging, educational activities

Cow milking
Crop harvesting
Sheep shearing, wool processing
Cider pressing, wine-making

Natural Features

Visitors may be interested in exploring natural elements on a farm

Waterfall or pond
Rock formations
Wooded area
Scenic overlooks

Historic/Heritage

Farms also tell part of the region's history

Display old farm machinery
Demonstrate farming methods passed through generations
Heirloom seeds

Retail

Showcase the uniqueness of the farm with food and beverages including pre-packaged produce or baked goods, ciders, syrups, jams and culinary festivals; offer crafts and gifts for the garden and home such as decorative corn shocks, dried flowers, wood carvings, quilts, basketry, loom-woven wool and pumpkins (see *Related Trend: Culinary Tourism on the Rise*, p. 57).

Bed & Breakfast

(see *Case Study: Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association*, p. 56)

Provide visitors with the full experience of a working farm, with on-farm lodging and country breakfasts. Daytime activities could include farm chores, a tour of the farm, garden and nature walks and visits to the farm's market or store.

CASE STUDY

Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association

"Leave the stress of the city behind and escape to the peace and quiet of the country. Awake to the crow of the rooster and a homemade breakfast like grandma used to make. Enjoy the antics of our barnyard animals. Take time to enjoy life and relax!" (FVA Web Site)

<http://pafarmstay.com>

The association's more than 30 member farms offer a variety of locations, rates and accommodations.

An overview of participating farms is provided through a brochure also available online. Its Web site features a summary of activities offered by each farm, and a clickable map to help visitors locate and learn more about the farms. Each farm is inspected by the association for cleanliness and safety. Vacancy of member farms can be checked online.



Agritourism Product Development and Marketing

Tips

Respondents to a New York State agritourism survey indicated an interest in engaging in participatory agricultural activities in the future, such as sampling local foods and wines, horse-back riding, touring a farm and fishing in a farm pond.

Also, nearly two-fifths of agritourism customers learned about the business via word-of-mouth, with nearly half also characterizing themselves as repeat customers. Developing a logo and labels for jars, bags and boxes can help reinforce the business name and provide opportunities for word-of-mouth advertising through gift purchases.

Source: Hilchey, Duncan and Diane Kuehn. Agritourism in New York: A Market Analysis

Other Helpful Amenities for Agritourism Farms

Visitors to New York State farms indicate the most important factors in selecting a site to visit are staff friendliness, scenic appearance of the farm and having diverse activities.

Other factors enhancing the visitor experience include:

Restrooms

Gift shops

**Snack bars,
picnic tables**

**Accessible
parking**

Farm Museum

The Town of Eden is moving forward with plans to develop a regional farm museum on Route 62 with interactive exhibits and process demonstrations. Such a museum, with development expected within the next three years, could serve as a central point of access for agritourism and tourism-related activities in the area. It is recommended that the farm museum serve as a visitors' center for the area, with visitor information and materials displayed and full-time staff on hand.

Farm Tours

Individual or multiple-farm tours for schoolchildren or other groups could include demonstrations of farming processes, educational workshops, crop picking, cooking classes and nature walks. Self-guided farm tours could also be developed, initially across the four towns (see foldout map, *Agritourism in the Southtowns*, p. 58/59). Future tour partners could include neighboring municipalities and eventually all of Erie County.

Farmers' Market

Increasingly communities are turning to farmers' markets to provide residents with access to fresh, locally-grown produce, promote healthy eating, help sustain agricultural businesses, generate economic activity in the market area, and serve as a small business incubator. Between 2000 and 2006, the number of farmers' markets in New York State increased 45 percent, from 235 in 2000 to 350 in 2006. There are 12 farmers' markets in Erie County alone. The growth in farmers' markets is also fostered by an expanding culinary tourism niche.



The four-town area is not currently served by a farmers' market, although there are several roadside stands in the area, and some markets nearby (Hamburg, Holland and Springville). Given the four-town area's concentration and diversity of agricultural businesses and its agritourism potential, the area is an ideal location for a farmers' market.

For many reasons, it is advised that the Southtowns develop a single, regional farmers' market. More than 50 percent of farmers' markets fail within the first five years, making it essential to have adequate support, diverse and unique products and a strong leadership and management structure. One of the key ingredients for a successful farmers' market is a central, visible and permanent location, as well as a strong market manager, preferably paid on a full- or part-time basis (see 10 Principles of a Successful Farmers' Market, p. 58/59). Also, there is significant competition in Erie County for customers, with many farmers' markets springing up in recent years to serve the immediate and surrounding communities. For instance, there are several serving different neighborhoods in the City of Buffalo.

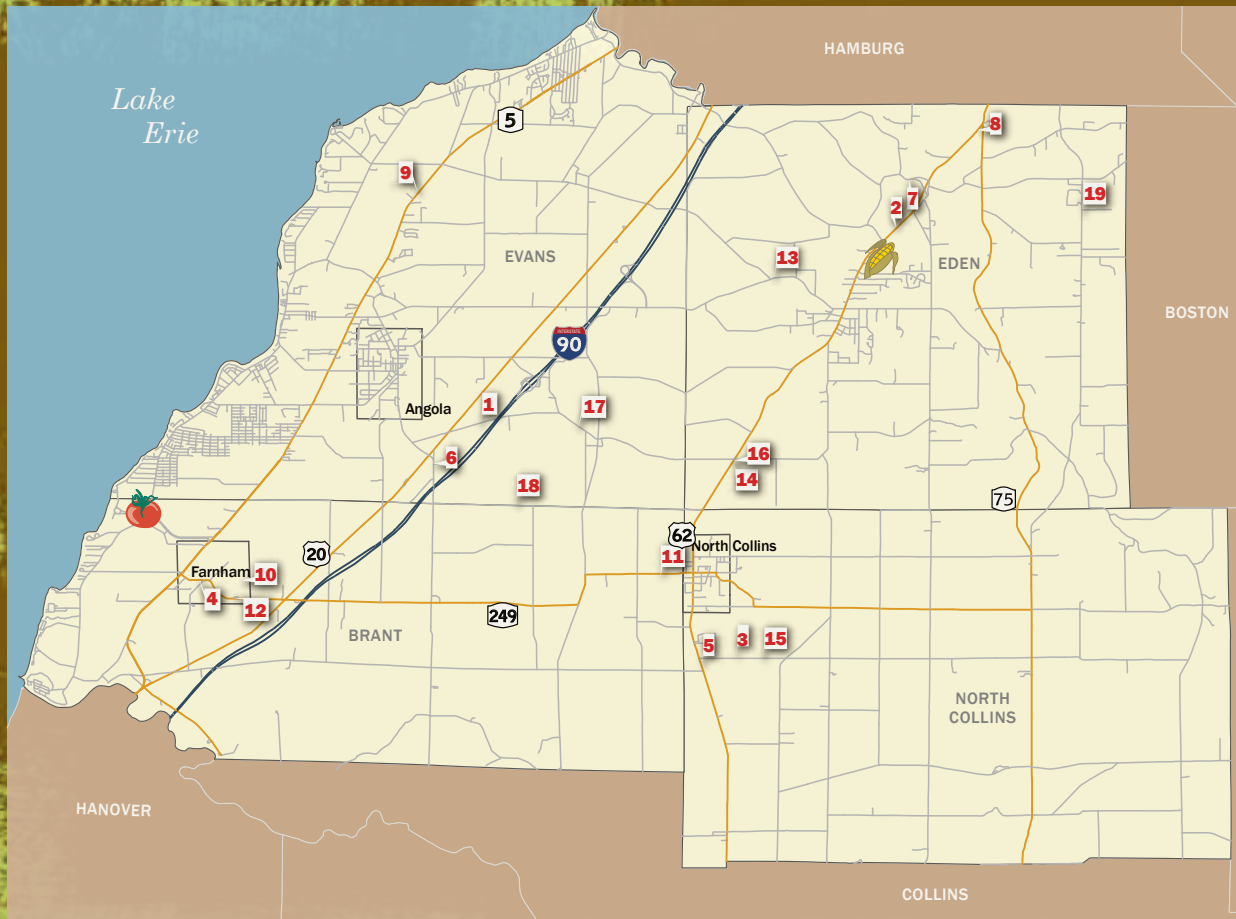
The Southtowns has an opportunity to establish a larger-scale farmers' market that goes beyond the sale of fresh produce and a few crafts to include events, culinary experiences and unique retail opportunities. Such a market would likely attract visitors from beyond the four towns to spend the day and attend related activities and venues in the area.

Potential sites for the farmers' market include the center of Eden, which would build on the town's existing brand as an agricultural center. A town or village center site is also ideal in that it offers walkable, active environments with a critical mass of shops and retail to complement the farmers' market experience. Other possibilities include land along Eden-Evans Center Road, proximate to the Southtowns' Thruway exit (see *Case Study: Penn Yan's Windmill Farm and Craft Market*, p. 59). The farmers' market would serve as a central location to cross-promote other agricultural and tourism-related assets in the area and region, including the farm museum and farm tours.

Given the wide range of experience in the region in establishing and growing farmers' markets, the Coalition should consult market managers from some of the county's 12 markets. Some of the more established markets include the East Aurora, Hamburg and North Tonawanda farmers' markets. Additionally, creative partnerships for planning and development of the farmers' market should be pursued, with stakeholders including government officials, farm operators, related businesses, consumers, crafters, Chambers of Commerce, and even libraries, health centers, and community centers.



AGRITOURISM IN THE SOUTHTOWNS



Events



Tomato Fest
August 24, 25, 26 - Evangola State Park
10191 Old Lake Shore Road, Brant









Eden Corn Festival
August 2 thru 5
American Legion Post 880 grounds, Legion Drive, Eden
Call 992-9141 for details






Southtowns Local Farms and Agri-Tourism

		Retail Stand	U-Pick	Tours
1	A&S Buffalo Ranch 1435 Pontiac Road, Evans 337-3439			★
2	Agle's Farm Market 7915 Gowanda State Road (Route 62), Eden 992-4290	★		
3	Awald Farms 2195 Shirley Road, North Collins 337-3162	★	★	
4	Bence's Farm 1355 Brant-North Collins Road (Route 249), Brant 549-7845	★		
5	Bowman Farms 11259 Gowanda State Road (Route 62), North Collins 337-2965	★		
6	Chiavetta's Farm Market & Greenhouse 9784 South Main Street, Angola 549-0458	★		
7	Eden Valley Alpacas 2712 Bauer Road, Eden 992-3934	★		★
8	Eden Valley Growers & Greenhouse Outlet 7502 Gowanda State Road (Route 62), Eden 992-9721	★		
9	Kwilos Farm Stand and Greenhouse 7678 Erie Road (Route 5), Evans 549-6201	★		
10	Our Family's Harvest Market 11086 Brant Reservation Road, Brant 549-1038	★	★	★
11	Phillips Family Farm 1809 Brant Road (Route 249), Brant 337-3007			★
12	Pine Tree Riding Stables 692 Commercial Street, Farnham 549-2189			★
13	Rizzo's Little Roadside Stand 2467 Eden-Evans Center Road, Eden 992-3557	★	★	
14	Schummer's Eden Edge 9779 Gowanda State Road (Route 62), Eden 337-0635	★		
15	Stonehill Orchard 2356 Shirley Road, North Collins 337-2380	★	★	
16	Thomas Family Farm 9934 Gowanda State Road (Route 62), Eden 337-3164	★	★	
17	Turnbull Nursery 10036 Versailles Plank Road, Angola 337-2248	★		
18	Vacco Farms 1524 Cain Road, Angola 337-2578	★	★	
19	Weiss Farms 7829 East Eden Road, Eden 992-9619	★	★	

ATTRACTIONS

- 1** Original American Kazoo Co.
3703 South Main Street (Route 62), Eden
992-3960 
- 2** Hicksite Quaker Meeting House
Corner of Gowanda Road (Route 62) and Shirley Road,
on west side of road, North Collins
337-2632 
- 3** New Angola Theatre
72 North Main Street, Angola
549-4866 
- 4** Nickel Plate Railroad Depot
Corner of Main and Penn Streets, Angola 
- 5** Schoolhouse #8 History Center and
Museum
2101 School Street, North Collins
337-3341 
- 6** Town of Evans Historical Museum
8351 Erie Road (Route 5), Angola 







BEACHES AND PARKS

- 1** Evangola State Park
10191 Old Lake Shore Road, Brant
549-1802 
- 2** Evans Town Park
8965 Lake Shore Road, Evans
549-0970 
- 3** Lake Erie Beach Park
9568 Lake Shore Road, Evans
549-0970 
- 4** Bennett Beach Park
Lake Shore Road near Bennett Road, Evans
858-8355 
- 5** Wendt Beach Park
7676 Lake Shore Road, Evans
858-8355 

While You Are Here...








The Southtowns area also features a diverse collection of historic sites, entertainment venues, recreational amenities, antique shops and boutique retail. Also be sure to enjoy the area's various restaurants ranging from casual fare to formal dining.

SHOPPING

- 1** 2nd Hand Roe's
10538 Main Street (Route 62), North Collins
337-0019 
- 2** Antique Group
2695 Green Street, Eden
649-1466 
- 3** Ivy Cherub
2473 Bauer Road, Eden
627-5823 
- 4** The Lord's Garden
9998 Clarksburg Road, Eden
992-9456 
- 5** Ravensong
2132 Seneca Road, North Collins
337-2836 
- 6** Times Gone by Antiques & Collectibles
11 Commercial Street, Angola
549-9654 



DINING

- 1** O'Brien's Pub
8557 North Main Street (Route 62), Eden
992-4300 
- 2** Four Corners Café
8571 Main Street (Route 62), Eden
992-4347 
- 3** RJ's Rock & Roe's Café
10534 Main Street (Route 62), North Collins 
- 4** Twister's Café
47 North Main Street, Angola
549-2166 
- 5** Connors' Hot Dog Stand
8905 Lake Shore Road or Sturgeon Point Marina (618
Sturgeon Point Road), Angola
549-1257 or 947-5185 
- 6** Taco Cantina
8461 Lake Shore Road, Angola
549-0100 
- 7** Grandview Super Freeze
Corner of Erie Road (Route 5) and Lake Road, Angola
549-2450 

10 Principles of a Successful Farmers' Market

1. A time, location and season that coordinates needs of farmers, consumers and local community
2. Central, visible and permanent location
3. Diversity of products and producers
4. Fair and enforceable rules and regulations
5. Strong market manager who is passionate about the market

6. Management structure allowing for vendor input

7. Marketing plan that clearly defines a target audience with a strategy for reaching that audience

8. Adequate funding

9. Community engagement

10. Continuous self-evaluation

Source: Farmers' Market Federation of New York

CASE STUDY

Penn Yan's Windmill Farm and Craft Market

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

Located in the center of New York's Finger Lakes region, "The Windmill," begun 20 years ago, today attracts 8,000-10,000 people on a weekly basis. Located on a large open plot of land, the Windmill hosts nearly 200 vendors, shops and craftsmen, offering fresh produce, homemade goods and even horse and buggy rides. Many visitors spend the day at the market, enjoying breakfast, picking out produce, shopping for crafts and watching the market's free shows. The market features several enclosed vendor buildings, constructed with support from New York State. Hotels and restaurants have developed in the surrounding area to take advantage of the increasing visitor traffic.



CASE STUDY

Dutchess County, NY

Located along the Hudson River between New York City and Albany, with its population center in Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County offers a combination of rural tranquility and urban connections. Faced with a declining agricultural industry, the county began investing in agritourism in 1989 and has since seen this market explode, with the number of roadside stands increasing tenfold (from 10 to 100) in the first decade, wine and farm trails and weekend packages developed, and a multi-county agritourism branding campaign launched.

Keys to success:

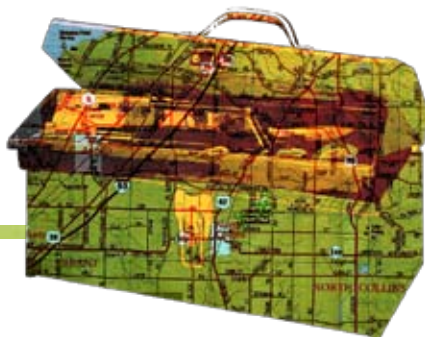
Broad partnerships – more than 20 partners engaged in the agritourism planning process, including the county's Cornell Cooperative Extension, tourism promotion agency, legislature, land conservancy and farmland protection board, as well as town planning boards, local farmers, the USDA Farm Service Agency and the American Farmland Trust

Organization – task force structure included a marketing group that developed the Dutchess County Farm Produce Map (funded by farmers and advertisers), worked with the county tourism promotion agency to integrate local food and agriculture into its marketing efforts, and initiated Hudson Valley Fresh, multi-county branding campaign; a public education task force informed the community of the value of agriculture and helped promote agritourism programs; and a public policy task force engaged elected officials and promoted related state and local legislation

Diverse Support – Financial support has been provided by local and national foundations, state and county government and private support



Tools for Implementation



Buffalo State College

Small Business Development Center

(<http://www.nyssbdc.org/Centers/centers.cfm?centid=11>): Serving small businesses throughout Erie and Wyoming Counties, the center provides one-to-one counseling free of charge to small businesses, with training and instructional programs. Specific areas of assistance include business plan development, locating funding sources, preparing for e-commerce, developing marketing plans and complying with licensing and regulations.

Cornell Cooperative Extension – Erie County (<http://counties.cce.cornell.edu/erie/>):

Cornell University's nationwide network of extension programs applies land-grant university research to farmers and rural families. Erie County office holds annual fall garden and farm fair. Other extension programs across the state include the farm market and wine tour maps in Niagara County and the Farm to Chef Express program in Saratoga, Washington, and Rensselaer Counties to assist farms in marketing produce to New York City restaurants.

Eden Valley Growers, Inc. (<http://www.edenvalleygrowers.com>): Eight-member vegetable growing farm cooperative that provides wholesale storage, distribution, purchasing and marketing services for members, as well as a storefront operation in the Town of Eden. Co-op ships more than 400,000 cases of 45 different fruits and vegetables to outlets throughout the eastern United States.

Erie County Farm Bureau (<http://www.nyfb.org/erie/>): Advocacy organization supporting the county's rural way of life. Bureau is active in the political system on issues ranging from taxation to conservation, and has been instrumental in passing Right-to-Farm laws in municipalities across the county.

Farmers' Market Federation of New York

(<http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/index.htm>): Grassroots, membership organization of farmers' market managers, market sponsors, farmers and market supporters. Provides a range of services to communities to increase the number, and capacity of farmers' markets, support professional market management and improve market quality. Its Web site provides support materials, resource guides, publications and assessment tools.

"Guide to Developing a Community Farmers' Market, Farmers' Market Federation of New York": Practical, comprehensive resource for communities interested in establishing a farmers' market, addressing all aspects of the process, including building interest, market research and needs assessments, organizing the market, and evaluation. Appendices provide sample surveys for farmers and consumers, checklists of tips and rules and regulations, and sample vendor applications. Contact Farmers' Market Federation of New York for a copy of the guide.

New York State Agricultural Innovation Center

(<http://www.nyfarmviability.org/aic/index.htm>): Helps agricultural producers add value to their products through branding, product quality enhancement, marketing and distribution strategies. Business planning services also provided through network of outreach specialists from Cornell University and SUNY institutions.

New York State Barn Coalition (<http://www.barncoalition.com/index.html>): Nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the appreciation, preservation, rehabilitation, and reuse of historic barns. Web site includes tips and resource links for barn repairs and restoration work, and information about grant and tax credit opportunities.

New York State Department of Agricultural and Markets

(<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/>): Offers range of agritourism-related programs, including coupons for fresh produce at participating farmers' markets for low-income families and Pride of New York, which promotes the sale of New York State-produced food with technical assistance and marketing materials. Funding opportunities include:

- **Agritourism Projects Grant Program:** Broad eligibility including individuals, businesses, educational institutions and municipalities. Activities supported include farm stands, farmers' markets, u-pick, education, entertainment and lodging and dining. Maximum grant is \$50,000.
- **Farm, Apple and Cuisine Trail Designation Program:** New program to designate and fund up to 10 farm trails, 7 apple trails and 5 cuisine trails across the state. Trails must include farm or food businesses proximate to one another, cooperatively market the farms' products, and use a map or highway signs to direct patrons to the operations. Trails must not exceed 25 miles and cannot conflict with scenic byways, wine trails or other existing trails.
- **Farmers' Market Grant Program:** Funds construction, reconstruction, improvement, expansion or rehabilitation of farmers' markets across the state. Proposals require a 50 percent local match, with state funds not exceeding \$50,000. Applicants must be a local government, nonprofit corporation, agricultural cooperative or regional market authority. Feasibility studies or other research will not be funded. Start-up grants can be made but only with strong evidence of market's potential success.

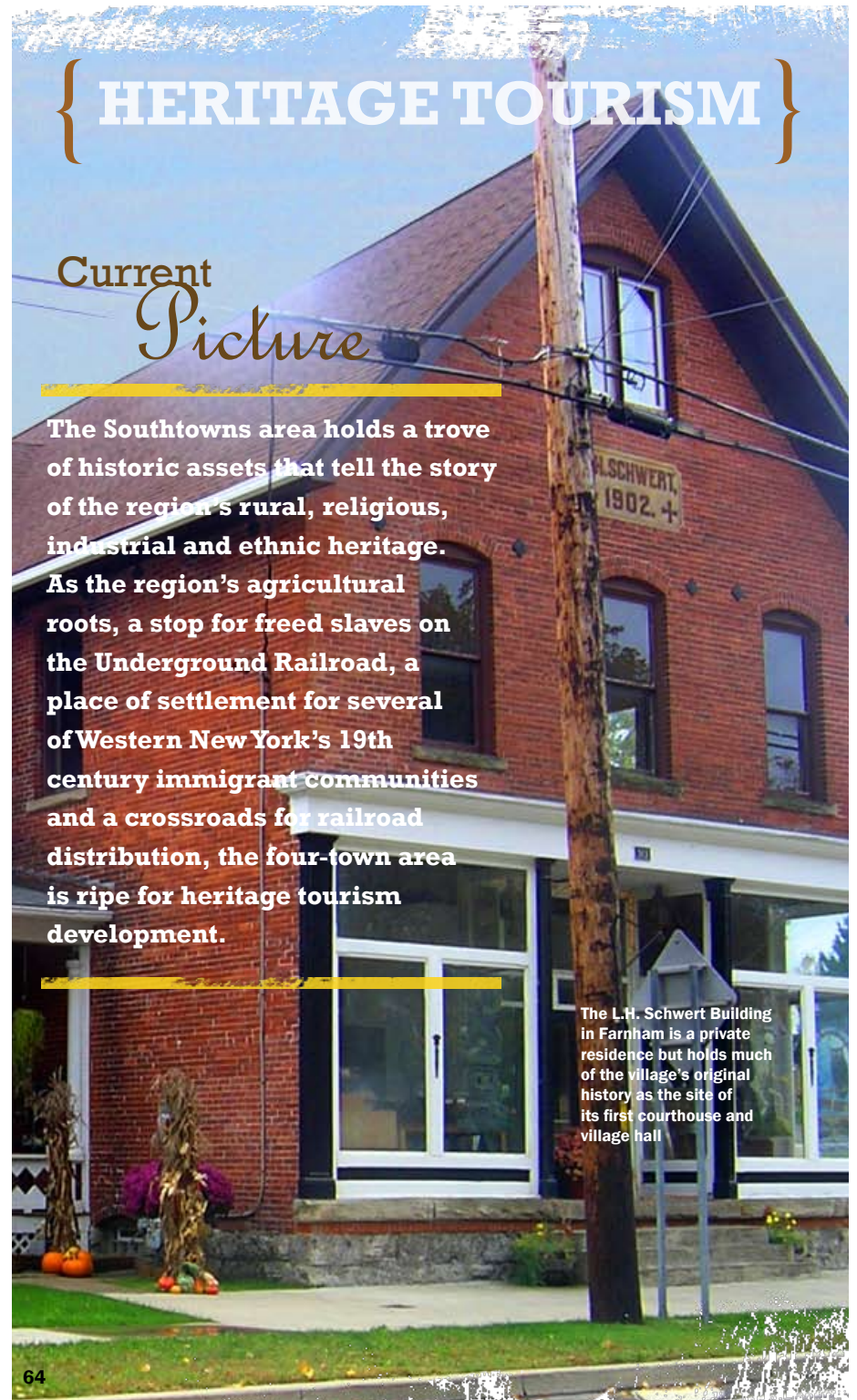
Rural New York Initiative (<http://www.rnyi.cornell.edu/>): Program of the Cornell University's Department of Development Sociology that interacts with policy makers and other stakeholders to provide information on rural New York. Provides institutional and technical resources to support applied research, focusing on community and economic development, changing food systems, environment and society, and poverty and social inequality.

Taking the First Step: Farm and Ranch Alternative Enterprise and Agritourism Resource Evaluation Guide (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise/FirstSteps.pdf>): Publication in 2004 by the Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Board, Inc., serves as a basic guide for agritourism and other alternative agricultural enterprises. Includes tips on evaluating resources, marketing and liability, with related worksheets and questionnaires.

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (<http://www.agmrc.org/agmrc/default.html>): Electronic resource for producers interested in value-added agriculture. Web site features information on commodities and products, market and industry trends, and business creation and operation.

Other partners:

**Erie County Department of Planning and Development:
Town Planning Boards
Town Farm Advisory Boards (Eden, Evans)**



Heritage tourism, or the preservation and interpretation of historic, cultural or natural assets to create an engaging visitor experience, is one of the fastest growing tourism segments in the U.S. According to a 2003 study by the Travel Industry Association of America, 81 percent of U.S. adults who traveled in 2002 were considered cultural heritage travelers. Also, visiting historic sites and museums is the third most popular vacation activity for U.S. travelers behind shopping and outdoor activities.

In recent years, the Southtowns area has built a strong foundation for a heritage tourism program. In Evans, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Graycliff Estate, in the midst of a multi-million-dollar restoration, is already a national draw for architectural enthusiasts. Leaders in North Collins partnered to restore the historic Schoolhouse #8 History Center and Museum. Eden offers the Original American Kazoo Co., the world's only remaining metal kazoo factory, while Angola is in the process of preserving its Nickel Plate Railroad Depot, New York State's last existing stop on the former Nickel Plate line. Brant features several historic cemeteries, with the Brant Cemetery containing the graves of Revolutionary War soldiers. The area's farming heritage, captured by traditions and practices passed through the generations and historic farming equipment, has tourism appeal for agritourists and history buffs alike.

There is also a fairly strong support system behind these assets, with all seven municipalities employing historians or benefitting from community volunteers, and some maintaining municipal historian's offices.

Historical museums in Evans and North Collins display historical artifacts and photographs for public viewing and research. A book on the history of the Town of North Collins was published in 2002 in celebration of the town's sesquicentennial.



Huson Cemetery in Brant with grave stones dating back to the 1800s



The recently remodeled New Angola Theatre offers entertainment in a historic setting

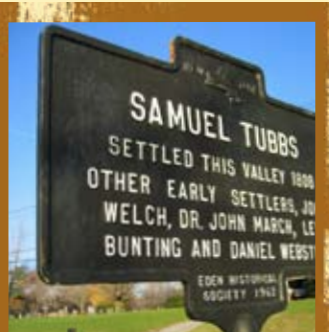


The North Collins Schoolhouse #8 Museum and History Center was recently refurbished



Eden's Asa Warren House, a purported Underground Railroad safehouse

The area's heritage tourism potential is hampered, however, by several factors. Fundamental to heritage tourism, and perhaps making this one of the more challenging industries to establish, is site interpretation – storytelling through visitor literature, historic plaques or signage, and then connecting these stories to preserved historic sites or artifacts. Much of the Southtowns' fascinating history exists only orally, while many important historic sites are inaccessible (abandoned or not open to the public). Other historic structures are in need of significant, costly investments before they can welcome visitors. Some of those sites that are accessible provide limited hours. Visitor information on these resources is scattered and inadequate.



The Southtowns would benefit from more interpretive historical plaques



The historic Hicksite Quaker Meeting House in North Collins, built in 1851, is not open to the public



On the shores of Lake Erie, the grand Wendt Mansion, is in need of investment

Strategies for Success

With the area's unique and diverse collection of heritage assets, and community residents clearly pushing for greater investment in and promotion of these gems, the momentum is in the Southtowns' favor. These action steps and best practices can guide the community in strategically building a heritage tourism program, from assessing and documenting the area's resources and heritage, to prioritizing investments and developing critical interpretive elements.

The Graycliff Estate in Evans

Copyright Clifford Whitman, Courtesy of Graycliff Conservancy

Sample Data
Categories
from the *Ohio*
Historic
Resources
Inventory

- **Present and Historic Names**
- **Site Plan**
- **Thematic Association(s)**
- **Date(s) or Period of Construction**
- **Alteration Date(s)**
- **Style or Design**
- **Architect, Engineer, Builder**
- **Original Use**
- **Ownership**
- **Owner's Name and Address**
- **Architectural Features**
- **Changes**
(additions, blocked windows, etc.)
- **Endangered? If so, by what**
- **Statement of History and Significance**
- **Condition of Property**
- **Photographs**



In historic resources inventories conducted for towns and villages in the state, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism includes governmental, commercial, residential, institutional, industrial and ecclesiastical buildings as well as unique or unusual structures such as bridges or carousels, as well as cemeteries and outdoor sculptures.



Step 1: Assess Resources

The asset inventory completed as part of Phase I of this effort is a strong start to a comprehensive assessment of the four-town area's heritage tourism resources. Included in the inventory are historic structures and sites, many identified by community leaders and town and village historians, with descriptive information such as year constructed, uses and occupants through the years, and current ownership. It is on the basis of this inventory that many of the area's heritage tourism strengths and weaknesses have been identified.

However, a more detailed analysis and review is required before a tourism program can effectively be pursued. For instance, it is critical to document specific architectural styles, modifications to the structure, unique stories relating to its various uses or owners, the existence of relevant historic artifacts, and current limitations for use (as dictated by its physical condition, private ownership or other legal protections) (see *Sample Data Categories from the Ohio Historic Resources Inventory*, p. 68/69). Much of this information can be obtained only by in-depth consultation with community leaders, historians, preservation experts and citizens, as well as extensive historic research beyond the scope of this planning effort.

The inventory will not only serve as a comprehensive record of the area's historical assets, but also as a community-vested and expert-reviewed record of the area's historic treasures, and thus a rational basis for any regulatory or preservation decisions that may follow.

Step 2: Protect Historic Resources

The protection and preservation of these resources, and establishment of design standards, is fundamental to building a sustainable heritage tourism program that reflects the values of the community. With many of the area's historic assets, including historic homes, barns, schoolhouses and cemeteries, under private ownership or on private land, additional protections are needed. Although designation as a state or national historic place offers benefits, protection of privately-owned structures can only be enforced at the local level (see *Local Designation vs. National and State Registers of Historic Places*, p. 70).

Local preservation policies are becoming increasingly popular in New York State. According to a 2005 report by the New York State Department of State, more than 175 municipalities in the state have enacted local preservation laws or ordinances since 1962. Eden is among them, having documented historic assets as part of its comprehensive planning effort in 2000. Eden regulates the use and modification of identified historic places and structures under its Town Code, with a Historic Review Board empowered to designate the landmarks and historic districts, and approve or reject alterations, new construction or the moving of these buildings.

There are four major legal protections a municipality can enact to protect its historic properties or districts (see *Critical Components of Historic Preservation Laws*, p. 71). These local laws would apply to properties of local historic interest as well as those listed on the National and State Registers of historic properties:

Local Designation vs. National and State Registers of Historic Places:

Designation on the National or State Register of Historic Places is largely honorary, and does not impose any modification or even demolition restrictions to a private owner. Enforcement power must come from the local level.

There are benefits to designation on the National and State Register, including 1) protection from federal and state agency actions through notice and a consultation process, 2) eligibility for 20% federal income tax credits for the costs of substantial rehabilitation and, 3) priority consideration when federal and state agencies are seeking rental space.



Zoning: A town or village containing neighborhoods, downtowns or other concentrated, contiguous areas of historically significant resources may establish a Historic Preservation District to encompass the area (even if some of the properties in the area are not historically significant). Alternatively, a municipality can establish an “overlay zone” to apply a uniform set of standards to a specific area which already may be addressed by several different conventional zoning districts. This adds a layer of protection, as actions proposed in the overlay zone may be subject to review by the local design or historic preservation board.

Site Plan Review: Enacted to ensure specific actions are reviewed by the municipality’s planning or design board, site plan review ordinances can be established as either a component of a municipality’s zoning law or as a separate ordinance. Site plan review laws should clearly state which actions are subject to review. Many of the Southtowns municipalities enforce some type of site plan review.

Landmark Preservation Laws:

These laws differ from zoning laws in that their purpose is not to regulate land use but to protect historic resources (including, in some cases, building interiors). These laws must specify the process for designating a building or site as a landmark, and the criteria used in that designation (see Case Study: Yorktown, NY, p. 72). Communities that enact historic preservation legislation separate from zoning should make sure the approval processes are coordinated so as not to unnecessarily burden the applicant.

Design Review Boards: Typically separate from the municipal planning board and appointed with members with specialized knowledge of historic preservation, design review boards are established to enforce and manage local preservation laws. The authority of the board depends on the municipality’s preservation ordinance. Some are only advisory, while others have authority to review any exterior alternation; most fall in between.

Critical Components of Historic Preservation Laws

- Based on an historic resources inventory and analysis
- Monitored by review body
- Clearly describe actions requiring municipal review
- Describe standards of review (these are often borrowed from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties or the Preservation League of New York State)



The historic Enos Hibbard house in North Collins

CASE STUDY

Yorktown, New York

http://www.yorktownny.org/Public_Documents/index

The town’s 2005 Comprehensive Plan contains several recommendations for “scenic and historic preservation,” including:

- Prepare inventories of historic sites and districts, as well as scenic roads
- Nominate appropriate structures for listing on the National Register of Historic Places
- Seek conservation easements for privately owned sites that contain critical historic or scenic resources worthy of preservation
- Expand heritage tourism through historic and scenic preservation and adaptive reuse of historic sites

The Yorktown Landmark Preservation Code requires Certificates of Appropriateness for any exterior modification to a designated landmark or property within a historic district. The Landmark Preservation Commission, which, by law, includes at least one architect and one historian, considers the compatibility of the modification to the existing structure or district, including general design, scale, texture, materials and color, and the importance of certain historic or architectural features. Landmark properties (or in the case of historic districts, groups of properties) must:

- possess special character or historic interest, or
- be identified with historic personages, or
- embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or
- because of unique location or physical characteristic, represent an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood



Step 3: Distill Heritage Themes, Prioritize Investments

A detailed historic resources inventory will serve as a valuable tool in distilling the overall heritage themes that connect the four towns to one another as well as to the broader region. The identification of heritage themes brings focus to the stories the area wishes to share with its visitors and, in turn, helps the community to prioritize investments in the heritage tourism program, from asset development to interpretation and signage.

Based on this project's Phase I asset inventory, historical research and community interviews, the following heritage themes have been preliminarily identified for the Southtowns. Additionally, suggestions for investment are offered for various sites and structures.

Lake Erie Waterfront

As a recreational retreat for the region's residents for more than a century, the Southtowns' lakefront area offers activities for the heritage tourist. Frank Lloyd Wright's lakefront Graycliff Estate is a major heritage tourism draw. Down the road, the historic Wendt Mansion sits on the lake in Wendt Beach Park. The mansion is in need of renovation, with proposals for its reuse including a bed and breakfast. A fine dining establishment is also a strategic reuse of the site that could showcase its architectural attributes. Further south are more lakefront cottages and dining establishments that have catered to the beach community for decades (e.g., Connors' Hot Dog Stand).

Immigration and Related Ethnic and Religious Heritage

The Southtowns tell a significant piece of the region's ethnic and religious heritage, with related assets including the area's churches, cemeteries and meeting houses. Some of the area's first settlers, the Quakers were an important social and religious influence, especially in Eden and North Collins. The Hicksite Quaker Meeting House in North Collins was erected in 1851, with Susan B. Anthony addressing a convention of the Friends of Human Progress there in 1857. Cemeteries in North Collins and Eden (North Collins Cemetery and Quaker Cemetery in Eden) contain the graves of many Quakers that date back to the early 1800s.

The Underground Railroad is purported to have passed through the area, with the Asa Warren House in Eden serving as a safehouse for freed slaves on their way to Canada.

Immigrant communities, including Italians and Germans, settled in the area to find jobs in factories and farming. In Evans, Reverend John Spencer organized the first house of worship southwest of Buffalo as the First Church of Evans in 1818. The area's churches tell much of this ethnic history. In North Collins, the Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Church formed from the joining of Sacred Heart for Italian-speaking families and St. John's for English-speaking families. St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Eden, founded in 1834 by German settlers to serve the surrounding communities, is the region's second oldest Catholic parish. St. Paul's Lutheran Church was founded in 1849 by German immigrants. Cemeteries attached to these churches tell personal tales of the area's earliest settlers, with the Brant Cemetery including the graves of Revolutionary War soldiers. Also, Native American history and culture is rich in the Southtowns, especially in Brant, which borders the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation.

The area's ethnic and religious heritage could be woven together through a tour of churches, cemeteries and ethnic sites. Church facilities are largely open to the public, with some already providing audio tours of their grounds and cemeteries (St. Paul's Lutheran Church). While church cemeteries are adequately maintained, many smaller family cemeteries are often overgrown or inaccessible, as they are located far off main roads or on private property. Community leaders should determine which church, cemetery and ethnic heritage sites could be highlighted for such a tour and invest in grounds maintenance, facility upgrades and the addition of interpretive elements.



The First Church of Evans congregation is nearly two centuries old

Railroad History



The railroad played an important role in the history of the Southtowns area, which served as a distribution link to Buffalo.

Nickel Plate Railroad Depot, Angola

The Norfolk & Western or "Nickel Plate" line depot, built in 1882, still stands as the line's only remaining wooden depot in New York State. Though the Angola Nickel Plate Depot Preservation Society has received two grants to move the station, along with a caboose, to a more central location on Main Street in the village, renovations to the station are needed before it can serve as a visitor draw. Interpretive elements at the site could showcase the village's railroad economy. Also, the site could tell the story of the 1867 "Angola Horror," a train derailment that killed 51.

Former Train Station in Eden

Station building houses a commercial business, although historical elements, including the ticket window and sign for the cable and telegraph office, have been preserved; historical plaque could document the station's significance and the town's railroad history.

Former Train Station Baggage Drop in Village of North Collins

In original condition but in need of investment; could serve as an interpretive center for North Collins' railroad history, with links to other rail attractions in the area, including the Nickel Plate Railroad Depot and Winter's Outdoor Museum.



North Collins Hotel

Refurbish dining area with historical elements (e.g., photographs) of the former Haberer House Hotel, a popular resting stop for rail passengers in the 19th century.

Winter's Outdoor Museum

Displays railroad and other historical equipment; open to public but not well marked or advertised; signage or information about displays would improve visitor experience.

Regional Links

Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier
Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society

Agricultural and Industrial Heritage

From the 1800s, when its vegetable and fruit farms proliferated to supply the region's growing population, to today, when its produce supplies a large portion of the eastern seaboard, the Southtowns area has been a significant part of Buffalo Niagara's rural heritage. Preserving this heritage are several farms that have been handed down through the generations. Eden's **Henry W. Agle & Sons** dates back to 1832, while the **Turnbull Nursery** in Brant was founded in the 1880s. **Awald Farms** in North Collins dates back to the early 1900s. **The Regional Farm Museum** in Eden could feature displays of farming methods that have been passed on as well as exhibits of historic farming equipment.

Milling was also an important industrial activity in the Southtowns area, especially in Angola and the Eden Valley area. Eden's first lumber mill, **Croop's Mill**, built in 1811, still stands. Millstones have been preserved in Eden's 1820 Clarksburg Mill, now a private club. These facilities could be rehabilitated with relevant artifacts displayed.



The Emblem Bicycle Factory of Angola began building bikes in the fall of 1903, with its products shipped worldwide and for use in World War II. The building is now abandoned, but could be renovated for commercial offices with space preserved for an exhibit area.

PRINCIPLES OF Interpretation

- **Relate** – personally connect the display to the visitor
- **Reveal** – tell a story, not just facts
- **Provoke** – motivate the visitor
- **Address the Whole** – address broader historical concepts
- **Address Different Audiences** – interpretation varies by age and background of the visitor

Most Visitors Retain:

10 percent of what they hear

30 percent of what they read

50 percent of what they see

90 percent of what they do

Source:

Veverka, John. Interpretive Master Planning

Source: Tilden, Freeman. Interpreting Our Heritage

Marketing Tip: Heritage New York

Heritage New York, Underground Railroad Heritage Trail: A program of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Heritage New York was established to create a series of thematic trails across the state. There are four Heritage Trails developed to date: the Revolutionary War, Underground Railroad, Women History and Theodore Roosevelt. Benefits of inclusion on the trail include eligibility for building grants to help interpret and present the historic site, as well as inclusion in promotional resources such as brochures, maps, Web site, and listings of special events. The Asa Warren House and other purported safehouses in the Southtowns area should be further researched and submitted for inclusion on the trail (see also report's section on *Reaching the Visitor*).

Step 4: Develop Interpretive Elements

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of establishing a heritage tourism program is developing the interpretive elements that will convey to the visitor the historical significance of the area's buildings, sites and artifacts. Effective interpretation is interactive, educational and provocative (see *Principles of Interpretation*, p. 76/77). The following reviews different types of interpretation, with specific recommendations for portraying the heritage of the Southtowns.

Tours: These can include tours guided by docents or volunteers, or self-guided tours such as driving or walking tours. Supplemental educational materials should be developed, including detailed maps with colorful descriptions, graphics and asset contact information (see *Case Study: Cottage Grove, OR, Covered Bridge Tour*, p. 76). Audio components could also be developed for the driving tour (see *Case Study: Washington Folk Arts*, p. 78).

• **Church and Cemetery Tours:** For individual municipalities or the entire four-town area; highlight the lives of those buried in the cemeteries, the rich and the poor, and the significance of the churches to broader social, political and religious movements in the area.

• **Underground Railroad**
Tour: Connect Southtowns' safehouses with Quaker and abolitionist movements in the area, as well as broader regional Underground Railroad promotion efforts or the Heritage New York program, which promotes a statewide Underground Railroad Trail with maps and brochures (see *Marketing Tip: Heritage New York*, p. 76/77).



Niagara Falls-based Motherland Connexions hosts Underground Railroad tours throughout the region.

• **Historic Homes Tours:** Building off the experience of the Angola Historic Homeowners Association, which is in the process of developing a historic homes tour for the village, develop other historic home walking tours for Eden, North Collins and Farnham. Produce informational brochures that showcase not only architectural elements, but the personalities behind the homes.

• **Agriculture and Industry Tour:** Four-town area driving tour to include select multi-generation farms. Farm owners could discuss and/or demonstrate historic farming traditions and exhibit historic equipment. Tour could include historic mills in Eden, and conclude with tour of Angola's Goya Foods of Great Lakes New York as example of current industry.



The Southtowns features many historic homes like this Victorian in Eden

CASE STUDY Cottage Grove, OR Covered Bridge Tour

Known as the "Covered Bridge Capital of Oregon," Cottage Grove features a 20-mile, one- to two-hour driving tour of its seven covered bridges. Online promotion of the tour (<http://traveloregon.com>) highlights unique features of each bridge, nearby dining and lodging and accessibility information.



Plaques/Signage: Signs should include graphic elements along with engaging text descriptions of historic sites. Such displays are especially critical for sites not open to the public. Signage should be designed with a consistent brand across each municipality or the broader area.

Displays and Exhibits: For those sites that are open to the public, develop interactive exhibits and displays of relevant artifacts. Consult with local historians and historian offices to determine the location of photographs and artifacts that could be displayed at specific sites. Engage community members as volunteer docents to provide visitors with additional information, presentations and tours (see *Heritage Tourism Volunteers*, p. 77).



Heritage Tourism Volunteers

Volunteers are a critical resource for any tourism program, but especially for heritage tourism, where most assets are operated by nonprofits or municipalities with limited resources. In addition to serving on museum boards, volunteers help with practical tasks such as building renovations, artifact collection and preservation, exhibit development and education, and act as an interface with the community as greeters, docents or tour guides. They can also assist with developing promotional materials and fundraising. Developing a volunteer network also builds community support for the tourism program and pride in the community's offerings.

How to Treat Volunteers

- Assign tasks appropriate to the volunteer's skills and interests
- Devote resources to train volunteers
- Plan and organize the program
- Be receptive to volunteer input
- Recognize volunteers' efforts and provide feedback on performance

Source: Texas Historical Commission. *Heritage Tourism Guidebook*

CASE STUDY

Washington Folk Arts

<http://www.washingtonfolkarts.com/index.html>

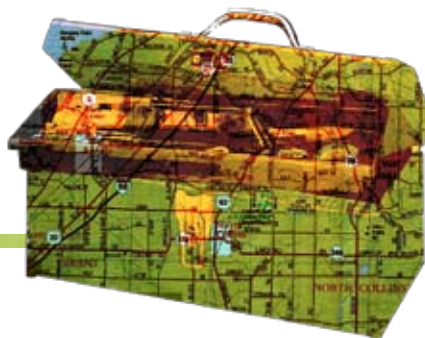
In an effort to showcase the state's culture and heritage assets along its rural highways, folklorists and tourism officials in Washington State partnered to develop the Northwest Heritage Tours, a series of driving tours with narrated audio guides that feature traditional music and stories from local residents along the way. The tours also highlight natural sites and places of historical interest.

The program took two years to inventory and document cultural traditions and assets in the state's rural areas, with support from the Washington Department of Transportation, the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Forest Service. A Web site for the program includes an interactive map and current information about special events taking place along the tour routes. The Web site's audio tour clips promote the CD and tour books for sale, which are also available at libraries, bookstores and gift shops.

Source:
Dane, Suzanne.
"Washington State's Heritage Tours."



Tools for Implementation



Heritage Tourism Guidebook, Texas Historical Commission

(<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/booklets/HTGuidebook.pdf>)

Comprehensive review of critical steps for developing an effective heritage tourism program, from assessment and resource evaluation to interpretation to marketing to fundraising.

Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier (<http://www.landmark-niagara.org/>)

Serving the eight counties of Western New York, the Landmark Society works to enhance public awareness of each community's architectural and historic heritage. Its activities include lecture series, protection of resources through advocacy, and tours of architecturally significant sites across the region.

Museum Association of New York (<http://manyonline.org>)

Promotes museums and provides professional support and training for museum staff and volunteers.

National Park Service – Museum Handbook on Collections

(<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/handbook.html>)

Reference guide on how to manage, preserve, document, access and use museum collections.

National Trust for Historic Preservation – Northeast Regional Office

(<http://www.nationaltrust.org/northeast/index.html>)

National nonprofit membership organization provides a range of grant programs and technical assistance including the National Preservation Loan Fund to acquire and/or rehabilitate historic buildings, sites and districts, and to preserve National Historic Landmarks; the Inner City Ventures Fund for neighborhood revitalization efforts that benefit low- and moderate-income residents; the Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation for National Historic Landmarks; the Cynthia Wood Mitchell Fund for Historic Interiors for the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of historic interiors; and the Daniel K. Thorne Intervention Fund for urgent preservation needs.

New York Landmarks Conservancy (<http://nylandmarks.org>)

This private New York City-based nonprofit administers several funding programs:

- Sacred Sites & Properties Fund provides matching grants for the preservation of religious buildings to repair deteriorated roofs, stained glass windows, masonry and other work items. Maximum award is \$10,000.
- Emergency Loan Program funds exterior and structural repairs at small historic properties. Grant maximum is \$15,000 per property.

New York State Council on the Arts

(<http://nysca.org>)

This office's Architecture, Planning and Design/Capital Projects Program provides funding for various preservation activities for nonprofits and municipalities, including design services and building condition studies.

New York State Department of State – “Legal Aspects of Municipal Historic Preservation”

Revised in 2005, this memorandum summarizes the key legal aspects of local historic preservation policy, with a resource guide for additional assistance in formulating local preservation policy.

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

(<http://nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/>)

- The Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) offers funding to nonprofits and local governments for parks, recreation and historic preservation activities. Grants support up to 50 percent of eligible project costs and can be used for acquisition, restoration, preservation, rehabilitation, protection and improvement of historic buildings, structures, sites and objects.
- The Certified Local Governments program supports local preservation efforts with special grants, professional legal and technical assistance, and training. To become a CLG, local governments must apply for certification from the National Park Service, enact and maintain a local preservation law, establish a local Historic Preservation Commission, and develop a process for landmarking historic resources.

Preservation League of New York State (<http://preservenys.org>)

With the New York State Council on the Arts, sponsors the Preserve New York grant program to support cultural resource surveys, historic structure reports and historic landscape reports. Nonprofits and municipalities are eligible to apply, with grants ranging from \$3,000 and \$15,000. The Preservation League also provides legal and technical services.

Regional Alliance for Preservation (<http://www.rap-arcc.org/>)

Provides preservation information to cultural institutions and the public, including information on the proper care of metals, furniture, paper, textiles and books.

Save America's Treasures (<http://www.saveameericastreasures.org/>)

A national effort to protect the country's threatened cultural and historic treasures, SAT administers a grant program for historic districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects (through the National Parks Service) and for collections, including intellectual and cultural artifacts, documents and works of art (through the National Endowment for the Arts).

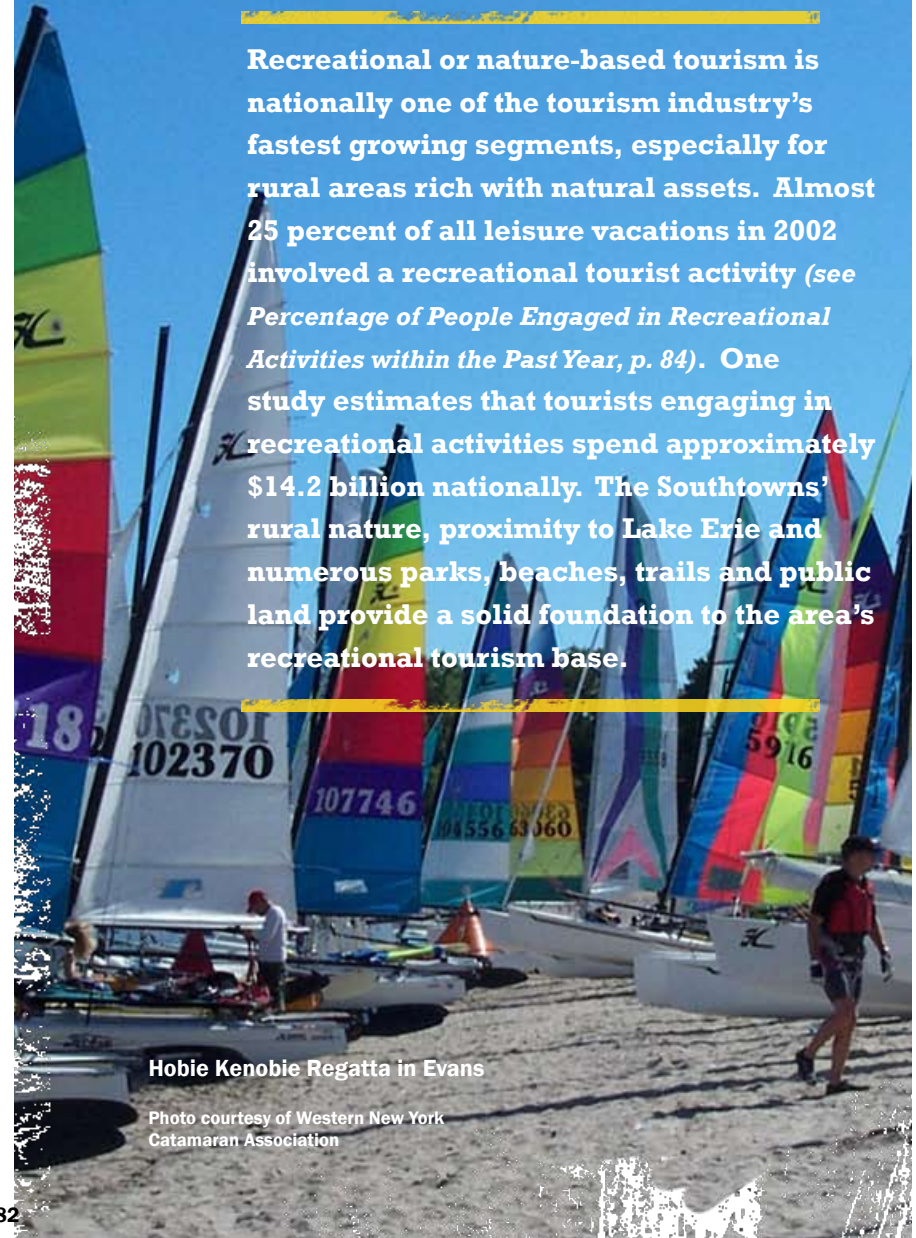
Upstate History Alliance (<http://www.upstatehistory.org/>)

Nonprofit organization which provides support, advice and training to historical societies, museums, historians and others interested in history in upstate New York.

{ RECREATIONAL TOURISM }

Current Picture

Recreational or nature-based tourism is nationally one of the tourism industry's fastest growing segments, especially for rural areas rich with natural assets. Almost 25 percent of all leisure vacations in 2002 involved a recreational tourist activity (see *Percentage of People Engaged in Recreational Activities within the Past Year, p. 84*). One study estimates that tourists engaging in recreational activities spend approximately \$14.2 billion nationally. The Southtowns' rural nature, proximity to Lake Erie and numerous parks, beaches, trails and public land provide a solid foundation to the area's recreational tourism base.



Hobie Kenobie Regatta in Evans

Photo courtesy of Western New York
Catamaran Association

Perhaps the prize of the Southtowns region is the splendor of public-access beaches.

Bennett Beach, Evangola State Park and Wendt Beach Park, among others, offer the greatest concentration of public beach access in all of Western New York. Much of the Southtowns' current recreational tourism takes advantage of Lake Erie for boating, fishing, swimming and diving. A catamaran regatta is another popular boating event for the region. The area's fishing is premier, with Lake Erie offering smallmouth bass, walleye, and steelhead trout, and **Muddy Creek, Delaware Creek, Big Sister Creek, and Eighteen Mile Creek** serving as resources for shoreline and small-boat fishing. The **Sturgeon Point Marina** in Evans provides dry docks, launch ramps, a restaurant, restrooms and fuel sales, and is host to several popular fishing tournaments.



Evangola State Park



Sturgeon Point Marina
(photo courtesy of Town of Evans)



Lake Erie Beach Park



The Southtowns' creeks are also prime fishing spots. The Town of Evans provides access points along Eighteen Mile Creek

The area's varied trail network serves a variety of recreational purposes. For instance, Evangola State Park features trails for hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and rollerblading. Multiple locations in the area offer hiking and snowmobiling, although sites for cross-country skiing, rollerblading and bicycling are more limited. One underutilized recreational trail resource is the well-established Seaway Trail, which follows the Lake Erie shoreline through Evans and Brant. The Town of Evans, however, is developing a Multi-Use Lakeshore Pathway which could eventually connect the town's lakeshore to Buffalo and points north.

Percentage of People Engaged in Recreational Activities within the Past Year

1) Walking for Exercise	84%
2) Nature/Visitor Center or Zoo	57%
3) Nature Photography	55%
4) Picnicking	55%
5) Nature Sightseeing	43%
6) Beach activities	40%
7) Bicycling	39%
8) Water sports	37%
9) Day hiking	33%
10) Birding	33%
11) Freshwater Fishing	30%
12) Winter Sports	26%
13) Backpacking	11%
14) Horseback Riding	10%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Survey on Recreation and the Environment 2000

The Southtowns' abundance of parks and nature sites has strong potential for recreational tourism. This includes not only the more widely recognized Evangola State Park and the area's beaches, but also the less used Ayer-Stevenson Audubon Nature Preserve in Evans, Winter's Pond in North Collins and Franklin Gulf Park in Eden and North Collins. These are prime areas to attract tourists interested in birding, hiking, horseback riding, nature photography and perhaps camping.

The Southtowns' recreational tourism industry is challenged at this point by gaps in infrastructure, with the area's multi-use trail network underdeveloped and visitor amenities at parks and on public lands lacking. The decline in Erie County funding for county-owned parks has led to the deterioration of infrastructure and, with reduced lifeguard support, limited beach access for swimming. Access to information on the area's recreational resources is limited, with trail maps and informational signage in parks inadequate. Also, regional promotion agencies do not heavily market the area's natural assets.

Strategies for Success

There are many opportunities for enhancing the recreational tourism market in the Southtowns. The following action steps address investment areas that offer the most potential for growth, including recreational water usage, bicycle tourism and trail development.

More than 70 miles of snowmobile trails crisscross the Southtowns

Photo courtesy of Eden Trail Blazers

Step 1: Enhance Recreational Water Usage

The Southtowns already leverages its water resources for recreational purposes, with several popular fishing tournaments, an annual regatta and extensive public beach access. There is strong potential for the Southtowns to expand its water-based tourism offerings.

Fishing is one of the most popular recreational activities in the U.S., with Western New York becoming increasingly recognized for its bounty of freshwater fishing. New York State is one of the top states in the U.S. for nonresident anglers. Lake Erie, the most biologically productive of the Great Lakes, is known as the best walleye fishing in the world. To reach this growing market, the Southtowns should continue to invest in its marinas and boating infrastructure, including enhancing existing and developing new access points along the inland creeks. Creek fishing may offer a more solitary, rugged and natural experience that caters to a different angler demographic. The Southtowns should also expand promotion of its fishing tournaments, including the Battle of the Points in Evans.

Scuba diving opportunities, including wreck diving on Lake Erie, should also be more widely publicized. The Lake Erie Diving Center in Evans, which sells equipment and hosts scuba boating tours, could be a strategic partner in such an effort.

Fish Species Located in the Southtowns

**Steelhead Trout
Smallmouth Bass
Walleye
Lake Trout
Perch**

Source: Erie and Niagara County Fishing Guide



Lake Erie Diving Center in Evans

CASE STUDY

Bicycling in the Adirondacks

<http://adirondack.org> and

<http://bikeadirondacks.org>

Although the Adirondacks is an area known nationally for its recreational tourism activities, until recently it was not a preferred destination for bicyclists. Since 1994, the Adirondack North County Association has worked to make the Adirondacks a “premier bicycle touring location.” A bicycle master plan was developed using funding from the New York State Department of Transportation’s Scenic Byway Program that “demonstrated the community benefits and economic values of local bicycling planning and outlined the necessary steps to create bicycle friendly communities.” With more funding from the NYSDOT, the association developed a network of bicycle trails and published a bicycle touring map. The association has also built shared pedestrian/bicycle paths and developed a Web site to provide bicyclists with a one-stop-shop for information on bicycle touring in the Adirondacks.



Best Practices in Trail Development

Trail types vary, and starting a new trail can be complicated and difficult, both logistically and financially. Best Practices for creating new multi-use recreation trails are outlined in two publications from Parks & Trails New York (<http://ptny.org>):

1) Getting Started: A Guide to Planning Trails in New York State outlines the entire process of trail development, from managing safety to developing trail guides, and lists possible funding sources and organizational resources.

2) Getting Involved: A Community Trail Handbook for Landowners addresses the benefits to and concerns of landowners along a multi-use recreational path with information on financial issues and potential tax benefits, case studies of successful private ownership along trails, and sample access agreements.



Step 2: Grow Bicycle Tourism

Bicycle tourism is a rapidly growing segment of recreational tourism, as bicycle-friendly areas attract casual cyclists as well as organized tours (see *Case Study: Bicycling in the Adirondacks*, p. 86/87). The Southtowns has the natural beauty and landscape required for such a destination, but the current bicycle infrastructure is insufficient. The Southtowns should upgrade its trails and roadways to facilitate bicycle use (see also p. 20). Off-road bicycle and multi-use paths should also be developed. Businesses such as bicycle repair and parts shops and accommodations in close proximity to restaurants would assist in attracting this subset of recreational tourists. Defined bicycle routes and maps, bike racks at destinations, park-and-bike stations, designated bike lanes on major routes and easements for off-road paths are also necessary investments (see *What Attracts Bicycle Tourists*, p. 87). The Southtowns should also cross-promote its cycling assets with related attractions such as history sites and shopping, while forging partnerships beyond its borders (e.g., the Pedaling History Bicycle Museum located just a few miles away in Orchard Park). Also, once the infrastructure is in place, the area could host organized bicycle races to expose bicyclists to the area (see *Hosting Sporting Events*, p. 88).

WHAT ATTRACTS *Bicyclist Tourists*

- Bicycle friendly streets and paths of sufficient width
- Access to scenic roads, natural areas, waterfront and cultural/historical attractions
- Good restaurants/cafes close to bicycle routes
- Accommodations with breakfast locations in close proximity
- Bicycle repair/parts shops
- Interesting stores
- Adequate and secure bicycle parking
- Theater, music and arts festivals
- Route maps and effective advertising

Source: Bike ON Tours. Developing Bicycle Tourism

Step 3: Expand Trail Networks

A key recreational tourism gap in the Southtowns is the lack of multi-use recreational trails, which attract users ranging from hikers, joggers, rollerbladers and bicyclists in the summer to snowshoers and cross-country skiers in the winter. Trailheads located near a town center or connecting multiple business districts bring an additional customer base to local businesses. Important considerations for trail development include implementing a coordinated and clear trail marking system (signage to and markings along trails); providing maps with detailed information on the difficulty of the trail; scenery along the trail and amenities nearby; and promoting related attractions, especially dining and lodging (see *Best Practices in Trail Development*, p. 86/87). As resources allow, interpretive signage could be added along trails to highlight the area's natural environment, culture and history.

An existing amenity that could benefit from expanded promotion is the more than 70-mile network of snowmobile trails winding through the Southtowns (see *Snowmobile Trails in the Southtowns*, p. 88/89). An important piece of winter recreational tourism, snowmobile trails attract visitors during typically lean months. Expanding and improving the current network of snowmobile trails could make the Southtowns the premier snowmobile destination of Erie County.

Hosting Sporting Events

Communities are increasingly realizing the economic and tourism benefits of large-scale sporting events. Such events typically attract participants from outside the region. Almost one-third of the 36 million participants have household incomes of more than \$75,000 and are willing to spend that money when visiting places during the events.

The Southtowns' extensive network of parks and natural lands and many scenic roadways make the area a prime candidate for hosting such events, including road and mountain biking and running events.

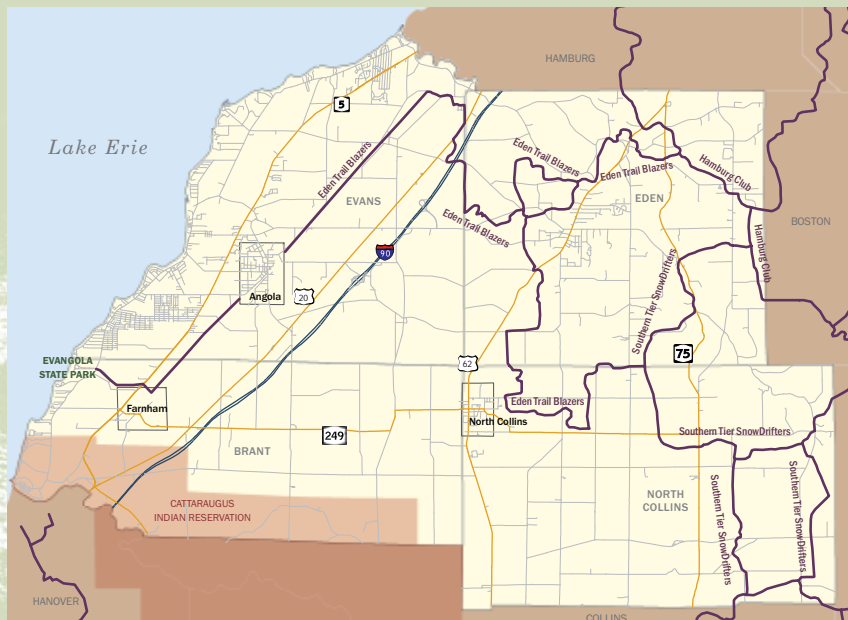
Special fitness events, however, do require adequate infrastructure and complicated coordination with public and private groups. As it improves its roadways for pedestrian and bicycle access and invests in its parks, the Southtowns should consider the potential for hosting such events.

In addition to direct economic benefits, the events expose participants and their guests to the host community's broader tourism assets.

Source: Avrasin, Maya. Setting the State for Special Events



Snowmobile Trails in the Southtowns



Snowmobile Clubs in and around the Southtowns

The Southtowns' more than 70 miles of snowmobile trails are maintained by various organizations throughout the area, which could be partners in an effort to expand or enhance the trail network:

Eden Trail Blazers

<http://www2.pcom.net/ecfsc/eden/eden.htm>

Hamburg Snowmobile Club

<http://www.hamburgsnowmobileclub.org/>

Southern Tier Snowdrifters

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

Western New York Snowmobile Club Of Boston

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



Step 4: Diversify Activities Available in Parks and Natural Areas

There are a diverse number of natural and recreational activities that could be provided at existing parks and other wildlife areas in the Southtowns. The single most underutilized natural asset in the Southtowns is Franklin Gulf Park, an Erie County-owned land bank of more than 600 acres that is currently closed to public access. Converting Franklin Gulf into a true park, with trails, parking, restrooms and a visitor/nature center would be a long and costly process, but could make the park a premier destination for those seeking a personal experience with wilderness while luring more recreational tourists to the area. The Niagara Frontier Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club or the Western New York Mountain Bicycling Association may serve as a resource for trail creation and maintenance in Franklin Gulf Park as well as other areas in the Southtowns.

In addition to developing hiking and multi-use trails, birding is a popular recreational activity that could be expanded in the Southtowns. This activity is already provided at some Southtowns locations, including Ayer-Stevenson Audubon Nature Preserve. However, increasing the number and promotion of organized birding tours of the diverse species found throughout the area's parks and natural areas would enhance the reputation of the Southtowns as a birding hotspot. Horseback riding is also available at specific locations, although the Southtowns should consider initiating public horseback trail rides, perhaps at Evangola State Park, which could attract those not likely to seek out private horseback rides. Multi-use horse trails would also afford the opportunity for hay rides in the fall and sleigh rides in the winter.

Parks are also ideal locations for special events and festivals. The Southtowns has already seen success with this approach – Brant hosts the Tomato Fest in Evangola State Park and Evans holds the Taste of Evans in its town park. Additionally, parks and becoming increasingly popular as host locations for organized sporting events (see *Hosting Sporting Events*, p. 88).

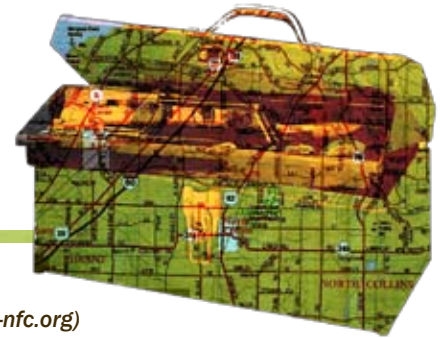


The more than 600-acre Franklin Gulf Park, currently closed to the public, could be a premier site for hiking and off-road cycling



The 20-acre Ayer-Stevenson Audubon Nature Preserve is a hotspot for birding and hiking

Tools for Implementation



Adirondack Mountain Club –

Niagara Frontier Chapter (<http://www.adk-nfc.org>)

Promotes the conservation and use of public wilderness, both in the Adirondacks and in Western New York, providing educational and recreational outings to members throughout the area; club members volunteer for trail building and maintenance projects.

Bike ON Tours (<http://www.bikeontours.on.ca>)

This group provides maps and guides on bicycling in Canada as well as useful information for bicycle tourism development. Provides consulting services for planning and marketing related to bicycle touring.

Buffalo Audubon Society (<http://www.buffaloudubon.com/>)

Through stewardship and education, promotes appreciation and enjoyment of nature in Western New York. Manages six nature preserves in Western New York, including the Ayer-Stevenson Nature Preserve in Evans, and provides science-based nature education, tours and guided nature hikes.

Developing Naturally: An Exploratory Process for Nature-Based Community Tourism (<http://www.strom.clemson.edu/publications/Potts/devnat.html>)

Primer for nature-based tourism development (produced by Clemson University) outlining natural resource inventorying, management techniques and marketing.

Eden Trail Blazers Snowmobile Club (<http://www2.pcom.net/ecfsc/eden/eden.htm>)

Works with local land owners to maintain 24 miles of trails and enhance snowmobile safety and participation in the Southtowns.

New York Bicycling Coalition (<http://www.nybc.net>)

Serves bicycle enthusiasts across the state with maps, information and event coordination (Resource Toolkit available online). Encourages bicycle use, advocates for bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly streets and monitors government activities affecting bicycling.

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

(<http://nysparks.com/grant>)

Lists grants for recreational tourism improvement. Contact the Regional Grants Officer for the Niagara Region for program assistance and application guidance. Funding opportunities include:

- **Snowmobile Trail Grant Program:** allocates funds to local government sponsors engaged in the development and maintenance of snowmobile trails within the State Snowmobile Trail System. Trails with user fees are not eligible and prior approval by OPRHP is required for all applications requesting the designation of new trails. A trails plan, trail narratives and trail map are all required to have a new trail approved.
- **Recreational Trails Program:** State-administered federal assistance program to provide and maintain recreational trails for both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail use.
- **Boating Infrastructure Grant Program:** Also federally funded, program supports development and maintenance of facilities for transient, non-trailerable recreational boats. Program mandates that facilities be on navigable waters, allow public access, and be designed for temporary, recreational users. Boating infrastructure includes mooring buoys, dry docks, floating and fixed piers, breakwaters, restrooms, pumpout stations and marine fueling stations.

New York State Snowmobile Association (<http://www.nyssnowassoc.org/>)

Seeks to preserve and improve snowmobiling in New York State; valuable source of information for trail construction, trail and equipment maintenance, and new trail-riding opportunities.

Parks & Trails New York (www.ptny.org)

Works statewide to protect and develop parks and trails; provides publications, programs, conferences and advocacy, as well as maps and data on trails throughout the state.

Western New York Mountain Bicycling Association

(<http://www.wnymba.org/portal.php>)

Works to stop trail closures, improve access to existing trails and construct new trails through mountain bike advocacy, trail maintenance work and rider education.

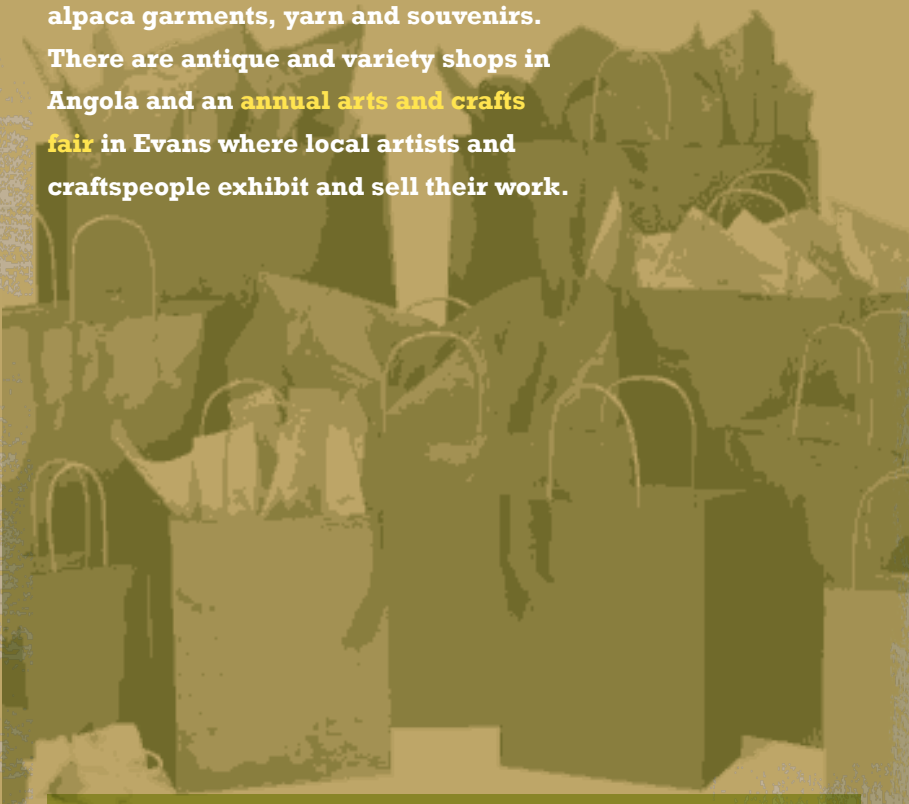
{ ANTIQUES, ARTS AND RETAIL }

Current Picture

Retail in rural areas, especially town and village cores, generally has been declining over the past several decades due to competition from chain stores and an increasingly mobile rural population willing to travel for competitive prices and product diversity. At the same time, recreational shopping remains one of the top leisure activities of U.S. resident travelers. Small communities across the U.S. have begun to tap this market by offering unique, authentic retail experiences including antiques, boutique shops, arts and crafts and gourmet foods (see Case Study: Selma, NC, p. 94/95).

The Antique Group in Eden sells vintage linens and fabrics and antique furniture

In the four-town area, there is an array of unique retail experiences that builds on the area's distinct culture, rural character and homegrown resources. North Collins' **Ravensong** offers Native American-themed gifts, while **Fintak** sells loom-woven rugs. Eden features several antique shops in its town center and garden and craft outlets throughout town, including the **Paca Post Store** at Eden Valley Alpacas, which sells alpaca garments, yarn and souvenirs. There are antique and variety shops in Angola and an **annual arts and crafts fair** in Evans where local artists and craftspeople exhibit and sell their work.



Such retail has the potential to become a stronger visitor draw once several factors challenging the sector are addressed. Chief among these is the need to enhance existing venues in terms of appearance and offerings to make them more appealing to a visitor market. Access is also an issue, as many of the area's visitor-directed retail outlets offer limited hours, while others are not well advertised (some lack signage or do not clearly portray what services or products are offered). Although part of a broader economic development challenge, the area's town and village centers would more effectively attract visitors with a critical mass of retail and tourism attractions that contribute to a walkable, diverse visitor experience.



North Collins' Ravensong features Native American-themed gifts and pottery



Fintak in North Collins sells loom-woven rugs, although the site is a private residence



Sign off Rt. 62 advertising Eden Valley Alpacas



A visitor might hesitate to enter this antiques shop in Eden

CASE STUDY

Selma, NC

<http://www.antiquesselma.com/> and
<http://www.johnstoncountync.org/>

A once-booming railroad town, Selma was in a state of serious decline in the late 1990s when its town manager announced plans to make Selma an antiques center. To attract retailers, he offered free rent to anyone willing to open an antiques store in a building downtown. Today, the town features 10 antiques stores and specialty shops for soaps, quilts and gourmet foods.

Selma caters to day-trippers, offering restaurants, cafes and a couple of historic sites, but no bed and breakfasts or hotels (which are available in surrounding towns). Many visitors stop as they travel along Interstate 95. Visitors are provided with a parking area on the edge of downtown, although they are encouraged to explore the town by foot. The East Coast Antiques Show takes place in Selma in September and is a large visitor draw.

The town, using the antiques district as the basis for its downtown revitalization strategy, supports all outdoor advertising for the district. The Antique Dealers and Merchants of Selma, North Carolina pays for group advertising in more than 30 publications. The town, antiques association and Johnston County Visitors Bureau promote the antiques district on their Web sites.

Source: Jones, Kimberly and Alderman D.H., Antiques Tourism and the Selling of Heritage in Eastern North Carolina



Copyright: Johnston County Visitors Bureau (l) Antique Dealers and Merchants of Selma, North Carolina (r)

CASE STUDY

Vidler's 5 & 10, East Aurora, NY

<http://vidlers5and10.com>

A third-generation family business occupying four connected buildings, Vidler's takes its customers back in time. Its merchandise includes nostalgic items such as yo-yos, marbles and penny candy, as well as gourmet foods, crafts and gifts. The building features Vidler's trademark red and white awning with original hardwood floors and 1930s-era cash registers.

Copyright: Vidler's 5 & 10



Strategies for Success

The following action steps, strategies and related case studies cover the various elements of developing tourism retail, especially in the area of arts and crafts and antiques. These include refining existing assets and building on synergies across retail venues and other tourism activities in the area, learning more about the current customer base, and tapping opportunities for additional retail development.

Brant Auction
Company in Eden

Step 1: Invest in Existing Asset Base

At this stage, the Southtowns' base of retail lacks the density to serve as a consistent visitor lure by itself. However, the existing assets can effectively serve the purpose of extending and diversifying the Southtowns' visitor experience as a strong complement to the area's heritage, recreational and agricultural tourism offerings. Investing in the assets initially promotes the efficient, strategic use of resources while also building a foundation for future growth in this market.

Enhance Retail Display

Simply improving the appearance and layout of the store can greatly improve the visitor experience (see *Retail Tip: Customer Interest Extends to Décor*, p. 96).

Assess first impressions. What are the first things visitors see, hear or smell as they approach or enter the store? Just as offensive smells or unpleasant sounds can detract visitors, pleasant smells or sounds can draw customers.

Use sidewalk and window displays.

Highlight offerings through window displays and sidewalk displays at peak traffic times.

Address layout. Avoid clutter and provide wide and accessible aisles to encourage a leisurely retail experience; keep the store clean (e.g., do not let items get dusty).

Create an atmosphere. Visitors are looking for an experience as well as specific items to purchase. Reflecting the character of the community with photographs and displays of a specific era contribute to the authenticity of the retail experience (see *Case Study: Vidler's 5 & 10, East Aurora*, p. 94/95).

Retail Tip: Customer Interest Extends to Décor

In addition to spending more time and money than typical shoppers, recreational shoppers consider store décor in determining which venues to patronize.

Source: Pavlyshyna, Nellie. *Motivations for Visiting Flea and Craft Markets in Rural Areas of Texas*

Diversify Offerings

Without necessarily requiring significant investments, proprietors can also diversify their product line to enhance the shopping experience. Offer other locally-produced items, from arts and crafts to homemade jams or baked goods, at the same time promoting other attractions and assets in the area (see *Marketing Tip: Partner with Other Shops*, p. 97). Sell items that reflect the character of the community, such as historic postcards or other souvenir items. Consider children as customers to enhance the shopping experience for families. Research other products sold in the area to identify gaps and potential niche areas. Solicit customers for new product ideas.

Train Staff

The friendliness of staff and their knowledge of the area are significant factors not only in the retail experience but also the overall visitor impression of the area. Set service standards such as greeting and conversing with every customer. Be knowledgeable about other activities in the area and be willing to share the area's history (see also p. 13).

Improve Building Exterior

Retail signage and façade design should reflect the character of the community in its style, scale and design. Landscaping and the condition of the building exterior reflect positively on the entire community while also attracting customers. A coat of paint and pot of flowers at the storefront are simple, cost effective measures that leave good first impressions. For costlier investments, several of the Southtowns municipalities support local business façade and building improvement with community development matching grant programs. The Southtowns should continue to leverage these and related programs and encourage tourism-related retail businesses to apply.

Marketing Tip: Partner with Other Shops

Antique and boutique shops could assist one another by displaying other shops' promotional brochures or by exchanging products and product samples. This is especially critical for those shops that operate outside the town or village centers and may be harder for visitors to find.

Step 2: Explore Opportunities for Increased Collaboration

There is strong potential to expand the area's retail capacity and improve its quality and distinctiveness through collaboration. This is especially the case for small-scale arts and crafts events already taking place in the four communities.

For instance, Angola, Brant and North Collins each holds an annual town- or village-wide garage sale. The four towns and three villages could combine their efforts to create a larger-scale flea market event to draw customers from beyond the four-town area.

Additionally, several local artists were identified as part of this effort's Phase I inventory, although it is likely that this does not capture the whole picture of the area's base of artisans and craftspeople. Some of these artists have their own studios, while the Annual Evans Arts and Crafts Show highlights dozens of local artists. The area should seek participation from artists and craftspeople while exploring options for showcasing this local resource on a more regular basis, either by establishing a permanent space for an artists' bazaar in one of the communities or including artists in the Southtowns' farmers' market (see *Case Study: Vertin Gallery, Michigan*, p. 99).



The Annual Evans Arts and Crafts Show features the work of local artists for sale (Copyright Sylvia Kleindinst)

CASE STUDY

Vertin Gallery, Calumet, MI

<http://vertingallery.com>

Tucked in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the former copper mining town of Calumet, MI, population 900, is experiencing a renaissance of sorts. Part of this transformation from a depressed post-mining town to a vibrant destination built on the principles of historic preservation is the Vertin Gallery.

In 2004 a local potter rented studio space in the then-vacant but grandiose Vertin Building. A small exhibit of his and another artist's work in the building's first floor generated a flood of interest from area artists interested in bringing their studios to the Vertin Building. Today the second and third floors of the building are filled with artist studios while the first floor exhibits the work of nearly 60 local artists, including paintings, sculpture, jewelry, poetry and books. The gallery, its tall windows lighting up the street at night, has a wide draw, and many of the artists have had to increase their production to keep up with demand.

Source: Michigan State University Museum. Craft Works! Michigan



a



b



c

Copyright Vertin Gallery (a and b) and Craig Woerpel (c)

Step 3: Tap Opportunities for Added Capacity

In addition to improving upon the area's existing distinctive retail base, there are many opportunities to expand visitor-oriented retail in the Southtowns. Many retailers in resort-type communities cater to visitors' interest in products related to health, wellness and special indulgences, such as gourmet foods and accessories (see *Build Visitor-Oriented Retail Capacity*, p. 100). Tourists are also interested in taking home with them remembrances of the community they are visiting, which makes heritage-oriented gifts popular. The Southtowns' heritage ranges from agriculture to Native American influences to religion to unique crafts. How can these stories and traditions be converted into memorabilia for the area's tourists?

Build Visitor-Oriented Retail Capacity

Possible Specialty Shops

Bakery products

Books

Candles

Chocolates/Candy

Ethnic Gifts

Flowers

Glass

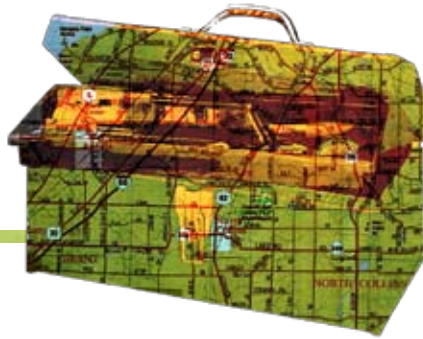
Gourmet Foods

Jewelry

Perfumes/Soaps

Toys

Tools for Implementation



Buffalo State College Small Business Development Center

(<http://www.nyssbdc.org/Centers/centers.cfm?centid=11>): Serving small businesses throughout Erie and Wyoming Counties, the center provides one-to-one counseling free of charge to small businesses, with training and instructional programs. Specific areas of assistance include business plan development, locating funding sources, preparing for e-commerce, developing marketing plans and complying with licensing and regulations.

Chambers of Commerce

The Eden and Evans-Brant Chambers of Commerce, though primarily volunteer-operated, could serve as valuable tools for identifying retail opportunities and assisting in the coordination of developing or establishing retail spaces in the respective towns and villages.

New York State Council on the Arts (<http://nysca.org>)

Dedicated to “preserving and expanding the rich and diverse cultural resources that are and will become the heritage of New York’s citizens,” NYSCA provides grants and technical and advisory support to artists and related organizations. Funding and support are provided annually according to program areas, which include arts in education, dance, folk arts, literature and music.

Tourism & Retail Development: Attracting Tourists to Local Businesses

(<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/G3713.pdf>). Published by the University of Wisconsin’s Center for Community Economic Development, this resource guide provides tips, strategies and related worksheets (e.g., visitor surveys) for retail businesses interested in expanding their visitor customer base. Several community case studies are also reviewed.

{ IMPLEMENTATION }

The prospect of implementing the myriad action steps and strategies outlined in this report is likely daunting for seven small communities, raising questions of where to begin, how to finance the effort and whom to partner with. The following provides a framework for implementing a toolkit for tourism development in the Southtowns through a phased approach that takes advantage of community and regional partners and creative funding opportunities (note also that each report section’s Tools for Implementation lists specific grant opportunities and strategic partners).

Who: Coalition with Collaboration

The Southtowns Community Enhancement Coalition, comprised of elected officials and municipal employees from the seven towns and villages, is an exemplary model of intermunicipal collaboration and coordination. Given its mission of addressing shared goals and common challenges across the four towns and three villages, and its role in spearheading this tourism planning effort, the Coalition is clearly the entity to lead the implementation phase of this program. The Coalition has also received a state grant to incorporate as a nonprofit 501c3, which will expand its ability to apply for and receive tourism grants.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that the Coalition – which functions without paid administrative staff – will be able to accomplish the task of tourism development without significant, consistent assistance from businesses, community organizations, volunteers and local government (see *Keys to Engaging and Sustaining Public Support*, p. 103). The Coalition will also need to forge broader partnerships with public, private and nonprofit stakeholders at the regional, state and even federal levels to move forward certain components of the tourism plan.

Given the community momentum generated by this project, there is a critical window of opportunity to solicit the engagement of community volunteers and local businesses, including umbrella organizations such as Chambers of Commerce. It is recommended that the Southtowns form a

Keys to Engaging and Sustaining Public Support

Build community pride by increasing awareness of the area's assets

(make the tourism inventory and action plan available to the public, host educational tours or present information at public meetings)

Dispel tourism myths

(“tourism jobs are low-paying,” “the travel industry is too seasonal”)

Set realistic expectations

(tourism will not be the silver bullet but is an important piece of the area's economic development strategy)

Be held accountable

measure progress and tourism growth and report to the community and elected officials

committee structure according to the tourism development areas outlined in this report – Hosting the Visitor, Transportation and Wayfinding, Reaching the Visitor, Agritourism, Heritage Tourism, Recreational Tourism, and Antiques, Arts and Retail. The Coalition should identify key leaders and partners from each community as the core of the committee structure. Areas where there is the most potential for quick movement should be prioritized in terms of committee formation. The Coalition should function to coordinate committee work and ensure it is in accordance with the project's goals. The Coalition can also assist in forging broader strategic partnerships and preparing and submitting grant applications for specific initiatives.

Regional partners will be critical in assisting with implementation and might include tourism promotion agencies, secondary and higher education programs in hospitality and tourism management, cooperative extension services, regional economic development groups and various levels of government. The Coalition may find it useful to reach out to community and regional partners at the outset through a series of informational meetings on report findings and plans for next steps.

When: Phased Approach

Patience is perhaps the most critical ingredient in moving this effort forward. Progress is likely to come slowly, over several years, as windows of opportunity for strategic partnerships open and funding becomes available. However, immediate advances are necessary to maintain momentum, build confidence and encourage community engagement. It is recommended that the Southtowns pursue a multi-phase approach to implementation with several “quick win” projects slated for the initial phase and longer-term efforts spaced throughout the program.

For instance, the Southtowns area could join ongoing regional efforts that align with tourism objectives and action steps outlined in this report. These might include Erie and Niagara Counties' tourism promotion agencies, which are pushing to build cultural and heritage tourism in the area, or Chautauqua County, which is focusing on agricultural and culinary tourism. Other starting points could include taking advantage of areas where the Southtowns already has a foundation of experience, such as agritourism and recreational tourism. Tourism system initiatives to begin with might include bolstering façade and streetscape improvement programs, which have already established a track record of success, or working with existing dining and retail amenities to improve their visitor experiences. Areas of development for the long-term include heritage tourism, development of branding and marketing strategies and products, and implementation of a regional signage system.

The following matrix separates actions steps into two multi-year phases and may help guide the Southtowns as it plans for implementation:

Phase I (2008 – 2010)

Hosting the Visitor: Expand support for community infrastructure improvements (streetscapes, parking, façade improvement); prioritize assets in need of investment; develop front-line staff training program; take advantage of existing training programs

Transportation and Wayfinding: Designate bike routes; explore opportunities for tapping into the Seaway Trail for exposure; encourage use of tourist oriented destination signs by businesses and attractions; assess areas in need of improved directional signage; identify areas or districts for coordinated signage programs

Reaching the Visitor: Plan visitor surveying effort for 2008 season; identify target markets and strategic regional partners, focusing on within-region markets; assemble asset packages of visitor-ready venues and events; begin development of brochure; assess need for Southtowns Web site; link assets with existing Web sites (tourism promotion agencies, municipal Web sites); identify sites for visitor information kiosks; engage community in process of defining Southtowns' destination brand

Agritourism: Assess vendor interest in agritourism initiatives and educate business owners of opportunities for diversifying offerings; prioritize development of agritourism-related amenities (e.g., farmers' market, map of existing farm stands); enhance farm stand signage and visitor support services; pursue farm museum in Eden, including use of site as a visitors' center

Heritage Tourism: Develop approach to a comprehensive historical resources inventory for all seven communities; review options for expanded local historic preservation; engage community partners (historians, volunteers) in process of identifying area's historic themes

Recreational Tourism: Pursue regional partnerships to enhance promotion of the area's premier fishing and water recreation and determine necessary infrastructure upgrades; plan for and implement improvements to existing trails; determine locations for new or expanded multi-use trails; identify natural areas and parks for targeted development; prioritize bike routes for investment

Antiques, Arts and Retail: Target existing retail businesses for façade and store design improvements; pursue increased collaboration across the area for showcasing arts and crafts; assess opportunities for future retail development

Phase II (2010-2012):

Hosting the Visitor: Continue community and visitor infrastructure investment programs, including coordination with district signage programs; assist priority venues in securing funding for asset development; support development of bed & breakfast establishments; implement pilot front-line staff training; continue to make use of region's existing training programs

Transportation and Wayfinding: Implement a coordinated signage program, including regional gateway signage at key entrances and signage leading to tourist assets; develop signage guidelines for key districts (e.g., in town and village centers) and support business compliance with guidelines

Reaching the Visitor: Continue visitor surveying; pursue new visitor markets; diversify asset and event packages and continue forging regional links for packaging; integrate Southtowns brand with advertising and promotional tools; expand collection of promotional tools, including niche brochures, Web site/s, visitor information kiosks and promotional DVD

Agritourism: Support agritourism venues in diversification of offerings; coordinate agritourism development with farm museum; expand area's farmers' market with events and vendor diversification

Heritage Tourism: Conduct historic resources inventory; draft local historic preservation policies with community engagement; identify and develop interpretive elements for historic resources in accordance with area's historic themes and stories as identified by community (exhibits, plaques/signage, tours and tour guides)

Recreational Tourism: Diversify and continue to broaden promotion of water recreation (fishing, boating and related events); expand trail networks, including connecting main routes to village and town centers; develop biking infrastructure including bike racks at destinations, park-and-bike stations and designated bike lanes; implement program for diversifying activities in nature areas and parkland

Antiques, Arts and Retail: Continue investment in existing retail amenities; support development of new, niche retail; implement collaborative arts and crafts events or exhibit spaces

How: Creative Approach to Funding

Translating these action steps into tangible progress will require tremendous financial resources, a key challenge for small rural communities seeking to develop tourism. The community will need to think creatively, partner strategically and act aggressively in its pursuit of funding.

As previously mentioned, the Coalition will see expanded funding opportunities once it is established as a nonprofit 501c3, which will allow the Coalition to be the lead applicant on many tourism and related grants. In general, the Southtowns will need to secure tourism funding for the public (parks, public land and buildings), nonprofit (community groups, historical sites and buildings) and private (restaurants, hotels, retail) sectors.

Funding for marketing and promotional efforts is often easier to secure than resources for asset development or system improvements, which may require the Southtowns to be innovative in its efforts to fund initial asset development steps. Developers of privately-owned attractions may find funding from traditional lending sources, including banks, foundations, government loan programs or community development initiatives. Publicly-owned attractions and facilities can be financed through revenue bonds, state and federal grants, local taxes and traditional sources such as banks and foundations. As always, partnerships with ongoing efforts in the region open opportunities for funding while strengthening the tourism program of the Southtowns and the broader region.

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