



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

Tourism Welcomes the Fall

TED O'BRIEN September 23, 2013

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O'Brien, tourism agency leaders tout efforts to maintain momentum from summer's record-breaking success

(NOTE: Photography and an MP3 of the full press conference are also available. Press conference participants are labeled in the image "THE KEY.JPG")

VICTOR, N.Y. – As the official first day of fall approaches this Sunday, **Senator Ted O'Brien** and other tourism advocates reported this summer's record-breaking tourism success and new initiatives intended to keep that success rolling through the autumn and winter.

"The partnership between hardworking local business owners, cultural organizations, tourism agencies and government has truly paid off for Rochester and the Finger Lakes region this summer," Senator O'Brien

said. "For example, according to my friends at VisitRochester, 2013 is on track to be the first year in which the economic impact of tourism in Monroe County will crack the \$1 billion mark. That is an amazing milestone for the county, and demonstrates what is possible when all of these different groups are working together well."

In the Finger Lakes Region as a whole, tourism was a \$2.8 billion industry in 2012, up 3.7 percent from the prior year. Whether the industry cracks the \$3 billion mark this year or next remains to be seen, but officials are cautiously optimistic.

"Tourism is a critically important industry in the Finger Lakes, generating a positive image for our region on a state and national level, and generating jobs and tax revenues on a local level," said **Valerie Knoblauch, president of Finger Lakes Visitors Connection**. "As we approach the \$3 billion mark over the next 12 to 18 months, it's time for all of us to recognize the role tourism plays in our economy — and for leaders to invest even more in the Finger Lakes 'product' everyone loves."

Knoblauch said the Canandaigua Lakefront redevelopment project, Hobart and William Smith Performing Arts Center, and Bristol Mountain Winter Resort Aerial Adventure Park project are three Ontario County efforts that were recently named among the top 20 priority projects by the Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council.

"All deserve state funding, and with Senator O'Brien's support, we hope to get it," she said.

In Ontario County alone, tourism spending totals more than \$191.6 million and employs more than 4,280 people. Visitors to the county generated \$13.2 million in local tax revenues for local municipalities in 2012, a 9.2 percent increase over the prior year.

This fall, visitors can look forward to the Naples Grape Festival, wine tastings on the Canandaigua Lake and Seneca Lake wine trails, and the opening of the new Von Maur department store at Eastview Mall, its first in the Northeast United States.

"If you have not already done so, invite your friends and family members to visit this fall," **FLVC Chairperson Mike Roeder** said. "Autumn in the Finger Lakes is beautiful."

"We're trying to change the conversation away from going county by county, or just Monroe County, to the need to promote the Finger Lakes as a region," said **Don Jeffries, President and CEO of VisitRochester**. "Right now, the cultural institutions in Rochester that we're famous for are gearing up for fall season – a beautiful time in the Finger Lakes. Where else can you go to the largest toy museum in the world and 35 minutes later be waterskiing on the Finger Lakes?"

Nicole Mahoney, local administrator of the 14-county Finger Lakes region's collaborative PR efforts and owner of Pittsford firm Break the Ice Media, shared insights into how those many counties work together to more effectively sell tourists on the region, including through the "I LOVE FRESH AIR" campaign.

The speakers were also joined by Bryant Sanders, regional assistant to U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, in a show of support for Finger Lakes tourism.

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Sen. O'Brien represents the 55th district in the Senate, which is made up of the eastern half of Monroe County and the western half of Ontario County, including much of the city of Rochester.

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection is the tourism promotion agency representing Ontario County in the Finger Lakes. Because of its central location, it also links to many other visitor services in the Canandaigua, Geneva, Naples and Victor areas.

VisitRochester is Monroe County's official tourism promotion agency. Its mission is to promote the area as a destination for meetings, conventions, and leisure travel.

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