

## WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: MARCH 5, 2015

---

---

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS MERLINO  
KENNY  
DICKINSON  
CONOVER  
WOOD  
VANSELOW  
FRASIER

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:  
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR  
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER  
JOSIAH BROWN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NEW YORK  
WELCOMES YOU, INC.  
TOM CONNORS, AD WORKSHOP  
BRANDON MALLORY, AD WORKSHOP  
KEVIN B. GERAGHTY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER  
SUPERVISORS BROCK  
SIMPSON  
TAYLOR  
CHRISTINA CURLEY, SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR, LAKE GEORGE  
REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU  
ANN MARIE CASTELLANO, THE WINGATE LAKE GEORGE  
FRED AUSTIN, FORT WILLIAM HENRY RESORT/BEST WESTERN/LAKE  
GEORGE LODGING ASSOCIATION  
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*  
CHARLENE DIRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST  
FOR ALL OTHERS PRESENT, PLEASE SEE ATTACHED SIGN-IN SHEET

---

---

Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:30 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Vanselow and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Tourism Director, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the agenda review, Ms. Johnson requested a contract with Benchmark Internet Group d/b/a Benchmark Email in the amount of \$3,119.14 for a 9-month subscription for email blast software for a term commencing upon execution of the contract and terminating December 31, 2015. She mentioned the yearly subscription cost was \$3,817.35 which had been pro-rated for 9 months. She commented the Department's email list of approximately 130,000 subscribers was important and was used for email blasts at least 15 times per year. Currently, she said, the email blasts were created within the Department and distributed with the assistance of the Information Technology (IT) Department. She commented they had looked for new software which would improve the process and remove some of the constrictions involved with the current email blast procedures. She noted the Department had been under budget on two printing projects and the necessary funds for this contract were available.

Peter Girard, Creative Director, explained that for the last several years the email blasts had been completed through the combined efforts of the Tourism and IT Departments. He added the Tourism Department created the content and design of the email blasts and sent them to the IT Department

where a coder program was used to format them by one employee, a second employee developed the subscriber list and a third employee was responsible for the mass email. He appraised the recent trend was for people to open and view their emails on their smart phones and the Tourism Department email blasts were not always compatible with all electronic platforms. He stated the email blast software would alleviate this problem because the companies were dedicated to ensuring the content was delivered and readable on all platforms.

Mr. Girard advised he had queried the top ten email blast software companies and he sent bid requests to the top five of which three companies had submitted proposals. He stated the three companies were iContact Premier Services (rated #1), Benchmark Email (rated #2) and Vertical Response (rated #4). He explained he had conducted a test on the software of the three proposers and determined that Benchmark Email's software was the easiest to work with and was the lowest responsible bidder. He said the contract would allow for 250,000 sends per month and any unused sends were banked so they could be used for future email blasts. He noted the software would remove the current size constraints for email blasts which would allow the Department to add more content and additional sponsors to each blast. He added the current procedure only allowed for three sponsors per email blast and it was sometimes necessary to reject willing sponsors due to the size constraints. Another benefit of the contract, Mr. Girard continued, was the Tourism Department would become less reliant on the IT Department staff. He noted the IT Department staff had done a great job but it was difficult for them to keep up with the industry in addition to their other duties. He informed the new software would have better reporting and list management properties which would allow the Department to track who opened the email blasts and what links they clicked on. This knowledge, he continued, would allow the Tourism Department to develop segregated lists to target email blasts based on the subscribers' interests. Mr. Merlino agreed that the IT Department had done a great job and he noted they had been reimbursed for their time; he said there would be a savings realized by not paying the IT Department for the email blast which could be used for this contract in the future. He said the email blast software would reduce the amount of time required to send the blasts and would allow the Tourism Department to keep up with the available technology.

Motion was made by Mr. Dickinson, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to authorize the contract with Benchmark Internet Group d/b/a Benchmark Email as outlined above. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the March 20, 2015 Board meeting.*

Ms. Johnson requested Committee consent to seek the services of a Digital/Social Media Manager for the Tourism Department and she pointed out a Scope of Services outline was included in the agenda packet. She advised social media strategies were constantly changing and the Tourism Department needed to stay current. She said the Tourism Department had a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter but they felt the need to expand and improve that presence. She commented they had discussed the matter with Mr. Merlino and both the Purchasing and Civil Service Departments to determine if it would be better to create a position or contract for the services. She added it had been determined it would be preferable to contract for the services. Mr. Girard explained the Department's Facebook and Twitter accounts were managed by several employees based on who was available and they wanted to have a person who was dedicated to this effort. He stated the person or company the Department contracted with would be out and about in the County attending various events to take pictures, post and create content for the social media sites. He said the Department wanted to expand their social media presence and attract more "likes" and followers which translated to more visitors to the Tourism website hopefully resulting in more tourists visiting Warren County. He explained the content created by this person or company would

be hosted directly on the Tourism website and would provide additional hits for search engines. He noted Tourism staff members would supplement the work of the person or company selected by continuing to post on the social media sites, as well. Mr. Dickinson asked the basis for the decision between creating a full-time position and contracting out for the services. Mr. Girard explained that since the Tourism Department was unsure of the full scope of services which could be provided they had decided it would be preferable to contract out the services to determine what would be offered. He said they would like to have the contract in place for at least one or two years to provide a better understanding of what could be expected from a full-time employee as a Social Media Manager. Following a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to approve the search and select a Digital/Social Media Manager for the Tourism Department.

Ms. Johnson circulated a copy of the Year in Review Binder to the Committee members; *a copy of the Year in Review Binder is on file with the minutes*. She commented three copies of the Binder were created, two of which were retained in the Tourism Department Office and one of which was on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors. She added the Supervisors were welcome to view or borrow the Binder if they so desired.

Ms. Johnson reported the Department had recently conducted the annual occupancy survey of area campgrounds, lodging and attractions in order to collect 2014 data. She noted this survey was completed every other year with the cooperation of the Planning & Community Development Department. This year, she continued, as an incentive to the lodging properties to respond to the survey, the Department had offered a chance to win a free one-third page, four-color advertisement in the 2016 Travel Guide and the winner had been Ridin' Hy Ranch. She commented the results had not yet been tabulated but they would be provided at the next Committee meeting.

Ms. Johnson announced the Department had been invited to attend the new Food and Travel Expo in Brooklyn, New York on May 2, 2015. She explained that because they were members of the New York State Travel and Industry Association they had been offered this free opportunity and she and Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, would attend this new show and exhibit. She apprised that "I ♥ NY", Taste of New York and Amtrak were the sponsors of the Food and Travel Expo which would give the Department an opportunity to focus on the close drive time from New York City, as well as the emerging locally grown and produced assets. She noted they would request samples and brochures from the local cheese farms and breweries. She noted Washington and Saratoga Counties would have their booths beside the Warren County booth.

Ms. Johnson pointed out the February Newsletter had just been released; *a copy of the Newsletter is on file with the minutes*. She said the goal of the Newsletter was to update the tourism community on recent and upcoming programs. She reported the February Newsletter had been sent to 1,118 email addresses and the most clicked items were the 2015 Special Event Occupancy Tax Awards, the 2014 Web Stats of Significance, and the new photos and videos. Ms. Johnson stated the Public Relations Reports for January and February, created by Joanne Conley, Assistant Tourism Coordinator, were included in the agenda packet. She noted the Department also worked closely with the "I ♥ NY" and the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council (ARTC) public relations firms.

Ms. Johnson informed the Tourism Department produced an Accessible Facilities brochure which was updated annually; *a copy of the Accessible Facilities brochure is on file with the minutes*. In 2014, she continued, the Department was contacted by Dr. Lynn Anderson, of SUNY (State University of New York) Cortland, who had offered some insight and corrections on some of the language in the brochure. She noted the brochure was available for download on the Warren County Tourism website or by mail. She said the brochure was brought to consumer shows and people seemed to appreciate that these facilities had been highlighted as accessible.

Ms. Johnson informed she had recently been contacted by "I ♥ NY" due to their recent mailing to retail companies throughout New York State. She explained "I ♥ NY" was partnering with the Retail Council to develop a Canadian Coupon Program for March 15-31, 2015. She said they had asked retail stores to participate in the Canadian Coupon Program by creating a coupon. She advised the campaign would include television commercials and digital advertisements in Toronto and Montreal and the information had been sent to local properties for participation. She read the following excerpt from the solicitation for participation in the coupon program:

*"Statistics show that more than 75% of Canadian's surveyed indicate shopping as their top activity when traveling to New York. Our goal is to increase awareness of New York State as a great shopping destination for Canadian citizens."*

Ms. Johnson announced the Governor's Winter Challenge would commence on Sunday, March 8, 2015 in Lake Placid, New York. She said this event would be a great chance for our Supervisors to show off the Adirondacks. She noted the Governor's Adirondack Challenge during the summer had been successful. At the previous Committee meeting, she recalled, Mr. Conover had requested the Tourism Department meet with representatives from the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce (LGRCC) to discuss Canadian promotion activities. She said a calendar of promotions had been developed which detailed Warren County Tourism, LGRCC and joint efforts for Canadian promotions; *a copy of the calendar is on file with the minutes*. Ms. Johnson reminded the Committee members of a request to create a survey form for the Tourism Department Satellite Office at the Adirondack Outlet Mall. She said the survey form had been completed and was included in the agenda packet; *a copy of the survey form is on file with the minutes*. She noted that thus far there had been no responses to the survey form but they were available at the Satellite Office.

Ms. Johnson introduced Josiah Brown, President and CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of New York Welcomes You, Inc., who provided a Power Point Presentation to the Committee members; *a copy of the Power Point Presentation is on file with the minutes*. Mr. Brown said during the weekends he traveled in the New York's Best Experiences wrapped truck for which he had earned the nickname of "The New York Sherpa". He commented that he talked to about 10,000 people per year as part of the New York's Best Experiences Program. He informed he had been involved in New York State tourism for the past 12 years and had traveled over 500,000 miles in New York State. Mr. Brown stated he had a vision a few years prior to take knowledge of New York State tourism to the public on a personal level. He apprised he had 2 core beliefs related to tourism: that people made their travel plans based on their personal interests and that recommendations tore down the wall of fear with trying something new. He expressed that Northern, Western and Eastern New York were unknown areas to those downstate or from out-of-state. He noted a recommendation to visit a particular area could be the bridge necessary for a traveler to risk a weekend in an unknown area. He said he had decided to launch a program based on his core beliefs which had become the New York's Best Experiences Tour. He referred to the program as a traveling recommendation tour where they talked to tourists on a one-on-one basis at specific events.

Mr. Brown advised they used the "Rule of 5" which he explained meant that giving a person 5 reasons to visit a particular location was ideal while less than 5 reasons had a tendency to not convince a tourist and more than 5 reasons would become overwhelming. He said the New York's Best Experiences Tour involved a mobile visitors' center which had been launched in October of 2013. He mentioned he worked with a number of Counties across New York State but Warren County had the advantage of travelers recognizing the term "Lake George Area". He displayed a picture of the New York's Best Experiences wrapped truck and he noted the Lake George Area was featured on the driver's door. He displayed a photograph of the New York's Best Experiences booth at the Northeast RV Show and he pointed out that each section of the booth had a personal interest

banner at the top (rafting, fishing, paddling, hiking, biking, etc.); he noted the personal interest banners were changed based on the type of show. He commented the tables contained displays which highlighted the 12 destinations participating in the New York's Best Experiences Program. He pointed out the Travel Guide was available below the display for the Lake George Area. Mr. Brown said they attended many travel shows and tactical events and he informed that "I ♥ NY" had assisted with the effort by helping to obtain entry into some exclusive events as long as the booth was displayed under the "I ♥ NY" tent. He displayed a photograph of the truck and booth at the Jones Beach Air Show where they had seen 330,000 people over the course of 2 days. He said about 1,000 people per hour had visited the booth for the total of 12 hours. He displayed a photo of the Baseball Hall of Fame Induction and he noted this event did not include vendors but they had been able to attend courtesy of "I ♥ NY". He added there had been about 55,000 attendees at this event and they had directed several people to visit the Adirondack Park after the event. Mr. Brown displayed a picture of the 2014 Warwick Apple Fest held in Warwick, New York and he commented there had been about 35,000 attendees. He noted this had been the first event that the Program had attended for 2 years in a row and he informed of a woman who had visited the booth both years looking for recommendations which had indicated to him that the program was working.

Mr. Brown informed the Warren County Travel Guide was incredibly popular at the trade shows and events and he said it was the #1 distributed guide in their booth. He stated the name recognition for Lake George was equal to that of Niagara Falls and Cooperstown. He said that to most tourists the name Lake George was the same as the Adirondacks. He noted that many people stated that "I was there as a kid" or "we love Lake George" when asked about past experiences. He apprised that fishing, paddling and hiking were the top 3 recreational activities that people asked about when visiting the New York's Best Experiences booth and he recommended those activities be highlighted when advertising the area. He noted more tourists were traveling around the major events they wanted to attend to ensure they would have something to do during their vacation. Mr. Brown encouraged the Tourism Department and tourism related properties to take personal interests into consideration during marketing efforts and to make recommendations by placing suggested itineraries on the website. Mr. Brown thanked Warren County for their support of the New York's Best Experiences Program. He informed he was building a team which would include a New York State hiking expert and fishing expert who would leverage all of their knowledge onto a website and the tour.

Ms. Brand distributed copies of her January/February Group Tour Update to the Committee members; *a copy of which is on file with the minutes*. She advised the Quarterly Group Loop Newsletter had been released on February 12, 2015 to approximately 3,200 email addresses. She noted the newly implemented bus parking pass for the Adirondack Hot Air Balloon Festival had been highlighted on the Newsletter to ensure tour operators were aware of this fee. She said the Adirondack Craft Beverage Trail had been highlighted in the "What's New" section of the Newsletter. She added the 2015 Warren & Saratoga Counties FAM (familiarization) Tour had also been highlighted on the Newsletter.

Ms. Brand announced the 2015 Warren & Saratoga Counties Destinations of New York State FAM Tour would be held on September 14-16, 2015 and they expected to surpass last year's participation of 57 Tour Operators. She said there would be 2 busses of Tour Operators and an "I ♥ NY" component would be included. She noted "I ♥ NY" would assist by bringing at least 14 International Tour Operators on the FAM Tour. Because 98% of the Tour Operators had arrived a day early in 2014, she continued, the 2015 FAM Tour would include an Icebreaker Reception and dinner aboard the Lac Du St. Sacramento on Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup> which would present an opportunity for group friendly suppliers to meet with Tour Operators. She advised the Fam Tour would showcase Warren

County attractions on Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup> and Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>. She said the Fort William Henry Resort would offer a dinner and reception on the lawn on Monday evening. She apprised the FAM Tour would highlight Saratoga Springs on Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup> with a reception at the Canfield Casino. She noted the FAM Tour would also include the Destinations of New York State Travel Show at the Saratoga City Center on Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> and Warren County suppliers were encouraged to exhibit at the show. As a result of the 2014 FAM Tour, Ms. Brand stated she was currently working on 2015 and 2016 itineraries for the following Tour Operators:

- ▶ Burlington Trailways from Burlington, Iowa;
- ▶ Tours by Design, Inc. from Hinckley, New York;
- ▶ Lakeshore Tours from Bowmanville, Ontario;
- ▶ Groups Galore from Ephrata, Pennsylvania; and
- ▶ Short Trips from Thornhill, Ontario.

Ms. Brand informed of the Brand USA Mega FAM Tour resulting from a partnership between "I ♥ NY" and Brand USA Germany to bring 80 travel agents on 8 routes throughout New York State. She said the Upstate New York portion of the FAM Tour would be held on April 20-26, 2015 and "I ♥ NY" had requested Warren County Tourism, as a Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA) to secure lodging and attractions for the travel agents. She stated 12 travel agents would come to this area and would travel from Saratoga via the Saratoga-North Creek Railway (SNCR) and stay overnight at The Wingate. She advised the SNCR would offer food products from Oscar's Smokehouse, Toad Hill Maple Farm and Nettle Meadow Goat Cheese Farm in an effort to emphasize authentic local experiences on the trip to the Hadley Train Station. She said they would meet John Duncan, of the Sacandaga Outdoor Center, to discuss outdoor adventure options. She added the travel agents would take a tour of Lake Luzerne followed by a tour and dinner at the Adirondack Pub & Brewery with a presentation by the Adirondack Craft Beverage Trail partners. The following day, Ms. Brand continued, the travel agents would tour Lake George Village and the Town of Bolton. She noted they would visit the Adirondack Extreme Adventure Course where the travel agents would have the opportunity to try the zip line. She added that lunch would be held at The Sagamore Resort before the tour continued on to Lake Placid. She thanked the partners who offered complimentary rooms and admissions because it helped the Tourism Department to showcase Warren County's offerings.

Finally, Ms. Brand displayed recent advertisements to promote group tours in Warren County and she commented she was working on the Meeting & Special Event Venue Planner. She said the Planner was being redesigned to be an online resource and would highlight wedding venues.

Mr. Girard displayed the new website to the Committee members and noted this was a Drupal website which was responsive to a variety of electronic devices. He said the new website was currently in phase 2 which would allow the modules to be custom coded for use by the Tourism Department. He pointed out the website would feature the top ten events in Warren County with a feature button on the home page. He said they were working on "view and submit photos" which would allow visitors to submit photos of their stay in the area as visual testimonials. He commented the new website had a persistent footer which would remain constant regardless of what page was being viewed.

Mr. Girard displayed recent Google Demographics to the Committee members and commented this used third party software to track demographics, such as age, gender, etc. He noted the majority of the visitors to the website were between the ages of 25 to 44. Mr. Girard informed the Tourism Department had acquired 11 photographs from Carl Heilman II Photography which would be used throughout the advertising campaigns. He commented these images were used on the website and

on the Seasonal Stickers created by the Department. He informed of the Warren County Tourism Department's new tag line, "Easy to Get to, Easy to Enjoy!". He displayed some images taken by the videographer at Gore Mountain Ski Resort to the Committee members and he said additional images had been taken at West Mountain Ski Resort and the Outlet Malls.

Pertaining to recent email blasts, Mr. Girard informed the Frosty Fun email blast had been released on January 7<sup>th</sup> to 128,277 subscribers and had been opened by 9,126 people in the three day tracking period. He said this email blast highlighted winter activities, winter carnivals and the 2015 Winter Brochure. He stated the Plan Ahead email blast had been released on February 16<sup>th</sup> to 129,891 subscribers and had been opened by 10,678 people during the three day tracking period. He added there had been a significant interest of 1,300 people in downloading the Travel Guide and of 500 people to receive it by mail as a result of this email blast. He said over 700 people had clicked on the link to download the Group Tour brochure and there had been an increased interest in the sponsor ads. A brief discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson introduced Tom Connors and Brandon Mallory, of Ad Workshop. Mr. Connors said he would complete a quick review of the winter campaign and Mr. Mallory would discuss some of the digital advertising that would be completed this summer. Mr. Connors displayed a map of the markets for the winter campaign and he noted the entire New York Metropolitan market was included, as well as from the Capital District to Syracuse with a concentration on shopping advertisements in Montreal. He stated the promotion website for the advertising campaign was [www.lakegeorgeny.com](http://www.lakegeorgeny.com) which was a fully adaptive website. Pertaining to the website statistics, Mr. Connors reported 90% of the people who visited were new; 60% used a desktop computer; and 40% used a tablet or mobile phone. He displayed the winter banner ads to the Committee members and he noted the ads had been created by Mr. Girard for the "Win an Overnight Stay" giveaway contest and to be aired with the television commercials. He displayed the full page takeover screen to the Committee members and noted this was run in all of the markets. He explained that when a person tried to log in to their email account this full page takeover advertisement was displayed. He commented Warren County Tourism had a 20% conversion rate for the full page takeover which was considered rather high.

Mr. Connors stated that an entire YouTube campaign had been run in Montreal. Mr. Mallory explained these were paid placements on YouTube and the target for the campaign had been people who lived within 35 miles of Montreal between the ages of 18 and 64 with interests in shopping; beauty and fitness; home and garden; savvy parents; books and literature; beauty mavens; cooking enthusiasts; do-it-yourselfers; foodies; and fashionistas (interest categories as listed by YouTube). He informed they had run two placements on YouTube, a 60 second and a 30 second video which had been run from November 5, 2014 until January 31, 2015. He said the two videos had produced 36,466 views with a cost per view of \$.03 and a little over 1,100 clicks. He expressed that these results were outstanding and the average cost per view was \$.10 to \$.12.

Mr. Mallory displayed the paid Facebook ad placements and he noted these were run as right hand rail advertisements. He explained these were the sponsored advertisements which appeared on the right hand side of the computer screen when someone was viewing their Facebook news feed. He informed the Committee members about "native advertising" which was a new trend in the marketing industry that involved placing sponsored content within the news feed posts on social media sites and he noted there was an intention to utilize this with the summer campaign. He explained that people generally found the native advertising to be less intrusive. He stated the Facebook ad placements had received 4,265 clicks and the cost per click had been \$.49. Mr. Mallory said they used the trade desk which was the automated buying of ads that he compared to a mini

stock exchange in real time. He mentioned the trade desk had been used for larger initiatives but also for a pre-roll video on shopping. He explained pre-roll videos were the advertisements which were imbedded before the user desired video content. Mr. Connors interjected that Ad Workshop ran about 20 different pre-roll campaigns for various clients and they averaged about 50% to 55% completion rate meaning the viewers watched the entire advertisement. He expressed that the pre-roll videos run in Montreal for factory outlet shopping had a 72% completion rate which he said was far and above the highest they had seen for any clients advertising with pre-roll video. Mr. Mallory stated that Canadians tended to watch the videos for longer, with a higher completion rate and a greater click through rate. He commented the pre-roll video campaign had run from November 5, 2014 until January 31, 2015 and had resulted in a 33% click through rate.

Mr. Mallory explained a fairly new marketing effort called re-targeting which involved redirecting website visitors to return to the website. He explained if a person went to a website, such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and placed an item in their shopping cart but left the website without completing the transaction then an advertisement would follow that user from website to website to encourage them to return and complete the transaction. He further explained the technology placed a pixel across the website to learn about user behaviors. He said when a person visited the website, they got "cookied" which alerted of any type of advertising opportunities regardless of what other websites were visited. He apprised this type of marketing effort was beneficial for the distribution of the Travel Guide. He explained if a person visited the website and clicked on or viewed the Travel Guide but did not sign up to receive one, then re-targeting could be used to encourage the user to return to the website for a free Travel Guide. A discussion ensued pertaining to marketing strategies.

Mr. Merlino said he wanted to plan a meeting of the local hoteliers and business owners to receive the same type of information that was given during this meeting. He stated it was difficult to show the hoteliers and business owners exactly what was being done to advertise the area and he felt they would benefit from the information presented today. Ann Marie Castellano, of The Wingate Lake George, stated it was a concern to the hoteliers if there was no increase to their occupancy rate. She questioned if there would be a significant decrease in the occupancy rates if this marketing campaign was not being run. She advised she had been trained to look for what you were not getting. She stated the occupancy rate was increasing but the hoteliers felt that it should be increasing more. She commented that Warren County had a 2% increase in occupancy and Saratoga and Lake Placid had a 7% to 8% increase in occupancy. She said that without the advertising campaign there could be a significant decrease in Warren County's occupancy rate. Mr. Merlino advised it was important to maintain the 2% increase in the occupancy rate and he noted Saratoga and Lake Placid were very different areas. Ms. Castellano expressed it was important to increase the occupancy rates during the shoulder seasons. Mr. Merlino commented that Saratoga did well for mid week occupancy rates due to the convention center which was an asset that Warren County did not have. He agreed there could be a significant decrease in occupancy if the advertising campaigns were not conducted. He stated the Tourism Department employed several talented people who were dedicated to their jobs. He opined that he did not feel as if the Department's efforts to promote tourism in Warren County were clear to the hoteliers and business owners. A discussion ensued.

Mr. Girard apprised that if a company was selling a product it was much easier to see that advertising was working based on an increase in the amount of sales. He said that advertising for tourism promotion was a little different because it was almost like an awareness campaign. He said the tourists could not book their hotel stays through the Warren County website and there was no end completion of their visit to the website. He stated visitors were able to obtain the information through the website, such as the Travel Guide or links to the various hotels but there was no guarantee that they visited the area or booked lodging with the hotel. He informed a lot of people

were attracted to the Warren County website and the top page viewed was the lodging page. He apprised that if people were taking the time to visit the website and view the lodging page then it was logical to assume many of them were visiting the area and booking hotel stays. Mr. Girard advised they were working on establishing a completion link which would allow for better tracking of the visitors' interest in particular lodging properties.

Mr. Brown informed he had been involved in hundreds of meetings at the County level and he was often asked if people were traveling and visiting the area regardless of the advertisements. He added his reply was that everyone was going to vote in November but campaigning for the election was completed for a reason. He stated the Lake George Area competed with other destinations and with indifference. He said the tourism marketing from a destination standpoint laid the pipeline but it was necessary for the businesses to step up and create a value statement which tapped into that pipeline. He apprised all of the tracking for marketing had to be completed at the point of the reservation and tracking was a partnership of building the systems on the websites and with staff and surveys. He mentioned a client of his that used the parking window tag issued to guests and included a small survey on the back of it which had provided valuable feedback.

Mr. Kenny exited the Committee meeting at 11:42 a.m.

A discussion ensued.

Christina Curley, Special Events Coordinator for the LGRCC & CVB (Convention & Visitors Bureau), distributed copies of her February 2015 Monthly Report to the Committee members; *a copy of the report is on file with the minutes*. Ms. Curley explained she dealt with the other side of tourism because she tried to attract meetings, special events and group tours to visit the area. She said her budget was larger this year and she intended to attend some new shows which were for associations and businesses. She commented she hoped to come back with some valuable leads from these additional shows. She mentioned she would attend some regional shows which would be attended by people who worked in New England, New York and New Jersey who would already be familiar with Lake Placid and Saratoga. She expressed one of the biggest issues with attracting meetings and special events to Warren County was the lack of a convention center. She said Saratoga had the City Center with a Hilton Hotel attached to it and five other hotels within walking distance. Ms. Curley stated she was trying to work with the available resources to increase the hotel occupancy in the shoulder season. She apprised another major issue was that not all of the businesses in the Town of Lake George were open in the winter months. She added most tourists wanted the restaurants and retail stores to be within walking distance of their hotel and with Lake George this was not the case in the winter. Ms. Castellano agreed one of the biggest issues with Lake George was that between October and April most of the businesses were not open except during the Winter Carnival.

Pertaining to her February 2015 Monthly Report, Ms. Curley said she had been working with the Northeast Campus Stores Association for more than a year for their November 2015 Annual Campus Store Education Program and Trade Show. She mentioned the group had decided to book with The Sagamore Resort . She advised she had also been working with ESSAE (Empire State Society of Association Executives) of which she was a member and she said last year's event had been held at the Holiday Inn in April. She apprised the ESSAE Annual Awards Dinner and Trade Show had gone well but there had been complaints about the lack of available restaurants. She said the ESSAE Annual Awards Dinner and Trade Show would be held here again in April of 2015 and was booked at the Fort William Henry Resort. She explained the CVB had recently become a "Platinum Key Supporter" for ESSAE which allow the LGRCC & CVB to be highlighted on the website and in their advertising and newsletters along with Saratoga. She expressed that a review of her February 2015 Monthly Report would show the associations, special events and groups she was working with to

provide business during the shoulder season. She advised the LGRCC was working on re-tooling their website to include an improved CVB page. She added they were also working on the website for the Festival Space. Ms. Curley announced that Frank and Mike from the television show *American Pickers* would be visiting the Lake George Area. She said filming would begin next month and the show was looking for leads for places with the types of items generally featured, such as vintage motorcycles, clothing, toys, signs, etc.

Fred Austin, of the Fort William Henry Resort/Best Western/Lake George Lodging Association, stated there was a plethora of information available in the Smith Travel Report. He said every franchise hotel belonged to the Smith Travel Report and provided them with the necessary information. He stated many hoteliers considered business to be increased if their revenue per available unit was up. He apprised the occupancy rate had remained flat in Warren County for the last 10 years. He opined that additional people were not visiting the area and the increase was attributed to an increase in the revenue per available unit. He asserted the occupancy rate for Warren County between 2008 and 2013 had decreased by 2.7%; however, he continued, the occupancy tax collected during that time period had increased by 1.4% and the average daily rate had increased by 7%. He said the question was what could be done to attract more tourists to the area and he indicated that preliminary work was being completed to answer this question. Mr. Vanselow pointed out that the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression had been between 2008 and 2013. He asked how Mr. Austin's figures compared to other areas and Mr. Austin replied that Saratoga and Essex County were increased by 5% to 8% while Warren County remained flat. A brief discussion ensued.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Conover and seconded by Ms. Wood, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 11:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist