

A scenic photograph of a waterfall cascading over layered rock formations in a lush green forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled light on the rocks and water. A stone staircase is visible on the right side of the falls, and a few hikers can be seen in the distance.

20 | ANNUAL 20 | REPORT

Tourism
Report

Chamber
News

Volunteers

Member
Highlights

Finances

Editor's Note: The 2020 Annual Report captures the work accomplished under the direction of two leaders: Rebekah Carroll, who was the Executive Director through July 2020, and Michael Hardy, who assumed the Executive Director's role in July. Each shares thoughts reflecting their time serving the Chamber, its members, and the community.

COVID-19 Pivot

Rebekah Carroll



I can't remember a scarier, more uncertain moment in my life than the moment that the Chamber team walked out of the Visitor Center on March 17, 2020. We packed up our offices, locked the doors, and hung a closed sign. At that moment, none of us knew what would come of the COVID-19 virus, how we would personally be changed, how America would be changed, how our businesses would be changed, and how our community would be changed. The one thing that we did know was that our business community would need a vibrant, optimistic Chamber of Commerce.

In the early stages of the pandemic, the Chamber team created new initiatives to serve our members' needs. Those new endeavors included the following new social media initiatives:

1. FLX-To-Go was launched immediately on Facebook and restaurants within the region were encouraged to post their special

offerings, to-go menus, and later curb-side pick up menus. The Chamber celebrated fast-paced growth in "likes," and that page was used extensively for the next year.

2. The FLX Rising initiative launched shortly after that in partnership with the Seneca Lake Wine Trail, Watkins Glen State Park, Grist Iron Brewing, Lakewood Vineyards, Captain Bills, and the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel. This initiative let the world know that although it wasn't safe to travel at the moment, we would be ready and waiting to welcome them with open hours to our wide-open spaces, our outdoor adventures, and our incredible lodging options.

In addition to social media, we increased communication to our members with weekly (sometimes daily) updates relative to PPP funds, NYS and CDC guidelines, grant opportunities, business updates, and much more. We created several new pages on our website offering those updates as well as links to valuable partners. We partnered with Congressman Reed's office to provide our business community with a one-to-one connection with his office that was providing meaningful, time-sensitive information. We connected individuals and business owners who were struggling to get unemployment benefits with Senator O'Mara's office who had a team dedicated to these efforts. We provided limited guidance on PPP and EIDL loan applications and made connections between our members and SCOPED for even more in-depth guidance on these topics.

We increased our educational efforts and launched our weekly Business to Business Meet ups via Zoom. We continued with an open-door policy for our members, and we provided support, additional promotion, and found answers for members when we didn't have them ourselves.

As our county, state, and world began to re-open, we breathed a guarded sigh of relief. Our business community was desperate to earn income, and we were there to support those re-opening efforts with our social media platforms, our weekly emails to our members, and our personal support. We partnered with Schuyler County on re-opening efforts, became a hub for distribution of masks and hand sanitizer, and we partnered with our business community on planning efforts.

We share all of these initiatives illustrating where we have been as a reminder that we are strong. We are community. We thrive on our connections with each other, and we couldn't be more honored to have been a very small part in you and your business' continued success!



A Successful Emergence

Michael Hardy

My first day on the job, July 15, was the middle of the pandemic. It was also the turning point and the start of what would prove to be a time in which many would thrive despite it being one of most challenging of times for all of us. I witnessed many a worried face on the first of many Zoom calls (a technology that was new to most of us and one we would depend on for the next six months and beyond) as we made every effort to inform, engage, and communicate with members, collaborators, and partners in business and tourism. “The Season” seemed bleak and then last-minute visitation spiked, and we were off to what might have been a record year if not for a reduced Spring.

Two of my favorite sayings during the summer and fall of 2020 were, 1) owners and managers were busy flipping burgers and changing sheets,” and 2) “We can thrive through this, not just survive it!”

I am thankful my predecessor was not only able to record her thoughts here, but also that the Chamber retained her for bookkeeping and council. Even though many of us went through periods of on-going trial and error to stay afloat and even keep operating “as normally as possible” having the institutional knowledge at hand then (and now) was comforting. I learned

very early that this community is resilient, determined, and has the stamina, and will to persist. I was (and still am) impressed by the spirit of collaboration and partnership that existed and were created with and by the Chamber, which is also the County’s tourism promotion agency.

Throughout the pandemic, WGACC maintained standing committee meetings dealing with immediate needs and long-term goals, released a weekly, relevant e-newsletter, and held Business to Business (“B2B”) events that began to take on a forward-thinking bend rather than only emergency responses and preparedness (although those were top of mind as well).

Small Business Saturday, Holiday Happenings and Winter Traditions & Holiday Lights Schuyler Style were activities and “non-event events” to let the world know we were open for business and that we were keeping people safe, businesses operational, and offering quality services and products.

Internally, many by-law changes, processes, and procedures were adapted, adjusted, and created to be sure our organization remained nimble, and -- even at half-staff -- we kept events, projects, activities, and engagement of both members and the public at a constructive, active, and vibrant pace. None too difficult of these was our first (and hopefully last) fully virtual Annual Meeting,



necessary to keep our 501(c)6 running smoothly and successfully.

Probably the biggest accomplishment in the second half of 2020 was the Simpleview website project for staff and members alike. This conversion was to have happened in March and had to be put on hold until the Fall. With much effort by Liz Salamendra, Katherine Jack, and myself, we got www.ExploreWatkinsGlen.com up, functional, and pretty to boot. There is a lot of work still to be done by staff and members, but it provides the two behind-the-scenes systems (CRM and CMS) necessary to convert information (mostly provided by members) into the information tourists need to choose our region as their destination of choice. I am very proud of the efforts it took to get us where we are, and pleased with the resources now available to fellow stakeholders.



2019-2021 Strategic Plan Score Card

Goal 1 Outcome #1

Focus on
Membership
Development

Understand the structure of our membership

- Membership Survey – COMPLETED in early 2020
- Analyze Results – COMPLETED in early 2020
- Present proposed plan to Board of Directors – COMPLETED in early 2020
- Deliver to members at the December 2019 After- Hours Mixers – COMPLETED in early 2020

Outcome #2

Incentivize key staff to prioritize retention and recruitment of members – COMPLETED in early 2020 but will need to revisit in 2021 due to COVID-19/the pandemic

Goal 2 Outcome #1

Optimize
Organizational
Structure

Retain talented staff for 3-5 years - With new staff in 2020, this is a continued focus in 2021 – ONGOING

Outcome #2

Pursue non-dues revenue sources in 2020 – ONGOING

- Cornhole Tournament – DELAYED to 2021 due to COVID-19
- Advertising Opportunities for member in the Annual Report - IMPLEMENTED in early 2020 and will continue to be ONGOING

Outcome #3

Utilize Board of Directors to its fullest capacity. The Board of Directors was increased in late 2020 from 9 to 15 members in 2021 – ONGOING

Outcome #4

Establish committees and events that are meeting our mission and operating effectively – All items COMPLETED in 2020/ONGOING

- All educational efforts consolidated under the Business & Education Committee
- Podcasts coming in April 2020 – DELAYED due to COVID-19
- Harvest Schuyler Program to transition to Cornell Cooperative Extension COMPLETED in 2020

Goal 3 Outcome #1

Enhance Efforts for
Government Arrairs

Create a Government Affairs Committee that is fully functional and is nimble enough to act upon the needs of the members – Efforts were paused in 2020 due to COVID-19 and will be revisited in 2021

- Research a potential partnership with Chemung and Corning Area Chambers of Commerce PAUSE due to COVID-19

Goal 4 Outcome #1

Streamline
Marketing Programs
for Chamber &
Visitor Center

Develop a website to better support the needs of our partners and member

- New logo – COMPLETED in 2020
- New website – LAUNCHED in 2020 (ONGOING enhancements)

Outcome #2

Better use of the advertising dollars spent by Chamber members and partners – ONGOING

Outcome #3

Better utilize the advertising dollars spent on behalf of Tourism Promotions – ONGOING

- Marketing Plan – COMPLETED in 2020

Outcome #4

Extend the Tourism Seasons – ONGOING (Example Holiday Happenings and Winter Traditions and Holiday Lights Schuyler Style in 2020)

Goal 5

Foster Unified
Community
Culture

Outcome #1

Improve the visitor experience while visiting our downtowns

- Create a plan – COMPLETED in 2020
- Implement plan – ONGOING

Outcome #2

Take a leading role in providing customer service programs for all businesses – ONGOING

Outcome #3

Coordinate and lead the development of a public relations plan within the county with appropriate partners

- Create a plan – ONGOING

Chairperson's Report

Well, we did it!

As chair of your board, I am happy to write that the Chamber got itself and its members through some of the most difficult and challenging days this organization and our world has ever witnessed.

I want to thank both our leaders, Rebekah, for her fine pivoting with a dedicated staff during the start and most unknown period of 2020 and the pandemic as well as to Michael, coming in during the handoff from a ten-year veteran of the Chamber to make the best of a terrible situation, motivating staff, members and even the board through the start of a new year still steeped in uncertainty.

Allow me to thank our members most especially. Our retention rate is high, you participated when and where you could and rode out the rough waters with us. That shows confidence and a spirit of partnership at their best. You are appreciated, and we are eager to see you find your silver linings as we have through 2020 and into a promising 2021. Be engaged and stay active.

Even with some adjustments and financial losses, movement of staff and ever-changing advisories, rules, regulations and laws that affected every category of membership and all aspects of life at work, home, and play, we united to do business safely and in each other's best interest, health, and we collaborated toward a bright and promising future. Your Chamber is on solid footing and eager to assist in your success.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MJS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Matthew Sharp
Cameron Manufacturing & Design
Chairman, WGACC



- Mission** To advance economic success through support, promotion, and education
- Vision** To be an invaluable partner and resource
- Values**
- Innovative
 - Member-focused
 - Committed to growth
 - Dedicated to excellence

Membership Facts

430

Current Membership Count

85%

Membership Retention Rate

11 YEARS

We have maintained the same membership dues structure consecutively

0 EVENT FEES

Our members enjoy attending a number of events at no charge.

Memory Lane: The Chamber is pleased to share updates from our members and partners. Please enjoy the following representative list of highlights from some of the Chamber's members and partners, released in 2020.

Barnstormer held its third-annual Farmed and Foraged dinner series.

The Finger Lakes Boating Museum hosted the author of "Steamboats on Keuka Lake," to kick off the year's free lecture series.

Painted Bar Stables hosted the Schuyler Equine Conference.

Seneca Cheese Company hosted several events, from Speed Trivia to live music.

Members of the Seneca Lake Wine Trail hosted events early in the year, including Global Eats and Local Wine and the Bargain Bash.

The Finger Lakes Farm Country Coalition hosted the third annual Taste FLXpo Premier Local Food & Farmer's Market.

The Arnot Ogden Medical Center and Ira Davenport Memorial Hospital earned certification as primary stroke centers.

Habitat for Humanity dedicated a home to a partner family.

IncubatorWorks sponsored the 2020 Entrepreneurial Summit.

The Schuyler County Historical Society celebrated the 200th anniversary of the women's suffrage movement.

Veraisons Restaurant at Glenora Wine Cellars hosted the ever-popular Celebrity Chef Pasta Night fundraiser on behalf of the Watkins-Montour Rotary Club.

Famous Brands introduced a personal shopper service.

Glenn H. Curtiss Museum opened a new exhibit, Snoopy and the Red Baron.

International Motor Racing Research Center Executive Director, Dan DeRusha, spoke on the “Legends of Racing Radio Show.”

Two Goats Brewing started the year with a full line-up of live music and retrieved those iconic “ceiling dollars” for charity.

The Corning Museum of Glass donated more than 3,000 masks, pairs of gloves, and safety glasses to help protect local medical professionals.

Elmira College introduced online classes to assist parents who found themselves tasked with teaching children at home.

All of our wineries responded to the pandemic with new options – including virtual events and curbside pick-up.

Rock Stream Vineyards began producing hand sanitizer.

The Rockwell Museum opened a digital exhibition entitled Create, Carry, Contain.

Seneca Harbor Station launched a grocery pick-up service.

Shtayburn Farm offered local delivery and curb-side pick-up services.



Sunset View Creamery announced the Creamery Club.

The Watkins Glen Public Library offered free wi-fi from its parking lot and streamlined the process for borrowing e-books and e-audiobooks.

Alternatives Federal Credit Union offered zero percent loans.

Bobby K played remote trivia on Fridays.

Boss Security introduced new tools to assist businesses with pandemic-related challenges.

Cayuga Health Healthcare Heroes participated in a medical mission to New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

Area restaurants and leading chefs introduced Dining Inside Out – a Virtual FLX Dinner.

Lively Run Dairy made milk into cheese for food banks.

Rasa Spa offered a virtual workshop discussing antidotes to anxiety.

Seneca Pure Waters Association hosted invasive species webinars.

CCE of Schuyler County conducted free energy studies.

HEAL Schuyler partnered with the Montour Falls Library and the Schuyler Historical Society to run a scavenger hunt.

Paradiso’s Village Bakery moved to a new location.

Deep Purple, an ale brewed with 100% concord grapes, was produced in collaboration with Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards.

Welliver projects received Associated General Contractors of America awards for excellence.

Former Chamber Executive Director Rebekah Carroll launched Statements Accounting and Consulting Services.

Seneca Lake Wine Trail and the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel partnered to offer weekday wine packages.



Watkins Glen International offered victory laps to benefit the RACE Foundation. WGI also announced that HSR would showcase its Group 5 class during the Masters Historic Race in July 2021.

The first-annual FLX Clean-Up was held.

Visions Federal Credit Union offered a series focused on fraud prevention tips.

Red Newt announced the Tadpole Pack, a new membership-based opportunity.

Finger Lakes Distilling covered their deck on the back of the building.

Chemung Canal Trust Company and the Chemung County Chamber of Commerce partnered to offer a webinar about changes to the State’s Human Rights Law.

The Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel hosted the ever-popular Ice Bar.

The Watkins Glen State Park was so busy at times that the Gorge trail that was running in one direction had to be closed at times.

The Chamber was pleased to participate in and support the groundbreaking at Clute Park in 2020, a TAP grant-funded project.

Finally, many thanks to Burr Consulting for consistently providing helpful guidance via his blog for business owners.

Events: On-site, Online & Hybrid



During the 2020 year, the Chamber organized a variety of events. All activities were presented in accordance with CDC and New York State guidelines relative to the pandemic.



iLead: The Base for Workplace Success

During the 2020-2021 school year, iLead served eight students and heard from five guest speakers. All activities were conducted virtually, including mock business interviews.



SPARK Leadership Summit

This annual conference was held on March 3, 2020. Ten speakers addressed 64 attendees with information in several general sessions and other breakout sessions. Principal session speakers included Arel Moodie, Founder and CEO of ReedOak, LLC; Judith Rowe, Principal of Judith A. Rowe Consulting, LLC; and Steve Burns, Director of Quality at Cameron Manufacturing and Design.

Leadership Schuyler

This educational program is organized by the Business and Education Committee. Thirteen speakers addressed 12 attendees at 11 sessions during the 2020 season. Session held from March to May were conducted virtually, and the graduation ceremony was held at Lakewood Vineyards.



Several events were held to raise funds for Chamber activities. The **20th Annual Donald Brubaker Memorial Golf Tournament** was held in September with 11 teams. The event was supported by one score card sponsor and one photo sponsor.



The **2020 Winter Gala**, “Whimsical Night in the Woodlands,” welcomed 228 guests. Held at the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel, the event was sponsored by Visions Federal Credit Union. Four awards were presented, including the Community Spirit Award to John King; the Leader in Business Award to Chicone Builders and Chicone Cabinet makers; the Lifetime Achievement Award to Ted Marks; and the Max Neal Award to Denis Fagan.

In 2020, the Chamber presented three **after-hours mixers**. The February event was at the Barnstormer Winery. In March nearly 100 people attended the event held at the Seneca Cheese Company, and in September, guests gathered at Plum Point Lodge.



The 2020 event schedule rounded out with the **Brochure Exchange**, which was held in the Village Square on Third Street; **Small Business Saturday** that partnered with 29 participating businesses to offer shoppers 26 days of “shopping small”; **ribbon-cuttings** at the Seneca Cheese Cutting and Paradiso’s Village Bakery; **B2B Meet Ups**, a virtual meeting series designed to support business leaders and owners with education and member connection opportunities; and **Talking Tuesdays**, also a virtual meeting held twice monthly that focuses on tourism-related issues.

After-hour mixers at (1) Seneca Cheese Company and (2) Barnstormer Winery. (3 & 4) Spark Conference. (5) Leadership Schuyler. (6 & 7) Winter Gala. (8) Farm Trail Weekend. (9) FLX Clean Up. (10) Donald Brubaker Memorial Golf Tournament.

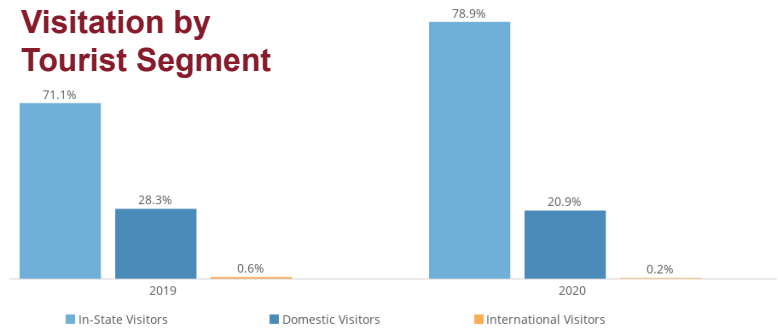
Phoenix Rising: Tourism Stayed Strong

Tourism is the life blood of this community. Most, if not all towns, villages, and the majority of businesses (profit and non-profit) depend on the revenues, sales taxes, and/or wages paid those who work in the hospitality, agritourism, and service sectors of this area. Fortunately, the assets most desired during this very difficult pandemic year were those so valued by the domestic traveler (the only travelers seeking us out) – both state and regional (2- to 6-hour drive) markets. The Finger Lakes National Forest, Watkins Glen State Park, and Clute Park as well as the shopping on Small Town USA Main Street, open air tasting rooms of our significant and adaptable wineries and breweries, and farms and lakeside eateries and attractions all drew

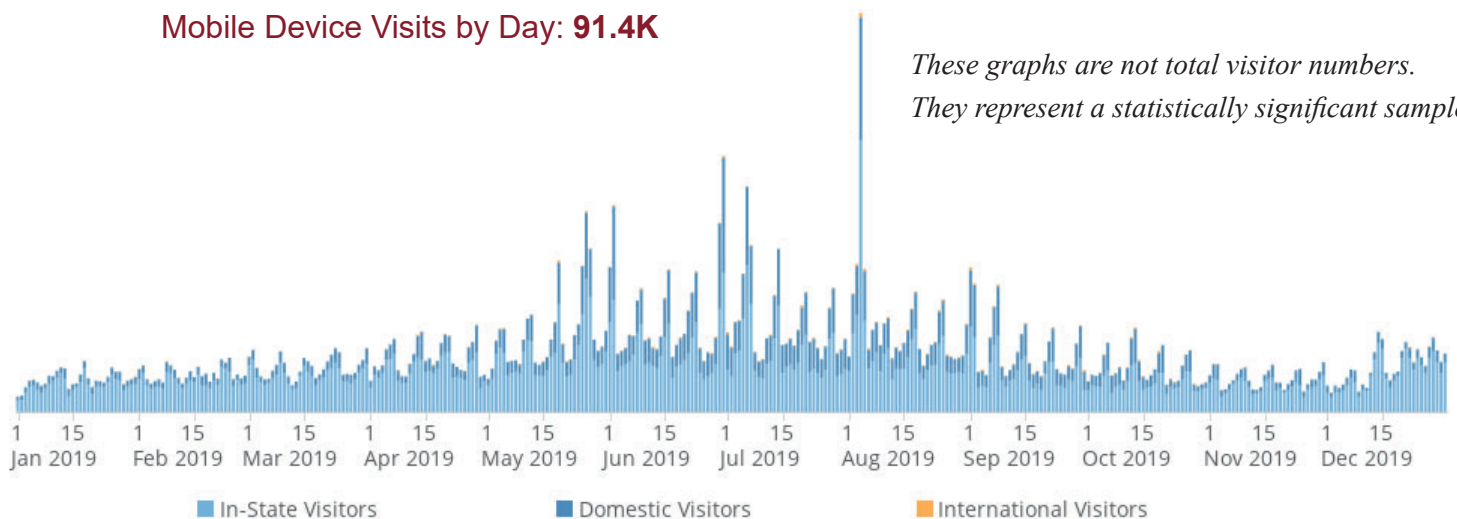
numbers we had not expected to experience. These visitors, some seasoned and loyal guests to our area, came for longer or repeated stays, and new guests discovered us for the first time. Many of them were happy to pay higher prices and

(Continued on page 11)

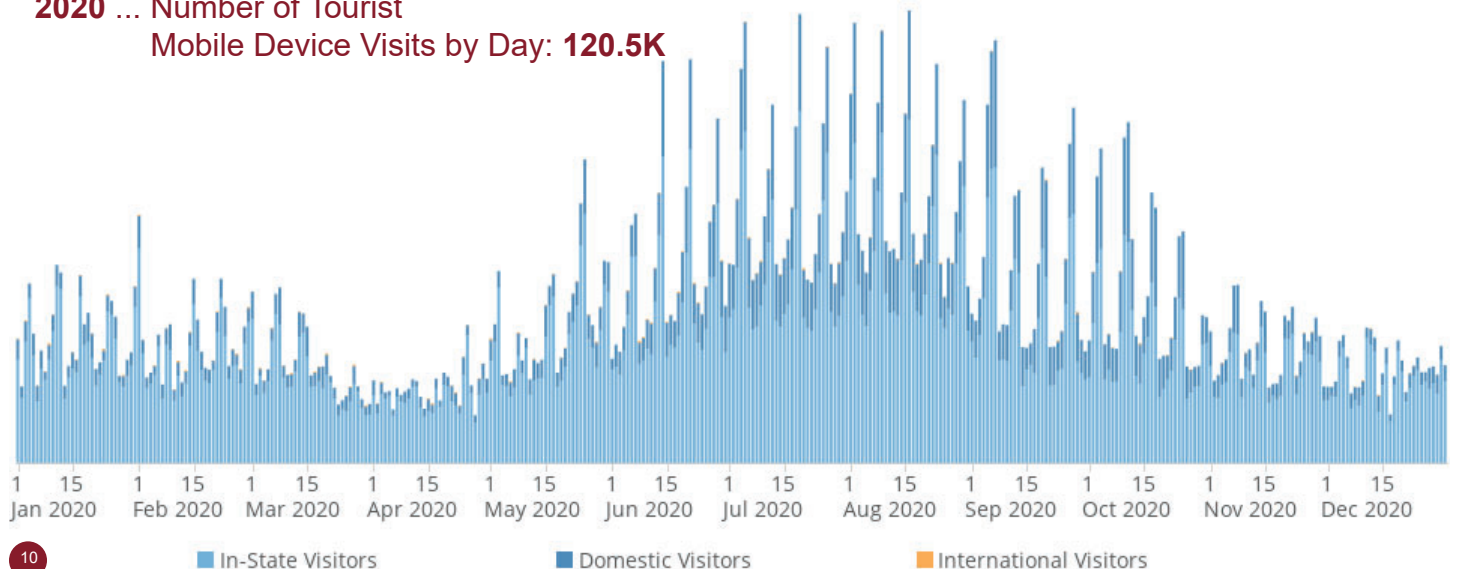
Visitation by Tourist Segment



2019 ... Number of Tourist Mobile Device Visits by Day: **91.4K**



2020 ... Number of Tourist Mobile Device Visits by Day: **120.5K**



Electronic Statistics 2019 & 2020

	2019	2020
Unique Web Visits	70,989	69,299
Phone Calls	4,114	4,195
214 N. Franklin St. Visitor Center Walk-Ins	19,827	10,206
State Park Visitor Center Walk-Ins	86,622	*
Travel Guide Fulfillments	19,640	10,175**

* Unable to staff, but member advertisers and brochures were present.

** Fewer printed pieces mailed due to wider use of new digital travel guide on www.explorewatkinsglen.com

robust fan-based business in 2021 (if not full capacity), we can predict an overlay of both years to explain what we are currently experiencing. We have witnessed our silver lining (likely many): the many visitors who fell in love with our region and what we offer will help spread the word to others and press them to come.

In the long-term, will the influx of visitors who come 1) over more prolonged “season(s),” 2) enjoy enhanced and likely changed-forever experiences, and 3) with a willingness to pay more valued prices, alter how and when we do business in tourism here?

We will not know until we end 2021, but what an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders to examine the three years after what could have been a devastating period, but that turned out to be a phoenix through/after the fire. The Chamber will provide the tools and aid in forging strategy in 2021 and beyond with its members, collaborators, and partners. Please join us. The Domo+rove mobile device data collection system WGACC purchased for 2019-2021 will be extended into 2022 (and beyond). There is much more information to glean that is sure to aid in marketing, staffing, promotion and event planning. There are close to two dozen points of interest with more detailed information to study to help in the cause as well, both in the county and throughout the region and state. Don’t just stay tuned, BE ENGAGED! GET INVOLVED!



The Finger Lakes National Forest was the most visited attraction in Schuyler County in 2020.

wait for experiences thought too costly or long by locals and previous visitors. Not only did they leave with a sense of renewal and bragging rights – they discovered what we already knew to be an amazing experience like no other and so close by – but they were certain to tell others and return themselves. At the date of this publishing midway into 2021, we are welcoming those new explorers back and welcoming them back with their friends and family in tow.

As you reflect on the two graphs (page 10) comparing and contrasting Schuyler County’s 2019 (a typical yet “record-breaking year” for visitors, their activities, and their spending) you will also see the surprising and quite remarkable close-to-record-breaking year (pandemic withstanding) experienced with very different activity in 2020. The 2019’s “Skyline of Singapore,” with high highs most attributed to WGI and other community events and mostly in “the Season” of 2019, was eclipsed by a more sustainable (and likely more desirable) “Rolling Hills” with more moderately (high) numbers of business spread from July through late fall/early winter (and through winter per 2021’s findings not shown). Given WGI’s opening for more

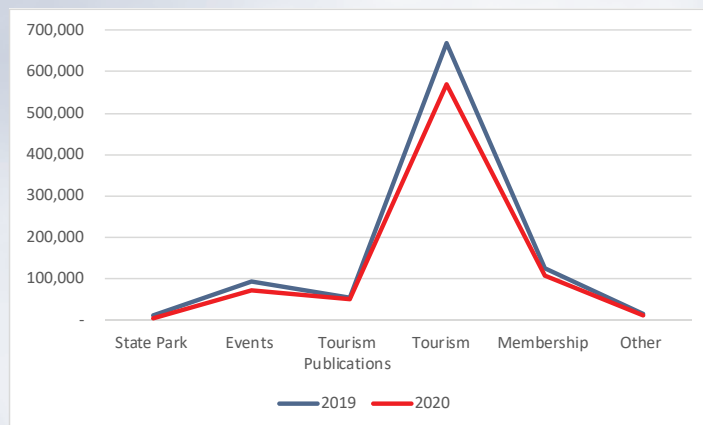
Financial Snapshot

INCOME

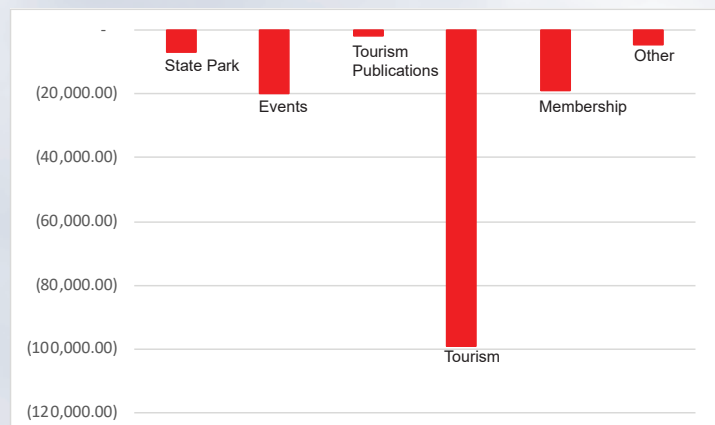
2020 **Total**: \$819,035.08

Like all of our members, the Chamber's revenue streams were significantly impacted by COVID-19. The chart below (left) shows the Chamber's revenue stream, comparing 2019 (the blue line) to 2020 (the orange line). The chart on the right shows the losses in each of the Chamber's revenue streams. The total loss of revenue in 2020 -- as compared to 2019 -- was \$150,947.43. Most lost revenue was from unpaid I Love NY matching funds, low sponsorship in advertising, and cancelled event revenue.

Revenue Streams



Change in Income by Revenue Stream

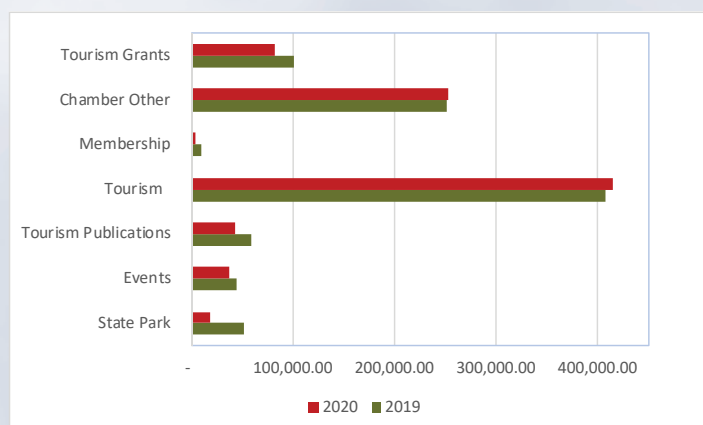


EXPENSES

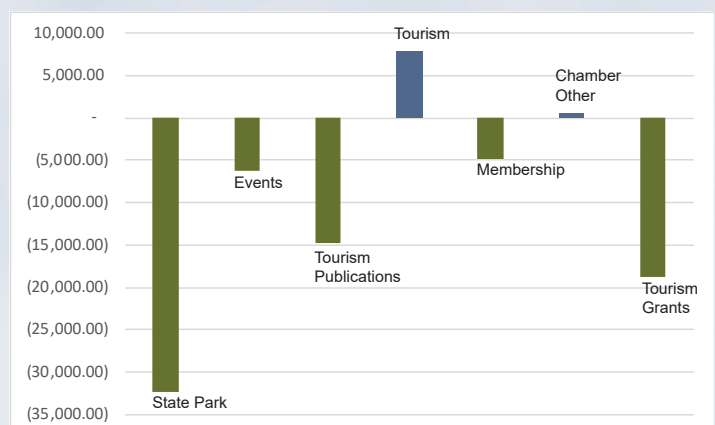
2020 **Total**: \$855,631.95

Also like all of our members, the Chamber worked hard to contain expenses during the pandemic. The chart below (left) shows the Chamber's expenses, comparing 2019 (the green line) to 2020 (the red line). The chart on the right shows the change in expenses, comparing 2020 to 2019. Green bars indicate a decrease in expenses; blue bars indicate increased expenses in 2020. The total change in expenses in 2020 -- as compared to 2019 -- was \$68,428.18. Most savings were from cancelled or postponed events and staff hiring freezes.

Expenses



Change in Expenses by Spending Category



Thank you to our 2020 Committee Chairs & Volunteers

Board of Directors

Matthew Sharpe, Chair

Scott Bell, Vice Chairperson

Raymond Lincourt, Second Vice Chairperson

Tracy Gates, Treasurer

Amanda Smith-Socariss, Secretary/Immediate
Past Chair

Brittany Gibson

Kerry Keller

Michel Ray

Ronald Roney

Carl Blowers, Ex Officio

Judy McKinney Cherry, Ex Officio

Business & Education ("B&E") Committee

Matthew Sharpe, Chair

Maggie Barnes

Dena Carrigan

Kaz Popovich

Sarah Robbins

Cindy Williams

Liz Zemak

Government Affairs Committee

Carl Blowers

Ann Bower

Phil Cherry

Anthony Fraboni

Jeannette Frank

Glenda Gephart

Carla Hibbard

Keith Klug

Judy McKinney Cherry

Adrienne Minichello

Mel Schroeder

Matthew Sharpe

William Yessman

Executive Committee

Matthew Sharpe, Chair

Scott Bell

Tracy Gates

Raymond Lincourt

Amanda Smith-Socariss

Golf Tournament Committee

Patricia Corcoran

Denne Johnson

Stephen Klemann

David Louch

Tourism Task Force

Carmella Hoffman, Chair

Dawn Aprile

Lisa DeSantis

Mary Hartzel

Stephanie Jarvis

Kerry Keller

Luke Leszyk

Ilona Marmer

Ronald Roney

Audit Committee

Brittany Gibson

Michel Ray

Ronald Roney

Finance Committee

Scott Bell

Tracy Gates

Matthew Sharpe

Amanda Smith-Socariss

Membership Committee

Dena Carrigan, Chair

Mary Hartzel

Mark Moskal

Michel Ray

Bill Stizman

Winter Gala Planning Committee

Michael Ray, Chair

Brittany Blair

Caryn Sharpe

Tyler Stevens

Stacy Woodworth

Restaurant Week Committee

Scott Bell

Rita Tague

Ambassadors

Josh Fuksman

Bryan Gilbert

Eileen Peet

Sue Silhan

Bill Sitzman

Natalie Travis

Jess Westlake

Strategic Planning Work Group Committee

Raymond Lincourt

Tracy Gates

Brittany Gibson

Kerry Keller



Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce - Official Schuyler County Visitor Center

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twitter.com/tourwatkinsglen