



# LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE

THE GREAT NORTHEAST JOURNEY

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## 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

I am pleased to report that our collaboration with National Geographic continues to further our mission to sustain and enhance the character of our region while promoting the region to a global marketplace. I am proud of how this dedicated Board and staff continue to foster both public and private partnerships while balancing economic development with destination stewardship.

This past year we have worked to further the connection between the Champlain Canal and local communities. In Whitehall, the NYS Canal Corporation, Town, Village and Friends of the IBA have agreed to operate the Whitehall Canal Harbor Park pavilion building as a visitor center serving visitors seeking birding, hiking, and boating experiences. On August 10th, we helped the Champlain Canalway Trail Working Group host a bike tour that looped from Saratoga National Historical Park to Mechanicville, Schaghticoke, and back to the Park. Over 50 riders enjoyed a beautiful day as they discovered this terrific recreational asset.

Our Board is very pleased with the results of the Lakes to Locks Passage Heritage Centers Strategy. Five years ago we began work with museums and facilities in Essex County to "meet and greet" visitors. These Heritage Centers have continued to implement skills learned through trainings and workshops to strengthen governance, interpretive programs and volunteers. Our recent survey with the facilities has shown measurable improvements in collaboration, capacity and sustainability. We are currently working to expand the program to institutions throughout the region.

Many thanks to all of you who have supported Lakes to Locks Passage during this past year. We welcome and encourage your involvement as we pursue our mission and vision, ensuring that Lakes to Locks Passage continues to be a great place to live!

Sincerely,

Randy Beach  
President

## HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2014

This year we were pleased to add Margaret Gibbs to our staff. Margaret previously served as the Director of the Essex County Historical Society and the Adirondack History Center. In that role she served as the Essex County Historian, gaining a deep understanding and appreciation for the communities and heritage of the Lake Champlain region. As Director of the Lakes to Locks Passage Heritage Program, Margaret is working with elected officials, non-profit community organizations, museums, libraries and cultural groups to establish a network of Heritage Centers that can serve as a catalyst for community revitalization and economic development.

Ilene Frank and Janet Kennedy attended all four of the Community Fund of the Greater Capital Region Capacity Building workshops led by the New York Council on Nonprofits. These workshops provided a wealth of information on organizational management and the requirements of New York's Nonprofit Revitalization Act. We are currently implementing many of the recommended policies and procedures, and working to secure funding to provide additional workshops that would share this information with our network of museums and non-profit organizations.

*The Lakes to Locks Passage Roadmap for New York's Great Northeast Journey* is designed to establish Lakes to Locks Passage as a premiere destination for national and international travelers seeking an authentic, place-based tourism experience. The focus of the plan is to utilize the branding of National Geographic's Geotourism program "Guided by Locals" to foster community pride and a commitment for stewardship of the region's intrinsic resources.

Through the co-branded online travel guide and strategic product development for national and international audiences, the places that are most respected and recommended by local residents are presented to visitors via thematic connections and multi-modal tourism opportunities. Lakes to Locks Passage has a diverse collection of resources, communities, stakeholders, interpretive themes, and opportunities for tourism development destination stewardship. The plan is designed to allow for multiple activities and experiences, that when promoted in a fully integrated manner, creates a larger "pie" for all to share. Activities over the past year have furthered the goals and objectives of the Roadmap.

### ESTABLISH A UNIFIED REGIONAL IDENTITY

- We continue to secure Waypoint Community resolutions, recent communities include Hoosick Falls, Elizabethtown, Keeseville, and Fort Ann. Drew and Margaret have been working to complete Waypoint Community kiosks and Heritage Center exhibits in those communities.

- We have been working with the Town and Village of Whitehall to build a partnership with the Canal Corporation

and Friends of the IBA to establish a Gateway Visitor Center at the Canal Harbor Park pavilion building that has a focus on birding, wildlife viewing, geology, hiking, biking and boating. As a follow up to the I Love NY Outdoor Adventure/Heritage Tourism Conference, we partnered with the Friends of the IBA as an I Love NY Watchable Wildlife Viewing Project. In May, we held a workshop with Jim Mallman of Watchable Wildlife, Inc. to develop a nature tourism program centered in Washington County, serving the entire Lakes to Locks Passage corridor.

- The Champlain Canalway Trail Working Group continues to facilitate inter-municipal agreements for infrastructure improvements. The Dix Bridge reconstruction is completed, the design for additional segments between Halfmoon and Schuylerville, planning for improvements in Whitehall with linkages to Lake Champlain and Lake George, and a promotional bike ride have been highlights of the year.

### DELIVER AN AUTHENTIC VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Lakes to Locks Passage established the Heritage Center Program through a network of non-profit community organizations, museums, libraries and cultural groups. Five years ago, the Heritage Center Program offered a series of workshops and one-on-one technical assistance to a "pilot project" of eight facilities in Essex County. The trainings addressed three primary areas of organizational management: leadership and governance; programs, exhibits and events; volunteers and community engagement.

This year, a follow-up survey of the Heritage Centers in Essex County revealed how these organizations have improved their operations. We found the trainings have served to reinvigorate them, elevate their commitment to serving their community, and improved their ability to have both residents and visitors appreciate their heritage. The survey also showed a strong interest for additional trainings and that collaboration is an essential ingredient for keeping museums open and alive.



This "Road to the Battle of Bennington" kiosk located on US RT 4 in Ft. Edward starts travelers on the thematic tour and was installed by the NYS Canal Corporation.

In November we are offering a workshop on “Sustaining Volunteers” with three components – recruiting, training and retaining volunteers; meeting and greeting the public; and identifying community stories that link our region’s shared heritage. Other outcomes of the workshop include identification of additional trainings to be offered and developing a “toolkit” to support Heritage Center volunteer programs.

- The “Road to the Battle of Bennington” thematic tour has been posted on our website under the “Experiences” category. Developed for the Washington County Historical Society, this tour links numerous sites from Fort Miller to Bennington Battlefield in Hoosick, with two interpretive kiosks to help guide visitors. In addition, Drew has worked with the Towns of Greenwich and Easton to apply to the Pomeroy Foundation to install two historic markers along the route.

- We are pleased to report that the American Battlefield Protection Program has awarded a grant to develop interpretive products that link key battles fought in northeastern New York and Vermont during the 1775-77 campaigns of the American Revolution. Tasks include developing a thematic guidebook, multimedia interpretation, and a “Toolkit for Battlefield Stewardship.” We are exploring opportunities to collaborate with Parks Canada to include the battlefields associated with the 1775-76 Invasion of Quebec.

- We have begun work on a grant from ESD/I Love NY to market Lakes to Locks Passage through radio and large-market websites. In addition, three mobile app “PassagePorts” will deliver thematic tours and we will translate brochures and museum exhibits into French to accommodate and facilitate our French-speaking tourism base in Quebec.

## CREATE A CO-BRANDED REGIONAL DESTINATION

The Lakes to Locks Passage/National Geographic co-branded website has succeeded in attracting visitors that want to explore “real America.” The website thematically weaves historic, natural, cultural and recreational attractions with the stories and scenic resources found in our towns and villages. With the strength of the National Geographic brand, we bring our marketing partners a globally recognized icon in sustainable travel and distinctive travel experiences. This year’s results include:

- The Lakes to Locks Passage Google Adwords campaign has had enormous growth over the past year. From Jan 1 to Sept 1, our campaign has had 21,110 clicks (compared to 403 in 2013), 2,652,702 impressions (compared to 161,089 in 2013) and a Click Through Rate [CTR] of 0.80% (compared to 0.25% in 2013). Our #1 performing keyword is “tourism.”

- Web-traffic is also on the rise. There is a 53.42% increase in sessions (visits), and a 61.71% increase in users (unique visitors). We have found that “Pages per Session” is down a bit and our “Bounce Rate” has increased slightly, this is likely due to the heavy traffic flow from Google Adwords.

- In April, Drew participated at IPW2014 in Chicago as a representative of the National Scenic Byway Foundation. Lakes to Locks Passage and Scenic Byways were very well received by the international community. Drew arranged a majority of the appointments, and met with delegates focused on fly/drive and self-drive sellers. As a result of our participation, we have generated a list of over 40 receptive operators, U.S. Commercial Service employees, as well as delegation lists from China, Italy and the United Kingdom to share with our managing partners.



At IPW2014 Drew used a binder and the America’s Byways “Come Closer” website to illustrate eight thematic itineraries in historic, natural and cultural themes.

- We have noted increased website traffic from India and Pakistan, this trend is also reflected in an increase of social media followers from those regions. The international tourism market is changing as middle-class income is on the rise in China, India and Pakistan.

- At the request of Parks Canada, Drew and Dee Carroll put together a boating itinerary for Lake Champlain that was published in *La Press Nautique*, a French-language boating magazine. Further conversations with Parks Canada has identified opportunities to develop thematic tours, additional website content, and cross-border tourism along the waterway.

- Janet continues to serve on the Board for the **National Scenic Byway Foundation**, which is working with the Federal Highway Administration to shape the future management of the Byway Program; increase awareness of the National Scenic Byways system; and advocate for financial support from public, non-profit and corporate partners. Drew has also been working on the Foundation’s Branding and Product Development Committee.

- Janet continues to serve on the **National Geotourism Council** (NGC) to building collaborations with Federal partners and National Geographic. *National Geographic Traveler* ran a full page ad promoting geotourism projects in their January 2014 issue. National Geographic is currently developing a new website platform for our projects that will improve our ability to develop and promote thematic itineraries and marketing campaigns with rich graphics including audio and video.

## SUMMARY OF FY 2014 GRANT ACTIVITIES

New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA) for two projects: "Services to the Field" for a series of workshops and trainings to museums in Washington, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Albany counties; and a partnership with Westport's Depot Theatre to create the audio narration for two "PassagePorts."

CFA/I Love NY grant for Promotional Audios and Public Radio Campaign; PassagePorts for "History, Health and Horses of Saratoga Springs" and "Seneca Ray Stoddard's Lake George;" and nature tourism exhibits for Whitehall's "The Crossroad of Nature and Recreation."

Pearsall Adirondack Foundation funding for multi-media exhibits in partnership in the Town of Moriah, the Iron Center Museum, Moriah Historical Society, the Moriah Chamber of Commerce and students from the National Honor Society at Moriah Central School.

Adirondack Foundation funding for workshops on nonprofit governance, volunteer management, interpretation, working with the media, and gift shop operations for organizations in the Lake George and Lake Champlain regions.

Lakes to Locks Passage has supported projects developed by many communities and organizations over the past year. These programs implement the Lakes to Locks Passage vision for unifying the region and instituting quality-of-life improvements, community revitalization and economic development activities:

- NYSOPRHP Bennington Battlefield resource survey
- Town of Westport Hamlet Historic District
- Town of Westport Town Hall renovation
- Town of Willsboro paved trail on Willsboro Point
- Friends of Saratoga Battlefield for Surrender Site
- Rensselaer Co. Historical Society Hart-Cluett House
- City of Cohoes Visitor Center Revitalization

### LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE, INC. FINANCIAL REPORT

	2013 Actual	2014 Budget
<b>Revenue</b>		
Balance forward	\$ 8,287	\$17,406
Grants	203,112	450,184
Contracts	18,150	136,750
Donations	2,020	1,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$231,569</b>	<b>\$605,340</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Payroll/Benefits	\$ 101,838	\$ 171,713
Consulting	85,396	350,131
Equipment/Supplies	3,345	4,500
Insurance & Accounting	8,531	9,700
Printing & Mailing	2,577	3,900
Phone, Internet & Web	2,619	3,000
Travel	8,645	10,400
Rent	2,136	2,886
Workshops	654	1,650
All Other	467	900
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$216,208</b>	<b>\$558,780</b>

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Lakes to Locks Passage, Inc. is not a dues-based organization as we want to serve all of our community members, regardless of their ability to pay. Therefore we appeal to elected officials, partner organizations, foundations, corporations and individuals to support the organization to the extent that they are able. We are extremely grateful for the support we have received in the past year from the following sources:

- Washington County Tourism
- Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce
- NYS Canal Corporation
- Rensselaer County Tourism
- Saratoga National Historical Park
- Adirondack Regional Tourism Council
- Stewart's Shops



PROGRAM SUPPORT



Lakes to Locks Passage is supported by the NYS Department of Transportation's Scenic Byways Program, one of the best State Scenic Byway programs in the nation. The Department's management of the Byway grant program has allowed numerous non-profit groups and municipalities access funds for implementation of the Corridor Management Plan, and has provided matching funds to Lakes to Locks Passage projects that provide a statewide benefit to the Program. We deeply appreciate the Department's staff support that has encouraged, and supported, Lakes to Locks Passage to develop an innovative approach and commitment to the grassroots management of the Byway.

## 2014 ANNUAL MEETING SPONSORS



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