



# QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2024



**BUFFALO  
CONVENTION  
CENTER**

# Q4 2024 SALES & SERVICES HIGHLIGHTS

## Mike Even Retires as VP of Sales & Services

In December, we celebrated Mike Even and his remarkable 30+ years with Visit Buffalo Niagara and the Buffalo Sports Commission. Mike's journey started with a two-year commitment as sales manager and transformed into an extraordinary three decades of dedication, leadership and excellence. He departs with a legacy of professionalism, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to his team and our community. Mike said, "I've had the privilege of promoting our city, building relationships across the industry, and working with some of the most talented people I know. To my beloved colleagues, clients, and friends—thank you for your partnership and support over the years. Buffalo is more than just a place on the map; it's a 'city of good neighbors' with pride, heart and resilience. I'm proud to have played a part in sharing that story."

On behalf of the entire Buffalo and Erie County tourism industry, we thank Mike for his invaluable contributions, tireless efforts and passion for Buffalo and Erie County throughout the years.



## Q4 2024 SALES AND SERVICES DEPARTMENT TRADESHOW ATTENDANCE

 <p>Annual Convention Las Vegas, NV October 7-10 Temekia Powers &amp; Meaghan Zimmerman</p>	 <p>Annual Convention Huntsville, AL October 14-16 Greg Gelinas</p>	 <p>Annual Convention Wichita, KS October 14-17 James Adler</p>	 <p>Flag Football Event Myrtle Beach, SC October 17-19 James Adler</p>
 <p>Annual Trade &amp; Media Mission London, England October 20-25 Leah Mueller &amp; Patrick Kaler</p>	 <p>Annual Tradeshow Niagara Falls, NY October 21-23 Meaghan Zimmer</p>	 <p>Annual Conference Attendance Building Verona, NY October 25-26 Karen Cox</p>	 <p>Annual Tradeshow Windsor, ON November 3-7 Leah Mueller</p>
 <p>Fall Focus Rochester, NY November 7-8 Meaghan Zimmer</p>	 <p>Annual Tradeshow Chattanooga, TN November 12-14 James Adler &amp; Lauren Vargo</p>	 <p>Conference &amp; Tradeshow Buffalo, NY November 20 Meredith Walsh</p>	 <p>Conference &amp; Tradeshow Buffalo, NY November 20 Meredith Walsh</p>
   <p>Greg Gelinas, Marisa Urbano, Meredith Walsh, and Meaghan Zimmer served as presenters for various classes at Buffalo State University, the University at Buffalo, and Niagara University during the fourth quarter.</p>		 <p>Annual Holiday Event Albany, NY December 4-5 Meaghan Zimmer</p>	 <p>Annual Conference Punta Gorda, FL December 8-11 Greg Gelinas</p>

## Leah Mueller Promoted To Vice President of Sales & Services



We're thrilled to announce the promotion of Leah Mueller, who has been managing and directing group sales since 2001, to vice president of sales and services! Mueller will take over her new role on January 1st, 2025. VBN's vice president of sales and services oversees the sales team, which works to attract meetings, conventions, and amateur athletic tournaments to Erie County. In her work as tourism sales director, Mueller expanded the domestic and international markets, arranging for group tours from Europe, Asia, and U.S. Her efforts helped grow the number of Erie County hotel rooms booked by visiting tour groups from about 2,000 a year in 2010, worth \$1.5 million, to this year's 19,000 room nights valued at an estimated \$14.4 million. This is an exciting new era in the travel business, said Mueller. "As tourism in Buffalo continues to develop and grow, there's never been a better time to be creative and bring in more groups – from tours to meetings and conventions to sports teams and championships," she said. "The sky's the limit."

## Trailblazers in Economic Development

We are proud to share that Visit Buffalo Niagara's President & CEO, Patrick Kaler, and Director of Sports Development, Greg Gelinas, have been recognized by *City & State New York* as part of their inaugural Trailblazers in Economic Development for 2024. The list highlights 100 individuals across New York State leading efforts to create jobs and drive local, state, and national economic growth. Patrick and Greg's inclusion reflects their dedication to advancing Buffalo's economic development through tourism and sports, further solidifying our region's position as a thriving destination. Congratulations to Patrick and Greg on this well-deserved honor!



## Religious Conference Management Association Leadership Site Visit



In November, Visit Buffalo Niagara hosted Harry Schmidt, CEO of the Religious Conference Management Association and other RCMA leadership, for a site visit and planning meeting. This visit marks an essential step in preparing for a July 2025 familiarization tour, where 25 planners will experience Buffalo as a potential destination for their

conferences and events. VBN staff members Meredith Walsh and Mike Even took the lead in hosting and guiding the site visit, showcasing Buffalo's unique venues, accommodations, and attractions. Their efforts highlighted the city's capacity to meet the needs of religious conference planners while delivering an exceptional experience for attendees. The successful visit reinforced Buffalo's position as an ideal location for religious conferences and set the stage for a productive and impactful FAM tour in 2025. We look forward to welcoming the planners next summer!



## James Adler Joins Adaptive Sports Committee

The Buffalo Niagara Sports Commission proudly announces that James Adler has joined the Adaptive Sports Committee. James brings extensive experience in sports development and a deep commitment to promoting inclusion in athletics. Through this collaboration, the Buffalo Niagara Sports Commission aims to support and continue to expand the destination's opportunities for adaptive sports in our region, ensuring that athletes of all abilities can participate and compete. We are excited to be part of this critical work, pushing the boundaries of what's possible in sports for all.

## Fall 2024 Restaurant Week

The Fall edition of Buffalo Restaurant Week was a tasty celebration of abundance, with 152 participating restaurants, a new high. The VBN Restaurant Week landing page posted 58,806 engaged sessions, and the average website engagement time was 2 minutes and 46 seconds.

Feedback from participating restaurants:

"As a new restaurant, the added exposure for our business, as well as the additional reservations and foot traffic, were beneficial to the future of our business," said Beacon Grille co-owner Amanda Wieszala.

"Participating was well worth it for us," said Evetta Applewhite, Oakk Room head chef. "It gave our restaurant the needed exposure to bring in both old and new customers. People took advantage of the specials going on."

Inchin's Bamboo Garden has participated in the last five Buffalo Restaurant Weeks. "It's worth the effort," believes co-owner Bobby Walia. "We saw an increase in traffic, and we will do it again."



## Hometown Touchdown In Philadelphia!

In October, Kate Scaduto, our marketing and social media manager, and Greg Pokriki, Be in Buffalo's Communications Manager, collaborated on an engaging activation at a Bills Backers Bar in Philadelphia, PA. The event was an excellent platform to connect with expats and Buffalo fans, showcasing everything under the #InTheBUF campaign. For those who couldn't attend, the *Hometown Touchdown* sweepstakes remained open. This exciting giveaway offered one lucky winner and their guest a memorable trip to Buffalo, including airfare, hotel accommodations, and tickets to a game in Orchard Park. This initiative strengthened connections with Buffalo's extended community while highlighting the city's vibrant offerings.



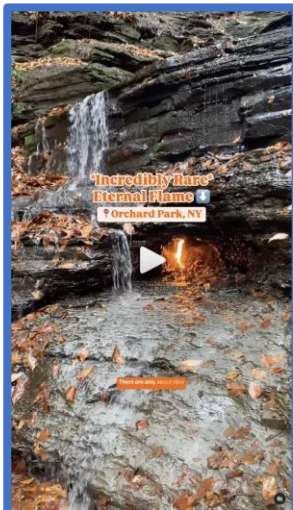
## Q4 MOST-VIEWED SOCIAL MEDIA VIDEO VIEWS

OCTOBER



National Pasta Day  
Total Views: 294,200

NOVEMBER



Eternal Flame Guide  
Total Views: 1,088,600

DECEMBER



December Events  
Total Views: 147,200

Other Q4 Social Media Video Content:

Fall Events at the Buffalo Convention Center

New Food at the Key Bank Center

Shopping Trip To Stitch Buffalo

Tom & Jerry Trail

Holiday Shopping in Lancaster

Holiday Shopping at Museum Shops

New Year's Eve

## EXAMPLES OF Q4 MEDIA HITS

### FOOD & WINE

**Buffalo's Best Kept Secret is a 100-Year-Old Ice Cream Parlor That Makes You Feel Like You're Stepping Back in Time**

Come for the sundaes, stay for the architecture.

By **Tori Allen** | Published on October 28, 2024



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CAN PARK SWIRE

### INDEPENDENT

**The hidden side of New York perfect for your next holiday**

The Big Apple is just one slice of New York State – **Hannah Stephenson** heads beyond the city to discover more



The hidden side of New York perfect for your next holiday  
Hannah and Grace on a bike tour of Buffalo

### THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

**Opinion | 5 great fall road trips in Ontario and nearby U.S. states for under \$500**



Visitors enjoy the Sculpture Court in the Wilmer Building at Buffalo AKG Art Museum.  
Sharon Carillon Visit Buffalo Niagara

#### Buffalo, N.Y.: Art is the attraction

Must visit: A city once renowned for chicken wings and football fervor has transformed into a vibrant cultural hub, thanks in part to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, now known as the AKG Museum. It has recently undergone a stunning \$200-million facelift that seamlessly connects the older 1905 neoclassical building and the 1962 modernist expansion (where you'll find its iconic pieces from the 20th century including works by the likes of Jackson Pollack, Andy Warhol and Frida Kahlo) with the new Jeffrey E. Gundlach Building, a massive circular structure luminously veiled in glass that expands the museum's exhibition space by 30,000 feet.

### LEISURE GROUP TRAVEL

**Buffalo Niagara Group Itinerary**  
Activities, Itineraries



**Take a Historic Journey Through Buffalo and the Erie Canal**

With 2025 being the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Erie Canal, Buffalo is a great place to see the canal and enjoy celebrations honoring its legacy. The celebration will culminate with the 2025 World Canals Conference in Buffalo, September 21-25, and the departure of the Seneca Chief, Buffalo Maritime Center's replica vessel that will reenact Governor Dewitt Clinton's 1825 inaugural cross-state journey along the Erie Canal to New York Harbor.

Readership: 13,753,411  
Shares: 104

Readership: 61,998,973  
Shares: NA

Readership: 853,152  
Shares: 861

Readership: 10,742  
Shares: NA



### AMERICAN BUS ASSOCIATION

**EXPRESS WAY: A Sneaky Cool Getaway**

Buffalo's modern renaissance surprises and inspires groups

September 30, 2024 | 3-min read



With its new sunlit galleries, stretches of green space, and stunning outdoor sculptures, the recently expanded and renamed Buffalo AKG Art Museum (formerly the Albright-Knox Art Gallery) in Buffalo, N.Y., is a showcase



**10 Most Picturesque Places In Buffalo New York**

**Forest Lawn Cemetery**



It might seem like a somber place for a photo op, but Forest Lawn Cemetery is renowned for its beautiful landscaping, serene ponds, and historic monuments, making it a peaceful and surprisingly picturesque spot.



**10 Most Underrated Cities in the United States**

By: Amanda O'Brien

**3. Buffalo, New York**



PC: AnoushkaToronto/depositphotos

Buffalo's economic slowdown inadvertently preserved its architectural heritage, creating a living museum of



Lucia's on the Lake  
Hamburg  
★★★★ 4.8 (385)

Readership: NA  
Shares: NA

Readership: 9,800  
Shares: NA

Readership: 10,667  
Shares: 10

Readership: 18,490,552  
Shares: 645

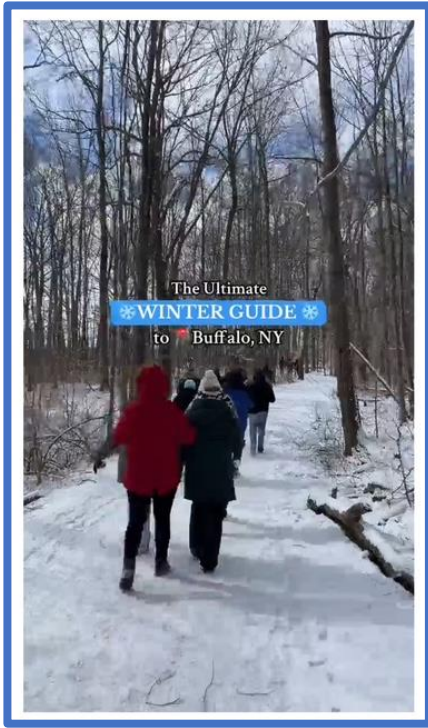


## Major Milestone: 90,000 Instagram Followers!

We're excited that Visit Buffalo Niagara has reached a significant milestone—90,000 Instagram followers! This achievement reflects the passion and creativity of our marketing team and underscores the importance of social media in showcasing Buffalo as a must-visit destination. Instagram's rising relevance as a visual storytelling platform makes it a vital tool for reaching local and global audiences. Here are our top-performing posts from the past month:

- **Sponge Candy Making at Watson's:** 220K+ views
- **The Buffalo Falliday Market:** 105K+ views
- **October Events Roundup:** 76.8K+ views

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to building our digital presence. This is just the beginning—stay tuned for more exciting developments as we continue to grow Buffalo's story on social media!



## Digital Winter Guide

Buffalo embraces winter enthusiastically, and our Winter Guide provides everything needed to make the most of the season. Here's a snapshot of what the digital guide has to offer:

**Winter Adventures** —The guide highlights snowshoeing, skiing, and sledding locations, such as Tiff Nature Preserve, Kissing Bridge Snow Sports, and Chestnut Ridge County Park. Visitors can also witness Niagara Falls State Park transform into a stunning winter wonderland as the fall's mist freezes on the surrounding trees.

**Local Hotspots** – After exploring, visitors can warm up at places like the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens, featuring the captivating *Gardens After Dark* display under its iconic tri-domed glass conservatory.

**Must-Try Comfort Food** – Buffalo's winter comforts include classics like spaghetti parm at Chef's Restaurant, traditional Friday fish fries at local pubs, and the rich, seasonal "Tom & Jerry" cocktail. These offerings are the perfect way to embrace the city's winter charm.

Our Winter Guide highlights the best of Buffalo's seasonal experiences, ensuring our region's residents and visitors enjoy all the magic of winter.



## Behind the Scenes of Social Media Strategy

Visit Buffalo Niagara's Drew Brown and Kate Scaduto stepped into a Sweet Home Senior High classroom to inspire the next generation of media professionals. During their visit to the school's Media classes, Drew and Kate shared their real-world marketing expertise, offering students a behind-the-scenes look at VBN's social media strategy. They walked through sample content and explained the creative process and strategic thinking behind every post. Beyond sharing industry insights, Drew and Kate also connected with students personally, discussing their educational backgrounds, career journeys, and their roles in VBN's success. A big thank you to Sweet Home Senior High School for giving us the opportunity to engage with these bright young minds. Partnerships like these help foster future talent and build lasting connections in our community.



## Hear Here: Live Music in Buffalo Podcast Features Music is Art Festival

The latest episode of *Hear Here: Live Music in Buffalo, NY*, Visit Buffalo Niagara's podcast celebrating Buffalo's rich musical heritage and dynamic live music scene, is now live! This episode spotlights the iconic Music is Art Festival and features interviews with festival founder Robby Takac of the Goo Goo Dolls, long-time performer Mike Farrow of Farrow, and Linda Appleby, a dedicated music educator and long-time festival attendee. Their stories showcase the passion and creativity that make Buffalo's music scene truly special. Tune in to experience how Music is Art continues to inspire artists and fans alike.

## SKIN IN THE GAME



Patrick Kaler  
President & CEO, Visit Buffalo Niagara

### Record-Breaking Visitor Spend In Erie County

In December, Visit Buffalo Niagara's Patrick Kaler, was featured on the WNED podcast *Skin in the Game* with hosts John Cimperman and Tim O'Shei. In the episode, they explored VBN's data showcasing the significant economic impact of sports at all levels on Buffalo and Western New York. From youth tournaments to professional events, sports drive millions of dollars into the local economy, supporting hotels, restaurants, and small businesses across the region. Patrick highlighted the upward trajectory of sports tourism and explained why this trend shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to sharing the current impact, Kaler discussed his vision for the future of sports tourism in Buffalo. He outlined strategic efforts to attract new events, expand Buffalo's reputation as a premier sports destination, and ensure continued growth in this vital sector.

### VBN Partners with FeedMore WNY for Holiday Food Drive

'Tis the season of giving! Visit Buffalo Niagara teamed up with FeedMore WNY to host a holiday food drive alongside our fellow



tenants in The Brisbane Building. FeedMore WNY plays a vital role in our community, alleviating hunger and supporting individuals of all ages through their food bank distribution center, partnerships with hunger-relief agencies, home-delivered meal programs, and other targeted feeding initiatives. To contribute to the drive, members of the VBN team took a trip to Wegmans Food Markets to help fill the food bins. We thank everyone who participated in donating over 500 pounds of non-perishable food in this effort to give back to the community.

### Industry Night at Wayland Brewing

Did you join us for the October Industry Night at Wayland Brewing? This Orchard Park gem has quickly become a standout in Buffalo's beer scene. It is known for its inviting outdoor space, great food, lively entertainment, and exceptional brews. Led by head brewer PJ Dunn, whose craft beer journey began in 2008 and includes experience at Thin Man Brewing, Wayland was founded with a simple mission: to create a place for people to gather. Alongside his partners Brad Rowell and Caryn Dujanovich, PJ has built a space that blends tradition and innovation. It was a fantastic evening celebrating our hospitality partners at this incredible venue!



### VBN Staff Participates in Blind Simulation Presentation with VIA

In November, the Visit Buffalo Niagara team had the unique opportunity to participate in a Blind Simulation Presentation led by VIA: Visually Impaired Advancement. This impactful session provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by individuals with vision loss and the tools and resources available to support them. VIA is a vital organization that offers

comprehensive services to assist individuals experiencing vision loss at any level and at any age. Its programs include a low-vision clinic, workforce development initiatives, vision rehabilitation services, and more—all designed to help clients achieve their goals and maintain independence. During the presentation, our team was guided through tasks without using sight, simulating what it might feel like to navigate the world with vision loss. The VIA team also demonstrated various assistive tools the visually impaired community uses, providing a greater understanding of how these resources enable individuals to live and work more effectively. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the VIA team for this informative and thought-provoking experience. Sessions like this enhance our understanding of accessibility and inclusion, which are key to serving our diverse community and visitors.

### Renata Toney Attends Annual CTA Summit

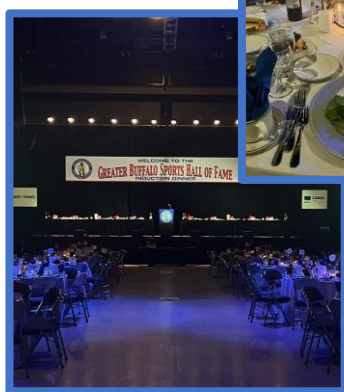
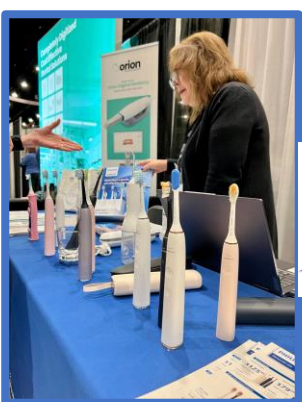
As Vice President of Destination Experiences, Renata Toney represented Visit Buffalo Niagara at the yearly Certified Travel Ambassador (CTA) Summit. Her attendance comes as VBN prepares to launch its CTA Program in 2025.

This summit provided valuable insights and best practices to ensure the program's success in enhancing visitor engagement and promoting Buffalo as a world-class destination.



# Q4 2024 CONVENTION CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

Sample Q4 of Conventions, Meetings, Banquets and Public/Consumer Shows Held



# VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Kimberley A. Minkel, NFTA – Vice Chair  
Thomas Long, The Westin Buffalo– Treasurer  
Thomas Beauford, Buffalo Urban League - Secretary  
Mary F. Roberts, Martin House - Immediate Past Chair

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Melissa Brown, Buffalo History Museum  
Daniel Castle, Erie County Dept. of Environment & Planning  
Matt Chiazza, Reikart House  
Anthony J.W. Chase, Buffalo State University  
Dottie Gallagher, Buffalo Niagara Partnership  
Mark Glasgow, Erie County Legislature Majority Caucus Appointee  
Patrick Kaler, Visit Buffalo Niagara – President & CEO  
Bob Karmazyn, Embassy Suites Buffalo  
William Paladino, Ellicott Development, Inc.  
Steven Ranalli, Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation  
David Schutte, Schutte Hospitality Group  
Don Spasiano, Trocaire College  
Michelle Urbanczyk, Explore & More Children's Museum

## VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA STAFF

James Adler, Director of Sports Development  
Jennifer Bialek, Executive Assistant to the CEO  
Jo Ann Blatner, Industry Relations Assistant  
Drew Brown, Marketing Manager  
Michele Butlak, Accounting & Benefits Manager  
Brooke Chavanne, Administrative Sales Assistant  
Karen Cox, Convention Sales & Services Manager  
Mike Even, Vice President of Sales & Services  
Karen Fashana, Vice President of Marketing  
Greg Gelinus, Director of Sports Development  
Brian Hayden, Senior Director of Marketing & Communications  
Nicklaus Householder, Destination Experience Specialist  
Patrick Kaler, President & CEO  
Michelle Kearns, Director of Communications  
David Marzo, Chief Financial Officer  
Leah Mueller, Director of Tourism Sales  
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Kathryn Scaduto, Marketing and Social Media Specialist  
Renata Toney, Vice President of Destination Experience  
Marisa Urbano, Convention Services Coordinator  
Lauren Vargo, Sports Services Manager  
Meredith Walsh, National Sales Manager  
Meaghan Zimmer, National Sales Director

## BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER STAFF

Melissa Burke, Senior Director of Sales  
Jeff Calkins, Vice President & General Manager  
Lorna Cullen, Office Manager  
Jamie Flood, Controller  
Megan Gummo, Sales and Catering Manager  
Patrick Kaler, President & CEO  
Craig Landseadel, Executive Chef  
Mary Ann Martin, Bookkeeper & Benefits Manager  
Mark McMahan, Maintenance Supervisor  
Heather Petrino, Sales & Service Coordinator  
Ken Sanford, Chief Engineer  
Christie Walker, Convention & Event Service Manager  
Cory Watson, Food and Beverage Manager  
Michael Will, Director of Operations  
Colleen Willis, Sales Manager  
Danielle Winiarski, Assistant General Manager  
Alishia Vega, Front Desk Receptionist



### VISION:

To be the most surprising destination you'll ever visit.

### MISSION:

Transforming our community by inspiring visitors and locals to discover Buffalo and Erie County.

## BUFFALO CONVENTION CENTER

### VISION:

To create memorable event experiences for our guests and be a catalyst for economic development and improved quality of life in Buffalo and Erie County.

### MISSION:

Delivering quality facilities and exceptional service through our warm hospitality, attention to detail and drive to achieve our clients' vision.

### Data Sources For This Key Performance Indicator Report:

Cervis Technologies

Cision

Google Analytics

Key Data

Madden Media

Momentum Technologies

Sales Force Marketing Cloud

Simpleview

STR (Smith Travel Research)

Tourism Economics

Zartico



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