

2016 – 2017 Annual Report

Dear Tourism Partners,

This year was another busy one for Tourism Sarnia Lambton. TSL was able to grow its digital marketing platforms, leverage bloggers and travel writers, promote events, and launch a retail shop. As Chair of the Board, I want to thank the TSL team for their hard work and dedication. As TSL continues to grow and evolve the staff continues to look for ways to enhance tourism throughout the County and to create unique experiences for visitors to the area. As Chair I get to work closely with Joy Sim-Robbins, Acting General Manager, and I have been very impressed with the leadership she has provided to the TSL team and her ongoing focus to build a foundation for success. I would also like to thank the Board Members for their support over the past year and their individual commitments to enhancing tourism throughout the County.

Sincerely
Karen Richards
Tourism Sarnia Lambton
President – TSL Board of Directors

Visitor's Centre

The NEW Visitor's Centre Retail Store has been mandated in 2016 by the Board of Directors. The Visitor's Centre Retail Business Plan was completed and includes the process of researching, purchasing and selling local products, souvenirs and giftware from our Visitor's Centre. Targeted Sales for low end and high-end items were considered when purchasing selection was made. High-end products are available in a limited quantity. As part of our lease agreement, TSL paid 5% of the retail sales to the Federal Bridge Corporation. Our purchasing research is ongoing in order to avoid competition with our tourism stakeholder businesses and the Ontario Travel Centre. The Ontario Travel Information Centre statistics confirmed that 82,715 visitors came to the centre in 2016.

Assembly Room Rentals

The Assembly Room was rented in the 2016-17 period, to a number of local organizations/business and generated an income of \$2,090 with 10% of the income being paid to the Federal Bridge Corporation as per our Lease Agreement.

Summer Student Program

Summer Job Grant for Federal Summer Student Program was received for two summer student positions – Special Event Assistant and Visitor's Services – May through August 2016.

Welcome Packages

Tourism Sarnia Lambton distributed 12,874 Welcome Packages to tournaments/conventions/meetings in 2016-2017.

Travel Guides/Maps

TSL printed 45,000 Experience Guides and 35,000 Sarnia/Lambton Maps in 2016-2017. Bulk distribution was 32,160 guides and 17,400 maps to Ontario Travel Information Centres, regional and provincial tourism events, welcome packages for conventions, newcomers and sports events, with distribution throughout Sarnia-Lambton, Canada, the U.S.A. and internationally.

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Social Media

Each year the excitement grows for TSL. In Fiscal Year 2016-17, the organization more than doubled its reach across social media while introducing new marketing elements to keep things fresh. 2016/17 highlights include:

Twitter - Grew Twitter following by 28.17% - Average 29,432 impressions per month

Facebook - Grew number of Facebook followers by over 3500, a 169.53% increase from last year

An average monthly reach of 123,712 Facebook users was reported for FY 2016-17

Instagram - TSL launched Instagram in July 2016 and reported a growth of 78700%. The viral success of the Discover Sarnia-Lambton video released across social media in July of 2016 has been viewed more than 290,000 times representing TSL's most successful digital campaign to date. TSL will continue to leverage the success of video across its digital marketing to further expand its reach.

Website

TSL continued to focus on generating maximum visitation to our website. With over 2000 pages of partner listings, information on regional and core attractions, and access to our printed publications, our dynamic website received a total of 980,343 page views and was visited by a total of 164,215 visitors in 2016-17.

We continue to drive traffic to our partners by offering free, linked listings to their website, ticket sales website, and social media channels. Listing data collected from this database is used externally with our Regional Tourism Office and other Regional Partners for themed publications, editorial, and newsletters which we submit on our partner's behalf.

Consumer and Partner Newsletter

Email marketing continued to be a large focus for 2016-17 with the organization growing its consumer database by 29%. The average monthly open rate for 2016-17 was 27%, 7 points higher than industry average, while the average monthly click rate was 7.3, 5 points higher than the industry average.

Partner – Over 750 tourism partners continued to receive important industry news and partnership opportunities through ongoing strategic partner communications.

Influencer Press Trips

TSL continued to focus on bringing qualified travel media and social media influencers to our region to put Lambton County on the map. In FY 2016-17, TSL brought in a total of 7 social media influencers from across the GTA and United States with a combined social media following of over 125,000 users to share what we have to offer with their audiences. The total combined posting from these press trips generated over 6 million impressions across social media.

Check out some of the blog posts below:

<http://www.lifestylefile.ca/2016/07/a-beach-vacation-on-budget.html>

<http://www.travelandstyle.ca/road-trip-exploring-ontario-southwests-blue-flag-beaches/>

<http://chicdarling.com/guide-canatara-beach-southwest-ontario/>

<http://chicdarling.com/guide-grand-bend-southwest-ontario/>

<http://anotherworld.com/main/travel/5-reasons-why-sarnia-lambton-is-a-fun-destination/>

<http://yourstrulyyinka.com/guide-downtown-sarnia/>

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Groups

Over the year we aided associations, organizations, tour operators and Sport groups/associations throughout Canada and the US. We will continue to utilize our relationships with Various industry association, such as OMCA (Ontario Motorcoach Association) and CSTA (Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance).

Sports Tourism – Sport Tourism is defined as an activity in which visitors are attracted to our area to participate in a sporting event, attend an event as a spectator or attend a sport and recreation attraction. Sports Tourism contributes significantly to the economic impact of tourism. It also raises our community profile, heightens our community spirit, and increases the usage of our community infrastructure

Some 2016/2017 Highlights;

- Inaugural Bluewater International Granfondo
- Ontario Ringette Association Provincial Tournament – Forest was the host
- Girls championship Qualifiers in Courtright
- Great Waterfront Trail Adventure - Lambton
- Hockey Canada Women's National Team Canada vs USA
- La Grande Traversée Cyclist - Lambton
- International Bauer Hockey Tournament
- Elite International Nations Cup Hockey Tour.
- 3 Ontario Cup Girls Soccer Tournaments

Provincial Pairs Lawn Bowling Championship, plus our annual tournaments such as;

- Waters Edge Soccer Tournament
- Stan Slack Classic baseball tournament
- International Power Boat Festival
- Triple Crown Wakeboarding Event
- Arena Cross Tour
- All Star Hockey Tournament
- Ontario Baseball Association's (O.B.A.) Senior 'A' eliminations
- plus our annual hockey, baseball, soccer, curling, rugby, football, golf, etc tournaments and events

Meetings and Conventions – Our key goal is to market our area as a preferred meeting and conference destination to the small to medium size meetings.

Some 2016/2017 Bids, Conferences & Meeting highlights;

- Habitat for Humanity 2018
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2018
- Ontario Chamber of Commerce Conf. 2017
- Canadian Institute of Management 2017
- Branch 62 legion District A Convention 2017
- Canadian Maine Anjou Cattleman's AGM 2017
- Optimist Club Sarnia Lambton 2016
- Kinsmen Canada Club 2018
- Air Force Club 2018
- Sarnia Sewing Conference 2018
- Lake Huron Hatchery Managers Mtg 2017

Motorcoach – Work directly with tour operators and group travel influencers to market and promote Sarnia Lambton as a viable group travel destination.

Some 2016/2017 highlights;

Our travel centre received 68 motor coaches between April 2016 to March 2017

TSL developed new itineraries for these tour operators to visit Lambton County.

- Anderson Adventures, Clio, MI
- Lakeshore Tours, Bowmanville, ON
- Hanover Holidays, Hanover, ON
- Custom Holidays, Allen Park, MI,
- Canadian Christian Tours, Burlington, ON
- London Historical Society Group, London, ON
- Great Canadian Holidays, Kitchener, ON
- Mae's Travel, Amherstburg, ON
- Robin Hood Tours, Goderich, ON
- MJ Tours, Grand Rapids, MI
- Jolly Tours, Ottawa, ON
- Rybicki Tours, Novi, MI
- Bradley Walters Tours, Kitchener, ON

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2016/17 Marketing campaigns with Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC)

Building on the refinement and the success of (SWOTC) marketing strategy from FY2015-16 of utilizing seasonal campaigns, FY 2016/17 saw further refinement to experiential focused campaigns highlighting our major experience categories; Beer, Wine and Culinary (BWC), Waterfront, and Ancillary. The campaigns geographically targeted primarily proximity drive markets including bordering U.S markets, Michigan, Ohio & Western New York and Southern Ontario Markets outside of Ontario's southwest including Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, Niagara, Oakville, Brantford, Hamilton and the outer Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The secondary geographic markets were the GTA and within Ontario's Southwest.

The two major experience campaigns, Beer, Wine and Culinary and Waterfront, made up the bulk of marketing in 2016/17 along with a smaller Ancillary campaign focused on tourism experiences (e.g. cycling, fishing, and camping), which may not be as well-known as its core experiences (e.g. beaches). The campaign tactics for both major campaigns included digital advertising tactics such as Google Advertising, Audience Targeting System display advertising, Facebook, Media Relations, Video, E-blasts, Social Media, and more; plus additional tactics unique to the individual campaigns

Cruise the Coast - Motorcycle

To go along with our marketing efforts we also partnered with SWOTC and a number of tourism organizations and operators on the Cruise the Coast experience. We reached our audience with the Cruise the Coast map, attended 2 tradeshows, participated in monthly newsletters and use other tactics to reach our audience with our web site (www.cruisethecoast.ca) and social media pages (Facebook and twitter) - Cruise the Coast - Ontario's South Coast .

The newsletter series had an average score of 7.1 in 2016 and 7.8 in 2017 on the Emma community; this usually has an average score of 7.0. All newsletters were opened on a fairly 50/50 split between desktop and mobile and were delivered to over 2500. TSL highlighted two major routes on the map, web site and newsletter; Cruise the St. Clair River and Lake Huron Route (Port Lambton to Grand Bend) and the Oil heritage Route (Sarnia to Florence)

Familiarization Tours

TSL partnered with SWOTC to host travel writer, Maria Lianos-Cardone, A Mother's World
TSL partnered with SWOTC to host Tony & Petula Fera, Let's Discover ON, produced a video
TSL partnered with SWOTC to host, Diana Tarasca, travel writer visit to Grand Bend
TSL hosted travel writer, Craig Ritchie, Lakeland Boating Magazine, featured article January 2017

Tradeshows/TSL Booths/Conferences attended:

- Food and Wine Show – Toronto
- International Motorcycle Show – Toronto
- Food and Wine Show – London
- Motorcycle Show - Cleveland Ohio
- Outdoor Adventure Show – Toronto
- International Cycling Show – Toronto
- Go Wild Show – London
- Kid Krazy – Point Edward
- Art Walk – Sarnia
- Canadian Sports Tourism Alliance –Ottawa
- SWOTC conference – Chatham
- Ont. Motorcoach Association Conference – Niagara Falls

TSL Staff List

Joy Sim - Robbins – General Manager (Interim)
Vicky Praill – Special Events and Sports Marketing Co-ordinator
Bev Horodyski – Product Development & Group Co-ordinator
Leona Allen – Information and Visitor Services Co-ordinator
Lesley Gelinis – Web Site, Systems and Signage Co-ordinator
Kyle Morrison – Social Media & Web site Development Co-ordinator
Chris Bregman – Administration and Marketing Project Co-ordinator