



PRESS RELEASE

VISIT SYRACUSE

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INTRODUCING VISIT SYRACUSE, INCORPORATED

From chamber affiliate to stand-alone tourism operation, Visit Syracuse now has its own Board of Directors and takes strategic steps to increase tourism

Syracuse, NY (May 16, 2017) – The oldest convention & visitors bureau (CVB) in New York State, has shifted away from its historical existence as a division of the region’s chamber of commerce to an independently structured Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). Visit Syracuse, formerly a division within CenterState CEO, has announced it is now operating independently as **Visit Syracuse, Inc.**

Why? Research Recommends It

In 2015, CenterState CEO and Visit Syracuse developed separate strategic plans to help improve their respective operations. Both plans came to the conclusion that Visit Syracuse would function most effectively as an independent entity, given its evolving mission and contracted relationship with Onondaga County. Additionally, the majority of DMOs across the nation (72 percent) already exist as independent entities, with several recently separating from local chambers to become stand-alone organizations. In New York State, Visit Syracuse was one of the last tourism bureaus of its size to be based within a chamber or economic development conglomerate.

“We were proud to be a part of CenterState CEO but as a DMO, we were following an old model, in terms of operation,” said Visit Syracuse President David Holder. “In order stay competitive against other destinations, we need to have a nimble, travel-industry focused organization to thrive. This new operating structure will optimize our ability to carry out our new, bold and unprecedented mission to drive tourism demand.”

The strategic plan provided a five-year vision on how Visit Syracuse, Inc. will promote and market Syracuse and Onondaga County as a unique travel destination for leisure, sports, events and meetings in a dynamic urban setting. After a nine month transition period, under the guidance of a transition committee, made up of local leaders, Visit Syracuse, Inc. became official on January 1, 2017. For the first half of the year, the Visit Syracuse team has been working to put the plan in motion.

ORGANIZATIONAL ADJUSTMENTS – WHAT’S NEW

Major changes will take place over the next several years but some of the immediate actions that are already taking shape include the following:

Separate Board of Directors

A newly formed, independent governing board of directors will help to oversee operations on the executive level. They will also take active roles by serving on advisory committees with the team. The following board members were appointed by regional tourism industry leaders:

- **Ed Brennan**, Beak & Skiff Apple Orchard (appointed by CenterState CEO) - **Chair**
- **David Aitken**, Destiny USA
- **Kelly Carr**, SMG/Oncenter
- **Frank Caliva**, CenterState CEO (appointed by CenterState CEO) - **Treasurer**
- **Bill Fisher**, Onondaga County Executive Office (appointed by Onondaga County Executive)
- **Tiffany Gallagher**, Crowne Plaza (appointed by the Greater Syracuse Hospitality and Tourism Association – GSHTA)
- **Ryan McMahon**, Onondaga County Legislator (appointed by the Onondaga County Legislature)
- **Kathy Rapp**, (appointed by the Onondaga County Legislature) – **Vice Chair**





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- **Troy Waffner**, New York State Fairgrounds
- **Danielle Neuser**, Fairfield Inn/Springhill Suites Syracuse (appointed by the Greater Syracuse Hospitality and Tourism Association) - **Secretary**
- **OPEN POSITION** – to be appointed by Onondaga County Executive

"This transition empowers Visit Syracuse with a dedicated board of tourism professionals to allow it to more effectively advance its efforts to create a strong quality of life in our region," said Robert Simpson, president of CenterState CEO. "At the same time, we will maintain strategic alignment on our shared vision of making this region a great destination to visit, live and work. We are committed to supporting Visit Syracuse and look forward to ongoing opportunities to work together as we celebrate Central New York as an exceptional place with many unique assets."

New Focus

Visit Syracuse, Inc. exists to influence, drive and respond to tourism demand. It is known to promote the area to event/meeting planners, leisure and business travelers – assisting more than 100 groups annually and contributing to more than \$850,000,000 of direct visitor spending. Some of the well-known events include Syracuse Ironman 70.3, United States Bowling Congress, Skills USA, Sweet Adelines Singing competition and more. Previously, the tourism bureau consisted of two concentrated groups – Sales & Services (events, sports, conventions) and Marketing (public relations, social media, and advertising). Now, the team will have three primary focus areas:

1. Brand Development
2. Prospecting and Conversion
3. Visitor and Partner Engagement

New Position

Starting immediately, Visit Syracuse Vice President of Sales Tracey Burkey, will move into a newly created position as the Vice President of Visitor and Partner Engagement. Burkey will lead the new Visitor Experience team, implement operational plans for all projects designated as visitor engagement, lead hospitality/visitor services, cultivate partnership development by overseeing a brand ambassador, manage Visit Syracuse's database that connects the organization to local attractions/tourism partners, and supervise visitor center operations.

What's Next

- Expanded Visitors Center presence
- Visit Syracuse, Inc. will remain funded through Onondaga County hotel room tax but will seek more sources of revenue – reinventing the funding model
- Employment Opportunities
- Building Syracuse brand awareness and reaching out to new markets
- Building the shopping brand as it is the #1 discretionary spending activity
- Increasing leisure visitation in all twelve months of the year with special emphasis on the winter season
- Increasing team sports tournaments/events during low room demand periods & leverage the university sports image to a sports destination
- Increasing conferences/events conventions to drive market compression
- Inspiring and encouraging the redevelopment and revitalization of existing visitor experiences
- Inspiring and encouraging the development of new visitor experiences that will inspire new visitors and extend the stay of repeat visitors
- Affiliate with local organizations

For more information, contact Visit Syracuse Communications Director Nikita Jankowski at 315-706-4443, njankowski@vistsyracuse.com.

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Historic Timeline:

- **1919** – Designated as the first CVB organization in New York State, merged with the Syracuse Chamber of Commerce
- **2010** – Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and Syracuse Convention & Visitors Bureau merged with an economic development organization to form CenterState CEO
- **2015** – Syracuse Convention & Visitors Bureau rebranded as Visit Syracuse
- **2017** – Visit Syracuse became independent tourism operation, Visit Syracuse

ABOUT VISIT SYRACUSE

Visit Syracuse, Inc. is Onondaga County's official marketing organization for tourism related economic development; leading the production of over \$850 million in direct visitor spending annually. The organization aims to strengthen the positive awareness of the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County as a convention and visitor destination; to increase revenues and stimulate economic development and growth for the community. If you want to know how much there is to do in Syracuse, check out visitsyracuse.com

