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## How to cash in on historic preservation



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Considering all the praise heaped on Buffalo and planners of the just-concluded conference of the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#), a big question remains: How does the region capitalize on the buzz generated by the more than 2,500 attendees?

The buzz, coupled with high-profile historic renovation projects such as the Hotel Lafayette and Statler City, has Western New York at a key tipping point in terms of cultural and architectural tourism. Hospitality and tourism leaders will operate under a powerful local microscope as people expect a larger cultural presence at area landmarks and hotels.

“Inevitably there will be a spotlight on Visit Buffalo Niagara (the former Buffalo Niagara Convention & Visitors Bureau) to see how they follow up on the convention,” said [Andrew Rudnick](#), president and CEO of the [Buffalo Niagara Partnership](#).

A Herculean effort was made to show off Buffalo and its architectural and historical landmarks to an influential crowd. Now local officials say the convention wasn’t the end of their effort; rather, it is the beginning.

“I see it as a new starting point for local and national recognition,” said Rep. [Brian Higgins](#), D-Buffalo. “I think there is a new level of local motivation to do something more than we’ve already done.”

He and others hoped the National Trust conference would serve various purposes.



Gary Burns

Buffalo made a name for itself with preservationists.

First, position Western New York on the radar screen of the lucrative cultural tourism market. There are signs that it's happening.

"On a lot of levels, the convention was a milestone moment and gives us a basis to build from," said Buffalo Mayor [Byron Brown](#).

Second, it would serve as an education to area residents about the value of architectural assets. That, too, is happening.

"I think the community is waking up to what we have here," said [Dennis Murphy](#), owner of the Mansion on Delaware. "Buffalo will never be a Daytona Beach, but we can be an important destination in the cultural tourism world."

Cultural tourism – one of the fastest-growing hospitality segments – can translate into big dollars. According to a study recently completed by the U.S. Cultural & Heritage Tourism Marketing Commission, the average cultural tourist spends \$994 per trip. Traditional tourists spend \$611 per person, per trip, the study noted.

A visitor survey conducted by RUF Strategic Solutions, meanwhile, was released this fall by Visit Buffalo Niagara. It found that those who attended such things as Garden Walk Buffalo and the National Buffalo Wing Festival have an average household income between \$175,000 and \$190,000.

That's why [Dottie Gallagher-Cohen](#), Visit Buffalo Niagara president and CEO, notes that the National Trust event offered a foundation for her organization to target new marketing efforts.

"Because of the (National) Trust, we can ratchet up the volume a little bit," she said. "The conference was part of a larger and longer-term strategy we have."

In coming months, the organization will embark on a targeted marketing effort that plays off the convention but also uses social media as a driving force.

"I'll be the first to admit we have a lot of work to do to take advantage of the moment," Gallagher-Cohen said.

It helps that Erie County Executive [Chris Collins](#) added \$50,000 to Visit Buffalo Niagara's proposed allocation of \$3.3 million in the 2012 budget. The extra money will be used for marketing, she said.

Collins said he is glad to see it take an aggressive approach to securing the region's place among cultural tourism spots.

"The beginning really wasn't today or the convention," he said. "It was work that Dottie and her people started a couple of years ago."

The region is beginning to see some payoffs. A joint bicentennial celebration of the War of 1812 is planned for next year in both Southern Ontario and Western New York. Also next year, [Jim Sandoro](#), founder of the Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum, will bring a portion of the “Great Race” centennial to the city. He also is expected to complete his Frank Lloyd Wright-designed filling station addition to the museum.

Both the “Great Race” and museum expansion are expected to attract many from the cultural tourism world.

Additionally, in the local pipeline is the 2014 Center for New Urbanism convention, which is expected to attract at least 2,000 visitors. That convention would not have come to Buffalo if the National Trust didn’t lay a foundation for it.

“We have the seeds for what should be an ongoing effort,” said Buffalo developer [Howard Zemsky](#). “This can’t be a once-every-decade thing. The conference should not be viewed as a culmination but, rather, a beginning.”

James Fink covers real estate, commercial development and government

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