

Higgins, Visit Buffalo Niagara & Destination Niagara USA lead discussion on economic impact of travel & tourism

Congressman Brian Higgins on Wednesday joined representatives from Visit Buffalo Niagara and Destination Niagara USA for a roundtable discussion led by the U.S. Travel Association. Western New York leaders, organizations and destinations chatted about the importance of travel and tourism to the local economy.

"As we continue moving toward a postpandemic world, remaining restrictions and measures related to COVID-19 at the U.S.-Canadian border are discouraging people from resuming cross-border travel at the same rate as before the pandemic," Higgins said. "The U.S. and Canadian economies have historically been connected by travel and tourism, especially in Western New York and Southern Ontario. In order to revive our local economies to their prepandemic levels, we must remove the barriers to travel, and return to northern border management that encourages the convenient and efficient flow of people between both countries."

Public Affairs and Policy Executive Vice President Tori Emerson Barnes said, "International travel

is key to our economic and jobs recovery, and Rep. Higgins has been a champion for safely restarting and rebuilding cross-border travel. The conversation today focused on what's needed to continue the progress that has been made. We're grateful to Rep. Higgins for his focus on the full recovery of this vital economic sector."

According to the U.S. Travel Association, domestic and international travelers spent \$2.9 billion while visiting NY-26, and supported 22,126 jobs in 2019. After the northern border closed in March of 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, travel-related spending dropped by 54% and job numbers dropped by 35%. In 2021, when the border began to reopen, spending by domestic and international travelers increased by over 76% in Erie County, and 109% in Niagara County.

Visit Buffalo Niagara President and CEO Patrick Kaler said, "Congressman Higgins has been a longtime champion for Western New York's tourism industry. His tireless efforts on the issues that impact Buffalo and Erie County's

visitor experience through tourism-related infrastructure projects, cross-border issues, and workforce development have been remarkable and will ensure regional economic success."

Destination Niagara USA President John Percy said, "We applaud Congressman Higgins and his endless dedication and passionate support of the tourism industry overall, especially here in Niagara Falls USA. His support and advocacy of tourism-related issues nationwide are imperative as we move forward in rebuilding our tourism economies."

In late June, the Canadian government announced it was extending current border restrictions until at least Sept. 30. Travelers must be vaccinated, and both Americans and Canadians are required to submit their health information and travel plans using the ArriveCAN app within 72 hours before arrival.

In addition to Visit Buffalo Niagara and Destination Niagara USA, participants in the travel discussion included representatives from the Buffalo Urban League, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area, Old Fort Niagara, U.S. Travel Association, Lockport Locks District, MusicalFaire Theatre, Merani Hotel Group, Niagara Frontier Transport

ation Authority, New York State Parks, Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House, City of Niagara Falls and the Aquarium of Niagara.

Higgins' team said he is "a vocal leader in advocating to end COVID-related restrictions and other barriers to entry at the northern border preventing our economies from returning to prepandemic levels. He recently wrote a letter to the U.S. Border Protection (CBP) Commissioner Chris Magnus calling for the agency to address the significant backlog for new applicants to Trusted Traveler Programs, like NEXUS, which allow expedited crossings for pre-screened travelers at the U.S.-Canadian border.

"Currently, there is a nearly nine-month wait for new applicants trying to schedule screening appointments at the Niagara Falls Enrollment Center, which finally reopened in April 2022 after a prolonged COVID-related closure. Higgins has spoken directly with Commissioner Magnus regarding the NEXUS backlog, as well."

Since the initial border closure in March 2020, Higgins has been in contact with leaders in both the U.S. and Canada, urging for "common-sense measures that encourage safe cross-border travel."

In November 2021, he met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding the testing policy at the Canadian border, calling for "a collaborative approach between both countries that will benefit both the U.S. and Canadian economies." In May of 2021, Higgins joined Visit Buffalo Niagara during Tourism Week to welcome the Canadian visitor back after the U.S.-Canada border was closed for over a year. In October, he spoke with White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeff Zients, seeking binational coordination at the northern border. Higgins followed up with subsequent letters to the Biden administration.

Additionally, this summer, Higgins joined local government leaders in Western New York and across the border in Canada in calling on the Trudeau administration to end the ArriveCAN mandate. His team said, "The app continues to cause headaches for travelers, deterring people from crossing the border for regular trips and tourism."

Higgins serves as co-chair of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group and the Congressional Northern Border Caucus. His district includes the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

COMPUTER PROBLEMS?



Friendly
Certified Computer
Repair Experts

Simply mention coupon
code 42513 and get

\$20 OFF

any service you need!

One time use only. Cannot be used in conjunction with any other coupons or offers. Coupon offer good until December 31, 2022. Valid for any new service except subscription fees. Must mention coupon at time of sale.

Geeks on Site

Call Now for a FREE Diagnosis
1-866-848-0045

FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT



Call 716-773-7676 today to find out how to advertise in our Fall Home Improvement section!

Grand Island PennySaver Sept. 14 • Tribune/Sentinel Sept. 16 • Island Dispatch Sept. 16

JOIN THE FUN AT THE
CUBA GARLIC FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 17-18, 2022



Plan your trip and discover more events at:
wnywilds.com



Live Deliberately.

Pecoraro: NT saves over \$750,000 in health care costs

The North Tonawanda Common Council announced it has saved the city more than \$750,000 since switching the city's health insurance brokerage firm to AssuredPartners (formerly known as Premier Consulting) in July 2021.

"I'm very pleased to see the council's leadership benefiting the residents of North Tonawanda on this issue," said Council President Bob Pecoraro who started this process in 2018 with then-Mayor Art Pappas. "I'd like to thank all those involved with this tough but fruitful process, including my fellow council members, the city accountant and former Mayor Art Pappas. The council would like to thank AssuredPartners for their diligent efforts, communication and significant results."

"For the first three quarters we have seen a savings of \$245,000 from pharmacy rebates alone," said Second Ward Alderman Frank DiBernardo, whom Pecoraro said was "instrumental in looking at the

numbers" and projected the savings impact on the city's budget.

DiBernardo added, "I'd like to thank former (Third Ward) Alderman Eric Zadzilka for assisting me with the request for proposal (RFP) to ensure we found an option that could fit our city's needs while getting a lower price."

He said he was optimistic about the prospects of the new change: "We can explore avenues to expand future savings in health care services with other appropriate entities, as well."

Zadzilka, who organized the wellness committee to explore health care options available for the city, said he was very pleased by the outcome.

"A major component was the introduction of the stop-loss coverage that would protect the city and its workers from unexpected costs from catastrophic illnesses and or costly medications," Zadzilka said.

He added, "Our workers' existing coverage was either main-

tained or improved. Especially with the recent economic downturn, record-high inflation, and a rising cost of living, we have to do what is right for our residents and workers.

"We cannot control the unpredictable rising costs of health care, but what we can do is find ways for significant cost savings now and in the future, while not jeopardizing our workers' coverage or digging deeper into taxpayers' pockets."

Pecoraro said Pappas was "thrilled by the news of the three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of savings."

"I'm pleased to see these yearly savings and would like to also thank the Common Council and the city accountant for getting this done before the end of my administration," Pappas said. "We have been placed in a position for success in an ever-changing marketplace. Thanks to their hard work, we found a right fit for both the taxpayers and workers of this city."

NT: Public invited to celebrate everything dog at 'Dogs Are People, Too'

North Tonawanda Mayor Austin Tylec announced the "Dogs Are People, Too" event will return to Carruthers Park in North Tonawanda for the second year in a row.

A press release explained, "Dogs are our companions, our family, our friends – and they deserve a day out for themselves just like people do."

"That is why, from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 3, at Carruthers Park in North Tonawanda, Mayor Austin Tylec, Sweet Buffalo to the Rescue, Diamonds in the Ruff Animal Rescue and Oliver Street Merchants Association are teaming up for the second 'Dogs Are People, Too' event for a celebration of all things dogs!"

Funds raised will benefit Diamonds in the Ruff Animal Rescue and help dogs from various rescues get adopted.

"Dogs give us so much friendship and love and nev-

er ask for anything in return," said Kimberly LaRusa, founder of Sweet Buffalo. "I want to celebrate our faithful companions and give them a special day to enjoy while helping homeless dogs find their forever homes."

The dog-themed event will feature activities like photo shoots for dogs with Tailor Mayde Photography, a doggy kissing booth, tips from dog trainers, a doggie bag for the first 100 dogs from Bellreng's Towing & Automotive, hair braiding from The Lash Loft & Beauty Lounge, food, music, shopping from local vendors, and adoptable dogs.

Organizers said, "Friendly dogs must be up-to-date on shots and leashed at all times to attend."

For up-to-date information, visit "Dogs Are People, Too" on Facebook at <https://facebook.com/events/s/dogs-are-people-too/1117990778820898/>.