

Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

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Lewiston Police Department survey finds strong support



BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

The Lewiston Police Department is currently reviewing the results of its just-concluded on-line performance survey with members of the Town of Lewiston community panel formed to comply with state mandates on police reform.

Announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in June 2020 in response to the police-involved death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and the resulting national protests, the state's Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative calls on LPD and law enforcement agencies throughout New York to "develop a plan that reinvents and modernizes police strategies and programs in their community, based on community input."

Those who fail to comply risk losing state funding.

In response, LPD has been working with the town-appointed committee representing a range of community interests to formulate a plan that needs to be submitted to New York state by April 1.

LPD Chief Frank Previte said the latest survey – the second such canvassing of the community – was intended to gauge its sentiment on performance and determine areas of improvement.

Looking over its results, Previte said he felt the 10-question survey fulfilled its goal of adequately representing the community's voice in a positive tone. A survey of LPD developed in 2015 by Niagara Frontier Publications found similar community support.

"I'm pleasantly surprised, to say the least. When I looked at that – we kind of live in a bubble
SEE LPD, continued on Page 12

Excitement for future of Fashion Outlets Mall

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO
Tribune Editor

In the year since the pandemic began, malls have been among the hardest-hit sectors of the nation's retail market. USA Today reports average foot traffic at the country's 16 leading malls was down nearly 50% in 2020, while CNBC predicts nearly 25% of malls will be closed by 2025. Nightly news reports on the subject are generally filled with doom and gloom images of empty malls and vacant store outlets.

Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA Property Manager John Doran certainly understands the grim sentiment. Unable to reopen until July, the mall endured a significant financial hit during the lockdown.

Yet, when it comes to the Fashion Outlets, Doran says there's actually plenty of reasons to be optimistic.

"We were extremely pleased with our January sales results. Many of our retailers met or exceeded what they did last January, which was pre-COVID-19," Doran says.

That seemingly surprising fact actually follows a national trend. CNBC reports mall traffic for the 2020 holiday season actually outpaced 2019 numbers. But there were other reasons to suspect the Fashion Outlets, specifically, would've had a tougher time rebounding. With the continued closure of the Canadian border and the virtual elimination of international travelers – two revenue sources the mall relies heavily on – it's hard to picture the outlets reaching those kinds of sales figures. Yet, as Doran notes, merchants did so amid reduced capacity and shorter operating hours, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
SEE NEW, continued on Page 9



Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA

Destination Niagara cautiously optimistic about 2021

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

John Percy and the Destination Niagara USA team hosted a webinar Wednesday to provide an update on travel, tourism and marketing in what will hopefully soon be a post-pandemic world.

"This week represents the one-year anniversary of when our world literally shut down, and the travel and hospitality sector has taken the largest brunt of the biggest decline we've seen in history," the agency president and CEO said. "But as we have witnessed in past crises, our industry is always the hardest hit – but always the quickest to rebound – and we are seeing that weekly through traveler sentiment surveys and the pent-up demand that is building. I do look forward to those flood gates opening real soon."

The coronavirus has forced people to work from home and on their computers. That habit seems to be sticking, as conference-type events have yet to rebound.

Vice President of Sales and Marketing Julie Gilbert cited a



"most concerning" Destination Analysts report that found "53% of business travelers currently agree they hope to not travel as much for work as they did prior to the pandemic."

Sales and Services Manager Reanna Darone said the pandemic has led to 20 rescheduled conference and meetings events (\$6.2 million economic impact), with eight cancellations (\$4 million) and eight additions (\$3.1 million).

She said a 360-degree video email was created and sent out within the industry to highlight safety initiatives and downtown meeting spaces, as well as concession promotions "to hopefully entice planners to book future business before the end of 2021."

Director of Travel Trade Sales Tina Mt. Pleasant said tour operators were polled during a webinar series, and "70% of them (50 total) replied that they were, indeed, planning on sending trav-

elers here in 2021." Even more encouraging is the uptick in recent hotel stays. "We witnessed a little bright spot with President's Day and Valentine's Day weekend," Percy said. "We saw our hotel occupancy climb to almost 74% – certainly a promising sign."

Though the Canadian border remains closed, Gilbert referenced a Longwoods International travel sentiment study and said, "Americans are increasingly showing signs of dreaming and planning travel, yet still leaning into those pandemic protocols."

Destination Analysts stated 71% of American travelers dreamt and planned travel last week.

As such, Destination Niagara is looking to draw people from New York state and markets within an eight-hour drive. Marketing will center on "staycations" and shopping at locally owned Niagara Falls USA merchants.

Percy referenced Gov. Andrew Cuomo's recent crowd-gathering changes when asked about the Niagara Region's spring and summer festivals.

SEE MARKETING, continued on Page 8

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