

# Link between the arts and tourism explored at conference

Improving cultural tourism would benefit all economic sectors, speakers say

by Kate Goldsmith

“Connecting Arts & Tourism” was the subject of a conference presented by Dutchess County Tourism and the Dutchess County Arts Council on April 27. Participants spent a morning at the Hotel Sierra in Fishkill listening to and sharing ideas on how to promote cultural tourism in the Hudson Valley.

“It’s time that we had this conference,” said Benjamin Krevolin, president of the Arts Council. “Today will be the first of many conversations we [the arts and tourism industries] will have.”

Cultural tourism utilizes a region’s arts and heritage resources to create a destination where the visitor will stay for an extended period of time. The focus of the conference was to highlight the economic benefits of acting collaboratively—not only to arts and cultural organizations, but also to hotels, restaurants and other businesses which visitors will patronize during their stay.

“Everything about cultural tourism is about partnership and working together,” said keynote speaker Barbara Steinfeld, vice president of tourism sales for Travel Portland. It’s about taking the performing and visual arts and heritage of a place and making it the hook that draws visitors. She used a wine term, “terroir,” to describe how a place needs to brand itself to become a destination. “Terroir” is the very specific set of characteristics—soil, temperature, moisture, etc.—that give a wine its distinctive qualities.

Steinfeld presented an equation that summed up the bottom line: “Heads in beds, plus butts in seats, equals bucks in bank.”

According to data provided by Travel Portland, cultural tourists contribute \$192 billion to the U.S. economy and represent 78 percent of the total U.S. leisure travel. Specific arts and heritage events or activities influence their choice of destination. On average, cultural tourists spend \$994 per trip, as opposed to \$611 for other travelers. Importantly, when they visit an area, cultural travelers will add unplanned arts and heritage activities to their itinerary, often extending their stay for several hours or even an additional night or two. This translates into a few more restaurant meals, probably some shopping, maybe another night in a hotel.

“Arts and tourism is economic development,” said Mary Kay Vrba, director of Dutchess County Tourism. In these tough times, she said, tourism is the No. 1 economic driver in the Hudson Valley, citing as an example that businesses who look to relocate to an area look at arts and cultural opportunities.

After Steinfeld’s presentation, conference attendees divided into three groups for breakout sessions focusing on specific aspects.

One, about creating community-based events that contribute to cultural tourism, highlighted the success of Rhinebeck’s Sinterklaas celebration. Often, community-based events aren’t distinctive enough to attract visitors from outside the area.

“There are cultural activities that are great for communities, but are not a

tourist draw,” said Krevolin, commenting last week on the conference. “We all love our local parade; we have a great time with our neighbors, but in terms of cultural tourism, not so much, because folks in Iowa have their own parades. But Sinterklaas is unique, so it can be a draw.”

Krevolin said Sinterklaas is a great example of how something can be developed on a grassroots level and can become a tourism focus. A key part of Sinterklaas, he said, is the personal investment of the talented professionals who happen to be residents, such as festival producer Jeanne Fleming and processional artists Sophia Michahelles and Alex Kahn.

“Because they are committed to this community, then something like Sinterklaas can happen because they can put their focus toward developing something [on this level],” said Krevolin. “That’s also reflected in the [Arts along the Hudson] tours and the artists studio tours. There’s great value to having artists in a community.”

## Thinking regionally

Another breakout session involved creating cultural tourism packages that work. Steinfeld encouraged regional branding for maximum impact.

In general, each county in New York markets itself through its own tourism promotion agency, although there is also a regional agency that markets for the 10-county Hudson Valley region.

Speaking last week about the April 27 conference, Vrba said, “We need to work with local constituents to build overnight packages, those things attractive to the visitor, and take that to a regional level. Build the regional product so we can go out and market that on a greater regional level and international level [through Hudson Valley Tourism].”

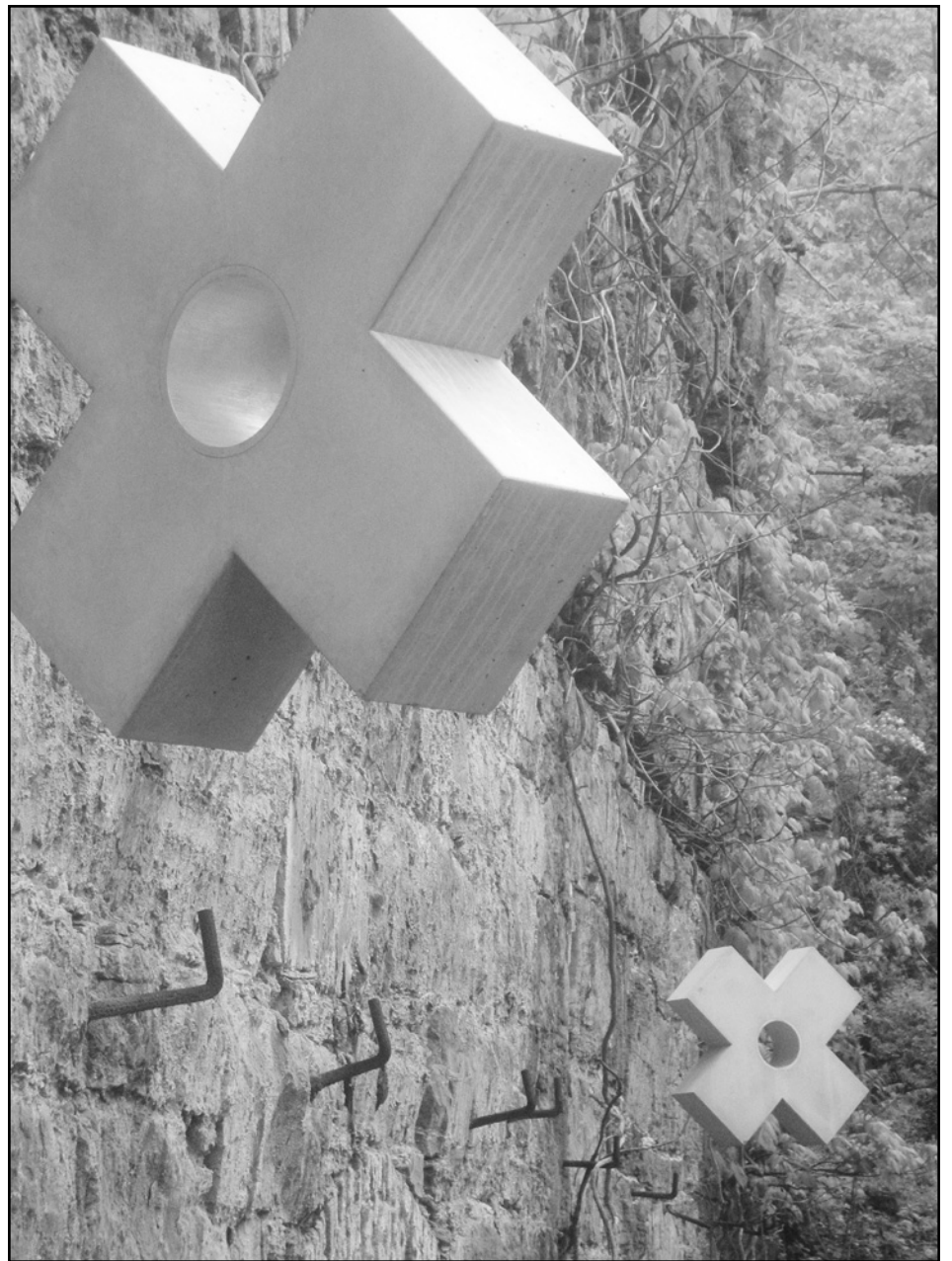
“I thought it was valuable to have Barbara Steinfeld, someone with an outside perspective, come in and give us a little bit of a critique,” said Krevolin. “I thought that was probably the strongest moment [of the conference], when she said, ‘I was looking at your [promotional] materials; they are a mess!’ It wasn’t vindictive; it was a fair assessment. I took that as sort of an observation for all these little initiatives: People aren’t coming to Dutchess County; travelers are coming to a region, and they don’t obey political boundaries.”

Krevolin said it was a wake-up call for all organizations to work together on branding the Hudson Valley as a cultural destination.

“What’s very complicated for Mary Kay and myself,” he said, “[is] we want to work toward that goal of regional personality; but the funding streams, and where our support comes from, works against us doing that.”

Krevolin noted that a mid-level, or regional, structure is not really in place in New York.

“We all have to figure out what the resources are to support something at the middle level. It’s very difficult to be working both on the county level and the regional level. Sure, there’s all kinds of great regional initiatives that can be done, but who’s paying us to do that? So, it’s a very tricky situation. But a strong message that came through Barbara Steinfeld was reinforcing this need for some kind of regional vision. Because we do have to figure out how



Designer Johnny Poux of Rosendale creates kinetic concrete sculptures that are the highlight of an event he and his wife created last year called “Concrete on Main Street.” Held in a local park, the event is set for May 15-16 this year. *Image courtesy of the artist.*

to link Storm King to Olana, for all kinds of political reasons. Lord knows, no one wants to create another bureaucracy; but clearly, this is an area where there’s much to be gained by investing those resources ... but right now, those resources don’t exist.”

## Creativity breeds success

The third breakout session focused on how two individual artists—Beacon-based composer Joseph Bertolozzi and modern designer Johnny Poux of Rosendale—have developed partnerships to create arts attractions that draw out-of-area visitors.

Bertolozzi composed a site-specific work, “Bridge Music,” from sounds he sampled by actually “playing” different parts of the Mid-Hudson Bridge.

“It was such a weird idea; no one understood what I was doing,” said Bertolozzi. “Everyone thought I was crazy.”

Not everyone, apparently. He convinced the New York State Bridge Authority to allow him to climb all over, even under, the bridge to strike various areas and record the sounds made; these were saved as sound files to his computer and incorporated into the 11 tracks that comprise “Bridge Music.”

Initially, Bertolozzi planned several live performances to be held during last year’s Quadricentennial celebration, using professional musicians staged at various points on the bridge, with satellite broadcasts going around the world. Unfortunately, Bertolozzi’s fund-raising campaign coincided with the worst recession in decades, and he was unable to raise the nearly \$2 million necessary to fund the project.

Nevertheless, Bertolozzi’s partnership with the New York State Bridge Authority resulted in the installation of listening stations on the east and west towers of the Mid-Hudson Bridge, where pedestrians can listen to “Bridge Music” by pressing a button. The composition is also streamed 24/7 at Waryas Park in Poughkeepsie and Johnson Iorio Park in Highland by tuning the car radio to 95.3 FM.

Bertolozzi released a “Bridge Music” CD that made hit No. 18 on the Billboard Classical Crossover chart and No. 39 on the Classical chart. This has expanded his audience; projecting out, it’s very likely to draw out-of-towners to Poughkeepsie. Another way he promotes the work is through collaborations with local restaurants, who have created menu items with “Bridge Music” themes.

“That was an easy way to get ‘Bridge Music’ to eyeballs all day long,” he says.

Thanks to a fiscal sponsorship with the Arts Council, Bertolozzi can raise money like a nonprofit organization without having to actually create one.

Johnny Poux has created an arts event, “Concrete on Main Street,” with a nod to Rosendale’s industrial history. Inaugurated last year as a one-day event attended by about 300 people, “Concrete on Main Street” features kinetic concrete sculptures designed by Poux, displayed in Willow Kiln Park for two days this weekend, May 15 and 16.

Why concrete? Poux did his senior project in high school on concrete; also, cement—the binding ingredient in concrete—is “the stuff that made Rosendale famous,” according to pro-

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Composer Joseph Bertolozzi explains how to use the "Bridge Music" installation on the Mid-Hudson Bridge. Pedestrians walking on the bridge can play any track from the composition on demand. Photo by Kate Goldsmith.

motional literature for the event.

"It's [Rosendale] a beautiful little town, a picturesque town," said Poux. However, he added, "It's a tough place to have a business."

Primarily a furniture designer, Poux said he was "looking for my next creative thing" when he and his wife explored the possibility of combining artistic expression with an event that could attract visitors to Rosendale.

In staging "Concrete on Main Street," Poux and his wife—"a grant writer and furious thinker"—have developed mutually beneficial relationships with town officials and local businesses.

"On a personal, artistic note, people in Rosendale are pretty town proud," said Poux. "They pull hard for their town. To do this event felt really right, to take some risks. There's a lot of creative expression."

"These are two possible ways you can apply your art to become a tourist destination," Krevolin said to the audience, comprised mainly of artists, after the presentation.

including: creating community-based events that stand out; cultural tourism packages that work; and incorporating individual artists and small organizations into tourism.

"I thought it [the presentation] was fascinating," said artist Monica Cohen of Ellenville. "I need to do art. It fills me. I need to know how to profile my art, or change my art, to make a living."

## Putting it all together

"I thought [Barbara Steinfeld's presentation] was great," said Cathy Temple, president of R&C Cleaning in Poughkeepsie and a tireless advocate for the arts. She attended the meeting because, as Immediate Past Chairperson for the Arts Council's

Executive Committee, she likes to keep in touch with all things art-related.

"I like that she said we need to get together as one big group. That goes along with 'leave your ego at the door,'" she said, smiling.

Reflecting on the conference, Vrba believes that Dutchess County has many of the requirements for cultural tourism.

"I think we have world-class destinations like Dia:Beacon, the Vassar Powerhouse Theater, the Fisher Center; even if you look at Walkway Over the Hudson for its architectural significance, this is going to be a draw," she said. "More important, once they're [visitors] here, all those other places like County Players or the Bardavon enhances their stay."

"The person who comes to visit Dia or Storm King is more likely to go to Maverick Concerts," said Krevolin. "That's the economic benefit of that. That's what this conference was meant to open a conversation about. How do we package what we have so that starts to happen?"

Krevolin thinks that everyone in the community needs to contribute to the solution.

"The folks on the ground need a better understanding of what's going on," he said. For example, if the person working the desk at a hotel knows a guest plans to go to Dia, he or she can suggest similar events that could enhance and prolong that guest's stay.

"They should be able to get into the mind of their customer and understand what the customer would like," said Krevolin. "That's also part of this idea: How do we begin to get these two sectors [business and the arts] to start talking to each other?"

## DC HazMat team takes top honors at statewide competition

POUGHKEEPSIE—The volunteer members of the Dutchess County Hazardous Materials Response Team (HazMat) recently won the HazMat Challenge 2010 in Montour Falls, NY. The event was part of the 17th Annual HazMat Training Program, hosted by the New York State Academy of Fire Science, held this year Feb. 19-21

The HazMat Challenge is designed to provide hazardous materials teams with an opportunity to practice typical response drills while competing against colleagues from across New York State.

Nine members of Dutchess County's HazMat Team participated in the challenge including: Alex Elie, Haz Mat team captain; Brian Hay, Haz Mat technician; Eric Phillip, Haz Mat techni-

cian; Nick Baisley, Haz Mat technician; Noel Dillon, Haz Mat technician; Steve Van Buren, deputy fire coordinator; Chris Cassidy, Haz Mat technician; Paul Bennett, Haz Mat technician; and Kent Amsden, Haz Mat technician.

As part of the HazMat Challenge, participants performed various HazMat entry-related tasks while wearing "Level A" Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), consisting of a self-contained breathing apparatus and a totally encapsulating chemical-protective (TECP) suit and providing the highest level of respiratory, eye, mucous membrane, and skin protection.

The tasks included:

•An over-packing exercise where the team placed a leaking 55-gallon drum

into an 85-gallon "overpack" recovery container;

•transporting a 55-gallon drum in and out of building over a distance of 200 feet;

•stopping a leak on a pressurized leak simulator;

•applying a chlorine "B" kit installation to a stimulated leaking one-ton chlorine cylinder

•liquid sample retrieval;

•decontamination of a contaminated patient.

Dutchess County's Haz Mat team scored a perfect "10" on the leak control exercise from all five judges.

"This event demonstrates how vital quality training is to effectively respond to emergencies," said Emergency

Response Coordinator John Murphy. "The County HazMat team is an integral component in our Emergency Response plan and we are proud to know we have the best in the state."

The Dutchess County Hazardous Materials Division consists of 25 volunteers, who are on call 24 hours a day to respond to and assist in coordinating and managing incidents when hazardous materials are suspected to be involved. This highly trained team meets all Public Employee Safety & Health (PEOSH) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements and responds within the Hudson Valley region as well as Dutchess County.

## State granted \$40M in Federal funding for energy efficiency retrofits

ALBANY—Assembly Energy Committee Chair Kevin Cahill (D-Ulster, Dutchess) recently announced that New York has secured \$40 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to make energy efficiency and renewable energy more accessible to thousands of New York homes and businesses through innovative financing models. The award, obtained through the leveraging of funds dedicated to the Green Jobs/Green New York program, will go

to the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) loan programs in participating municipalities to facilitate the installation of energy efficient systems in existing structures.

New York's \$40 million award is the largest of 25 announced today by Vice President Joe Biden as part of a \$452 million Recovery Act investment to "ramp-up" energy efficiency retrofits. The initial money for Green Jobs/Green New York of \$112 million came from the state's carbon emission cap and

trade program, known as RGGI (pronounced REGGIE). Green Jobs/Green New York, enacted by the 2009 legislature, was essential to obtaining the additional \$40 million in federal funds.

"Green Jobs/Green New York and PACE are designed to create jobs, lower energy costs for households, not-for-profits and small businesses, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions," said Cahill. "New York has once again demonstrated that it is a national leader in tackling the tough challenges of climate change

while creating jobs and a cutting edge energy economy for the 21st century."

The Green Jobs program also provides for job training and development, in conjunction with the trades and educators to develop a clean energy workforce. The program requires close coordination with labor organizations and community service groups to help create a career ladder providing the education, training and ancillary services that will allow the market to thrive long after federal stimulus funds have dried up.