



NIAGARA FALLS TOURIST HOME ASSOCIATION, INC.

President's Report

James Abbondanza

For so many industries, 2020 was a horrible year. 2020 brought a complete halt to tourism in NF which led to months of no guests, huge losses to income and in some cases people changed their STR business over to long term rentals or just sold their rentals completely.

2021 will bring some interesting new trends to our industry.

- 1) More people want to stay in STRs so they can socially distance with their own private space and still have room for an entire family at a lower cost than a hotel.
- 2) With China and India still unable to travel to the USA, we are seeing many more Americans from nearby states booking STRs. This is filling in the gaps from our missing international tourists.

However, with these changes comes new problems; specifically "locals" trying to book our homes for parties. As an industry, we are aware of this trend and do our best to mitigate its impact. AirBnB has implemented a few internal checks that help with this issue. Keep an eye out for (716) area codes or guests who live in NF, Rochester and Buffalo. This occurs mainly on weekends, one night bookings and holidays. Stay vigilant to protect your property, the neighborhood and our brand.

The NFTHA board has been working a lot behind the scenes, though we realized that we were not doing a great job communicating with our members. We have taken steps to change that with this newsletter and scheduling meetings more consistently. We are also open for any questions directly by email, phone and the Facebook page. If you have not done so already, please join the FB page as we post the latest news there first. Email us for the direct link - info@ntha.org.

Currently, our efforts with the City of Niagara Falls to help them develop a new ordinance is in the hands of the City Council. Please see Legislative Report (Page 3 in this newsletter) for information about our efforts.

Speaking of City Council, both myself and Colin Ligammari are running for City Council 2021. For now, we will both stay with the NFTHA in our current positions but will revisit this topic should either of us win a seat. We both believe strongly in the positives of STRs for this city, our neighborhoods and small business owners.

Thank you to all our members for renewing/signing up for the yearly membership. It is a small thing to join but has a huge impact with helping our ability to continue fighting for you and our industry. Our group of hosts need to have a strong voice in our City to protect all our hard work and our ability to continue operating.

MEMBERSHIP

CHERRISH BEALS

The NFTHA board has been working on several different membership initiatives for 2021 as we get organized and prepared for this year's tourist season.

Primary goals of the organization are to increase our membership and support and promote our local businesses. One way we'll be doing this is through an online guide book we're creating called "Where the locals go." See Community Relations Report, Page 4.

You may have received a call from me regarding renewing your membership. The more members we have the greater impact we can have in our community and our industry. Membership is just \$25 for the year. To be a member, you must be a permitted host property of either a STR or Bed and Breakfast.

What do YOU get for your \$25:

- Your properties that have a Certificate of Compliance (COC) will be listed on the NFTHA website to help drive more direct bookings.
- A window cling decal with our logo that says NFTHA approved that each member and business can proudly display.
- Legal and governmental assistance with regards to permitting and the city's ordinance.
- A digital image that you can use with your Airbnb/VRBO listings in order to show your home(s) are approved by the NFTHA and legally operating within the required guidelines of the local ordinance.
- Access to the NFTHA Facebook group so you can stay up to date on all we're working on, get industry tips from your fellow members and share your expertise.

You can do your part by completing an annual membership application on our redesigned website at nfta.org/application/

Complete your membership application by April 1st to ensure you receive your NFTHA Approved window clings and a magnet with the QR code and website for the "Where the Locals Go" guidebook in time for this year's tourist season.

NFTHA Saved Member Thousands of \$\$\$\$

Recently, a member was working on obtaining a Certificate of Compliance for a new property they had renovated. The City Inspector claimed that they needed to replace the windows to meet current code which would have cost thousands of dollars.

Another member had recently had this same experience and after researching NYS law was able to provide the state code requirements saying "No, this is not required" and get their certificate of compliance without having to spend thousands of dollars to replace windows.

They shared their experience which helped their fellow member also avoid the unnecessary costs.

I would say that is a good return their \$25 dues.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

MAY 16TH - MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

COOKOUT - EXACT TIME AND PLACE TO BE DETERMINED

Please reach out to Cherrish Beals to help with organizing the General Membership Meeting and Cookout to cherrish126@gmail.com.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

CARROLL SCHULTZ REETZ, CHAIRPERSON

On January 13th of this year, I reached out to all Council Members via email to address the state of the current ordinance and if there were going to be new attempts to revise it. Below is a copy of that email.

Dear Councilmen,

We understand that the Short Term Vacation Rentals ordinance will be coming up for review again in 2021 and that members of the council will be forming a committee. We expect that the Niagara Falls Tourist Home Association representatives will be a part of that committee. In preparation for that, we have been working on a version of the ordinance that will hopefully serve as a starting point for discussions.

We think that we can all agree on the following:

- This city has a myriad of serious problems (i.e. crime, blight, crumbling infrastructure and a poverty level above the average for a city our size), and Short Term Vacation Rentals are not one of them.
- While Short Term Vacation Rentals are not a serious problem in Niagara Falls, they do represent a growing source of potential income for a city that badly needs revenue to address the serious problems.

We have taken the current ordinance, the Mayor's proposed ordinance of this past summer, and spoken with our members to prepare a revised ordinance that takes into account the city's, community's, and operators' needs.

It is our fervent hope that this go round will be different; that revisions to the current ordinance will be done collaboratively, with all stakeholders, in an ongoing discussion (i.e. not just one meeting).

The Niagara Falls Tourist Home Association and its members are vested in this city and its neighborhoods. Our success and the city's success is dependent upon our working together to make our city better and our citizens more prosperous.

I have attached our revised version of the ordinance for your review. Please reach out to myself and/or James Abbondanza when you are ready to start discussions and committee meetings.

Sincerely,
Carroll Schultz Reetz

To date, the only response we received was from Councilman Spanbauer. There have been repeated rumblings that this issue of revising the ordinance will not be going away. On Vince Anello's show Mayor Restaino said that any changes to the STR Ordinance were in the Council's hands while at the same time saying it is up to them to approve or not, anything from the Administration. It was a vague statement that doesn't indicate whether the Administration plans to pursue their misguided attempts from last year. I think we can all agree that there are more pressing issues that the city has on its plate other than to trying to squash entrepreneurship and small business development.

While we do not wish to "poke the bear" we also don't want to be blindsided with a new proposed ordinance that does not take into account our interests. Since January, three current Council Members have announced they will not be seeking re-election (Touma who is stepping down this month, Chris Voccio and Bill Kennedy who will be running for County Legislature). This will most likely impact any movement on this issue. It is our intent to assure that our interests are represented in any future changes and work with the city for the betterment of both our industry and the city.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

COLIN LIGAMARRI

As part of our community outreach initiative, I have been working on what I've been calling the Small Business Boost!

In hopes to drive our tourists to our small businesses, we are offering direct marketing from guests to businesses with our QR code for \$65.00 annually. We (the hosts) will place our QR code magnet on the refrigerators of our homes. When utilized by the guest, it will bring them to a webpage (in progress by James) that provides the information and hours of the participating businesses.

The Association will provide all members a QR code magnet, as well as a window decal with our name and logo. This brings brand recognition to the Association as well as peace of mind to our guests that they are staying in a well-regulated home and are receiving trusted recommendations. The decals and magnets should be ready for pick up or delivery by April 1, 2021 for all paid members. More on that to follow.

We do have a large number of businesses that we are trying to get to in order to offer our marketing opportunity. If you have a favorite local business or would like to help out in this regard, please reach out to Colin at cligammari@yahoo.com

BEST PRACTICES CORNER

Guest experience is the key success driver. Cleanliness is a given but there are other factors that will yield better reviews and ratings as well as increase customer loyalty for those repeat guests and referrals.

In this newsletter, we are going to focus on THE BASICS

- Make sure you have complete and accurate listings and photos. Niagara Falls has issues, do not try to hide or gloss over them. Be honest if your house is in a "rough" part of town.
- Keep your availability calendars up to date. If you list on several platforms make sure your calendars are syncing properly.
- Respond quickly to questions and inquiries. Quick responses are more likely to get the booking.
- Make sure the directions to find your property are clear. Have someone try and find your property using the directions before you send them out to guests.
- Install a digital lock with long battery life. With 4 number key codes, use the guests last four digits of their phone number. They are not likely to forget it. It only takes a minute to change the code and gives them the added feeling of greater security.

NFTHA BOARD NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

CARROLL SCHULTZ REETZ

SECRETARY: The Board is pleased to announce its newest member, Sheila Zuni as Secretary. We are grateful to her offer to help as this is a very important position as the Association grows and becomes more formal in its structure.

BYLAWS: For some time I have been wanting to institute a set of Bylaws for the governance of the Association but last year's battle with the City Administration impinged upon my time and ability to develop and put forth Bylaws for the Association to adopt.

Recently though, I have prepared a first draft of Bylaws that is being reviewed by the Board and several of our members. Bylaws serve as a framework for how the Association will operate. They will define our principals and provide rules for governance. I expect they will go through several revisions during the next month, but they will be ready for the General Membership to vote on in May.

MEETINGS: The Board continues to meet monthly online. However, there has been much discussion as to how to hold general membership meetings and make sure as many members as possible can attend. ZOOM has come up so we would like to know if that is a viable option for you. If so, please let me know at ecarroll.schultz@gmail.com so I can get a count.

As the season approaches, we know that scheduling a time that fits all our busy schedules is difficult but it is our hope that we will be able to conduct General Membership Meetings at least 3 times per year.

- Give guests, vendors, and anyone else entering your property their own unique code.
- The number one thing guests want is a clean home. Even great cleaners miss things occasionally. Inspect the cleaning jobs.
- Make sure all the supplies are restocked and that the property is ready for your guests to have a once-in-a-lifetime trip. It is your reputation, so doing a final walk through prior to a guest arriving is well worth the time/effort.
- Provide your guests with a guidebook of local eats and things to do. The Association is currently working on one for our members.