Media Brief Planning Document

Submission details	
Your name	Ben Kenna
Group or organization name	Visit Finger Lakes
Scenario	“Wine Region of the Year: Elevating Excellence”
Your speaking role	Sam Filler

Insert your organization’s logo here.

1 Event Logistics

Give the time, date, and place of the briefing. List each speaker’s name and title. You will represent these real people during the briefing.

Detail	Your answer
Date	Oct. 27, 2026
Time	9:30 a.m.
Place	New York Kitchen, 800 S Main St. Canandaigua, NY 14424

Speaker name	Title	Speaking role
Tracey Dello Stritto	President and CEO, Finger Lakes Visitors Connection (Visit Finger Lakes)	Opens the briefing, covers the 2026 timeline, Wine Academy, and culinary partnerships, and hosts interviews
Ross D. Levi	Executive Director of Tourism, Empire State Development	Represents New York State, covers public infrastructure, how it is funded, the economic impact, and the international markets
Amy Navor	Executive director of Finger lakes wine association	Represents the Finger Lakes AVA, explains what the Wine Enthusiast designation

Speaker name	Title	Speaking role
		recognizes about the region’s wines, and covers the tasting room expansions
Sam Filler	Executive Director of New York Wine and Grape Foundation	Represent New York's statewide wine and grape industry by explaining the importance of sustainable vineyard practices

2 About the Organization

Write a boilerplate summary. Cover each of the following:

- History, mission, values, and unique selling points (USPs)
- Products or services
- Number of employees
- Where you are based, and the number of offices or stores (or online only)
- Notable achievements, awards, or recognitions

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, known as Visit Finger Lakes, is the official tourism agency for Ontario County, New York. Founded in 1984 as a nonprofit, its mission is to grow the local economy by bringing more visitors and overnight stays to the county while supporting local businesses and quality of life for residents. Its biggest selling point is location: the county's wineries, restaurants, and outdoor attractions are within a six-hour drive of most major East Coast and Midwest cities. Its team of four works from one office in Canandaigua and promotes the county through its website, visitor guides, social media, and local business partnerships. In 2023, Ontario County set a record for visitor spending, and in 2024 it ranked third in the 14-county Finger Lakes region with $377.7 million spent, supporting 5,150 local jobs. For this initiative, Visit Finger Lakes is partnering with the Finger Lakes Wine Alliance.

Visit Finger Lakes is leading "Wine Region of the Year: Elevating Excellence" alongside three partners.

The Finger Lakes Wine Alliance is the marketing association for the Finger Lakes American Viticultural Area representing the region's wineries and promoting Finger Lakes wine to consumers and trade.

The New York Wine & Grape Foundation supports New York's wine and grape industry statewide, representing growers and producers across every region of the state. Its programs include New York Sustainable Winegrowing, a statewide vineyard sustainability certification.

Empire State Development is New York State's chief economic development agency. It administers the I LOVE NEW YORK tourism program and the Regional Economic Development Council process, through which state funding for tourism marketing and capital improvements is awarded.

3 Speaker Biographies

Write 3 to 5 sentences summarizing each speaker's professional background, and include a headshot. Copy the block below for each speaker.



About: Tracey DelloStritto

Tracey is the President and CEO of Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, the official tourism promotion agency for Ontario County. A Finger Lakes native with more than 15 years of local leadership experience, she previously led the Ontario County Chamber of Commerce and served as Executive Director of the Partnership for Ontario County. Her wine roots run deep, including roles as Executive Director of the Finger Lakes Wine Alliance and Communications and Club Manager at Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard. She holds a B.S. in Counseling Psychology from Clarks Summit University.



About: Ross D. Levi

Executive Director and Vice President, New York State Division of Tourism / I LOVE NEW YORK, Empire State Development

Ross D. Levi leads New York State's tourism division and the I LOVE NEW YORK program, where he directs statewide tourism marketing and coordinates with regional tourism promotion agencies across the state. He joined Empire State Development in 2012 as Vice President of Marketing Initiatives and was appointed to lead the tourism division in 2017, after overseeing the Adirondack and Catskill Challenges, the Governor's annual Tourism Summit, and the Path Through History initiative. Before ESD he served as Executive Director of the Empire State Pride Agenda and as a legislative director in the New York State Senate, and earlier worked in film marketing for 20th Century Fox, Universal and Miramax. He holds a J.D. from Brooklyn Law School and a B.S. from Boston University.



About: Sam Filler

Executive Director of New York Wine and Grape Foundation

Sam is a leader at the New York Wine & Grape Foundation (NYWGF) who works to support New York's wine and grape industry. He holds a master's degree in urban planning from NYU and brings a background in agriculture, community collaboration and sustainability. He is especially proud of helping launch New York Sustainable Winegrowing, a statewide vineyard sustainability program. Outside of work, Sam enjoys traveling, hiking, biking and exploring food and wine with his wife and two sons.



About: Amy Navor

Amy is the Executive Director of the Finger Lakes Wine Alliance, the marketing association for the Finger Lakes American Viticultural Area. A Rochester native with over 15 years in the wine and spirits industry, she has led brand and marketing campaigns at Constellation Brands and The Wine Group. She is also co-founder of the luxury spirits company Appanage Brands and holds an Executive MBA from the Rochester Institute of Technology..

4 Objectives

What outcomes do you want from this PR effort? Describe the goal of the event and the general situation.

The goal of this PR effort is to build on the Finger Lakes region being named Wine Region of the Year by Wine Enthusiast in 2025 and attract more visitors during the 2026 tourism season. The media briefing will highlight the region's wine industry, announce plans for infrastructure improvements and professional training, and introduce new marketing campaigns and events. The overall objective is to increase tourism, support local wineries and hospitality businesses, create jobs, and establish the Finger Lakes as a world-class wine destination while maintaining the region's commitment to quality and sustainability.

5 Audience

Which press and media outlets do you want to target, and whom are you inviting? Build a media contact list of at least 3 relevant journalists.

TARGET OUTLETS AND INVITEES

We are targeting four tiers of media. Regional news outlets that reach the Finger Lakes and Rochester audiences most likely to visit in 2026, including the Democrat and Chronicle, the Finger Lakes Times and Spectrum News. Regional business press covering the economic development and job creation angle, led by the Rochester Business Journal. National wine trade publications that reach the enthusiast audience the campaign is built around, led by Wine Enthusiast, whose 2025 designation is the reason for this initiative. And media in our target international markets, beginning with Toronto, which is a four hour drive from the region and one of I LOVE NEW YORK's strategic markets.

Invitees are the four journalists listed below. Press materials will be distributed to the wider regional and trade list following the briefing.

MEDIA CONTACT LIST

Journalist name	Title	Outlet	Email or phone
Tracy Schuhmacher	Food & Drink Reporter	Democrat and Chronicle	tracys@gannett.com
Andrea Deckert	Staff Writer & Reporter	Rochester Business Journal	adeckert@bridgertowermedia.com / (585) 653- 4021
Christina Pickard	Writer-at-large	Wine Enthusiast Magazine	(914)- 345-9463 / cpickard@wineenthusiast.net
Carolyn Evans Hammond	Wine Columnist	The Toronto Star	carolyn@carolynevanshammond.com

6 Key Messages

What overarching points do you want your target audience to take away? Write 5.

#	Key message
1	The 2025 Wine Enthusiast designation is not luck; it recognizes decades of quality improvement and innovation by Finger Lakes grape growers and winemakers.

#	Key message
2	Recognition fades without investment behind it, so this initiative converts the award into infrastructure, certification and marketing before the 2026 season rather than after it.
3	Increased wine tourism has the potential to support regional businesses, create employment opportunities, and encourage investment across the wine, hospitality, and culinary sectors and grow economic opportunities.
4	Wine tourism reaches well beyond the tasting room, generating $1.33 billion a year in New York on lodging, food and transportation that lands in local restaurants, hotels and small towns.
5	This growth has to be sustainable growth, because the land and the quality that earned the recognition are the same things that have to be protected to keep it.

7 Event Details

Cover anything attendees and speakers need to know:

- Attire for speakers (for example, business casual)
- Materials to bring (for example, the product at a product launch)
- How to get to the building and room
- Security protocols, if any

Speakers will wear business professional attire and bring their printed talking points. Every journalist will receive a press kit with the Wine Enthusiast article, vineyard photos, sample itineraries, tasting notes, and success metrics. Award-winning Finger Lakes wines will be displayed at the podium and offered in a short tasting after Q&A.

The briefing is at New York Kitchen, 800 S Main St in Canandaigua, on the north shore of Canandaigua Lake. Guests can park for free in the on-site lot and enter through the main entrance, where a check-in table in the lobby will open at 9:00 am. Staff will then direct guests to the theater on the ground floor, and the post-briefing tasting will take place in the tasting room on the same level. Media must RSVP and show a press credential or outlet ID at check-in, and staff will verify guests are 21 or older at the tasting. Speakers, invited winemakers, culinary partners, and a Wine Enthusiast representative will be available for one-on-one interviews after Q&A.

8 Tough Q&A

List at least 3 tough questions your group expects, and write a brief recommended response to each.

Question #1	Finger Lakes wineries have said 2026 has been one of their slowest years, with fewer international visitors. Is an international campaign realistic right now?
Recommended response	That is exactly why this campaign matters now. We are targeting wine lovers in Toronto, Boston, New York City, Chicago, and London to turn the Wine Enthusiast recognition into steady visitation, and our culinary partnerships are designed to extend visitor stays and spending once they arrive

Question #2	Canadian visits to New York fell 26% last year amid tariffs and political tensions, and Canadians are still staying away. Why is Toronto one of your target markets?

Recommended response	Canada has long been New York's largest international market, and we are not giving up on our closest neighbors. Our campaign works alongside the state's NY LOVES CANADA program, which offers Canadian travelers deals on attractions and lodging, and Toronto is one of five target markets, so we are not relying on any single one.

Question #3	Small family vineyards say they may not survive the economic pressures facing the industry. Won't this initiative mostly benefit the big, established wineries?
Recommended response	Family-run wineries are the heart of this region, and Wine Enthusiast's recognition specifically highlighted that family-led culture. The Wine Academy raises service standards across the whole region, not just at the largest wineries, and our agritourism packages and chef collaborations are designed to extend visitor stays and spending throughout the region.

9 Talking Points

Speaking role: [Insert your speaking role]

Write 7 to 10 talking points specific to your role. Each must be one sentence. These will be printed for you, and they are the only material you may use at the briefing.

#	Talking point (one sentence)
1	The Finger Lakes' 2025 Wine Enthusiast recognition is an important achievement that reflects decades of dedication, innovation, and quality improvement by the region's growers and winemakers, and it creates an opportunity to strengthen New York's wine industry.
2	As Executive Director of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation, my priority is to support the growers and producers whose agricultural expertise and commitment to quality are essential to the continued success of our state's wine industry.
3	One way we are supporting that future is through New York Sustainable Winegrowing, a statewide vineyard sustainability program I helped launch to advance responsible growing practices and protect the long-term health of our vineyards and agricultural communities.
4	Sustainability must remain central to the Finger Lakes' growth because protecting our land and natural resources today will help ensure that future generations of New York winemakers can continue producing high-quality wines.
5	Alongside sustainability, the proposed Finger Lakes Wine Academy represents an important opportunity to strengthen professional standards across the region by offering certification programs for sommeliers, hospitality staff, and tour guides.
6	By improving industry knowledge and service standards, the Wine Academy can help ensure that visitors receive knowledgeable, consistent, and high-quality experiences when visiting Finger Lakes wineries.

#	Talking point (one sentence)
7	The Finger Lakes' progress can also serve as an example for wine-growing regions across New York, demonstrating how agricultural excellence, sustainable practices, and collaboration can work together to strengthen our state's wine industry.
8 (optional)	Ultimately, our goal is to turn this recognition into lasting progress for New York's growers, producers, and agricultural communities while protecting the natural resources and industry standards that will sustain our wine industry for generations to come.
9 (optional)	
10 (optional)	