

## Family and Friends are Burlington's Top Visitors

Burlington's bread-and-butter tourists are visiting friends and family. And while they also come for waterfront events and the city's proximity to other attractions in Toronto and Niagara Falls, it's family that ranks first. And that's what the city is focusing on as it develops its tourism strategy.

Pam Belgrade, Tourism Burlington's executive director, says residents have consistently said they want high quality tourism destinations that appeal to visitors and residents alike. To do that, the city has set a tourism vision to "provide a distinct tourism experience focused on the waterfront, downtown and natural features and attractions that will respect and enhance the quality of life in the community." Burlington is now working on a business and marketing plan to support that vision. The city promotes itself in a variety of ways across Ontario and Canada, says Belgrade, "but our bread and butter is people visiting friends and family in the city, mainly from Britain, the Netherlands and Germany which also reflects our community demographic." Convention business likes Burlington, she said because the city "is so convenient to Hamilton and Toronto airports, highways, the waterfront, the Royal Botanical Gardens and GO Transit." Belgrade does not have hard numbers for tourism in the city, but points to Ontario Ministry of Tourism figures for Halton region and anecdotal evidence to indicate it is rising. About 6,000 people stopped by Tourism Burlington's visitors centre last year. Many were tourists and quite a few were residents looking for information for visitors. The city has been promoting the centre's new location at 414 Locust St. downtown and, in May alone this year, 1,200 folks stopped in. Ontario tourism figures for 2003 -- the latest available -- show tourism in the region rose 16 per cent to 2.32 million visitors between 1998 and 2003. About 675,000 of those stayed overnight in the region and approximately 461,000 of them were visiting family and friends.

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*Tourism Burlington is the destination management organization for Burlington and operates a Visitor Centre that is open 7 days a week at 414 Locust Street just minutes from our beautiful waterfront.*

***For more information, contact:***

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