

TOURISM COMMUNITY DAYS

CAYUGA LAKE VILLAGES

AURORA | UNION SPRINGS | CAYUGA

LISTENING, SHARING, & STRENGTHENING

Tour Cayuga hosted a **Tourism Community Days** conversation for the Cayuga Lake Villages of Cayuga, Union Springs, and Aurora. The event brought together nearly 30 residents, business owners, and elected officials, alongside all six members of the Tour Cayuga staff, including both the outgoing and incoming Tourism Directors. The evening centered around one purpose: to listen, share, and strengthen the roots that connect our lakeside communities and Tour Cayuga's strategic efforts. We not only sought to understand how to best promote their destination but, more importantly, to understand the challenges they face in order to support them however possible.

WHAT WE LIKE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

Pride of Place

Across all tables, participants spoke with deep pride about the natural beauty and small-village character that define the Cayuga Lake Villages. The lake itself was at the heart of nearly every conversation—its views, recreation, wildlife, and its role as the thread connecting each village. Participants also highlighted the rich history, architecture, and heritage that give these villages their authenticity, from historic train stations and churches to museums and landmarks such as Frontenac Island and access to Cayuga Lake.

Community Spirit

Community spirit was another recurring theme. People described their villages as friendly, welcoming, and unpretentious—places where neighbors know one another and visitors are treated like locals. The balance between rural charm, entrepreneurship, and creative energy was seen as a strength that makes the area both tranquil and full of potential.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many shared concerns centered around environmental stewardship, especially lake health, harmful algal blooms (HABs), and the growing impact of large-scale farms, solar and wind projects, and other forms of industrialization. There was a strong desire to find balance between progress and preservation to protect views, water quality, and wildlife habitats.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES CONT...

Villages also noted the need for more housing and amenities to attract and retain young residents, families, entrepreneurs, and year-round workers. The closure of Wells College was mentioned as a major shift, leaving both an emotional and economic gap. Participants also discussed limited dining options, seasonal business patterns, and the challenge of keeping younger generations engaged in local life.

At the same time, these challenges sparked ideas about sustainable growth, ways to strengthen the visitor economy without losing what makes the area special. Many felt that thoughtful tourism management and education could help ensure visitors “leave no trace” while deepening local pride and understanding of the area’s history and natural assets.

HOW THE COMMUNITY DESCRIBES ITSELF

When asked to describe their destination in one word, the most common responses reflected both serenity and strength.

Together, these words paint a picture of a community proud of its place in the Finger Lakes, rooted in tradition, surrounded by beauty, and united by a shared lake and sense of belonging.



NEXT STEPS

Tour Cayuga will continue to compile insights from all **Tourism Community Days** to inform future marketing, visitor education, and community engagement initiatives. The themes shared in Cayuga, Union Springs, and Aurora (environmental care, rural character, and community connection) will directly shape upcoming programs and campaigns.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to this conversation. Your voice helps guide how we tell the story of our destination, starting right here, at home, along the shores of Cayuga Lake. We look forward to continuing these conversations, and our office remains open to your individual outreach. We also encourage you to take and share the **Resident Sentiment Survey** with your neighbors so we can continue listening throughout the year. Scan QR Code to begin survey.



The insights shared will directly inform how we represent Cayuga County’s lakeside villages in 2026. Hearing firsthand from residents about their pride of place, environmental priorities, and community character gives us a more authentic foundation for future messaging, helping us share each village’s story with greater depth and accuracy.

Noah Howard
Public Relations Manager

In the discussion, community members highlighted the natural beauty of the area and the general friendliness of people in the community. As destinations, these communities attract travelers seeking slow travel experiences and those searching for outdoor relaxation and activities. This aligns well with our Go Beyond campaign, which highlights outdoor attractions balanced with leisure activities.

Hilary Fenner
Marketing and Group Sales Director