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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INTEGRATION PROGRESSES FOR PARTNERSHIP

SANDUSKY, OH — The boards of the Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau and Ottawa County Visitors Bureau have approved management agreements with Greater Sandusky Partnership, taking another step toward the planned integration of Greater Sandusky Partnership and Shores & Islands Ohio.

The Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau and Ottawa County Visitors Bureau oversee county lodging tax revenue dedicated to promoting their communities as travel destinations. For over 20 years, the two visitors bureaus have worked together through Shores & Islands Ohio to market the region as a unified destination.

Under the approved agreements, Greater Sandusky Partnership will manage those destination marketing efforts on behalf of the two visitors bureaus. One final agreement among Greater Sandusky Partnership, Shores & Islands Ohio, the Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau and the Ottawa County Visitors Bureau is expected to be approved by September 1.

Also, effective September 1, Eric Wobser will become Chief Executive Officer of both Greater Sandusky Partnership and Shores & Islands Ohio as the two organizations continue implementing their planned integration.

"This is about bringing together two organizations that already share a common goal to make this region a great place to visit, live and do business," said Eric Wobser. "Working together allows us to better coordinate those efforts for the benefit of the entire region."

After helping lead Shores & Islands Ohio and its predecessor organizations for more than two decades, Larry Fletcher will transition from his role as President and Chief Executive Officer on September 1. He will serve as Director of Strategic Alignment through December 31, 2026, to help ensure a smooth leadership transition before moving on to explore opportunities to elevate his role with Lake Erie Foundation, an organization he has served as a board member of for many years. Fletcher will also continue as a board member for Greater Sandusky Partnership.

Fletcher commented, "It has been my great pleasure to represent the region's tourism industry over the past 20+ years, starting with working alongside Joan Van Offeren, Dawn Weinhardt, the rest of the staff and our board teams as the Shores & Islands partnership was being developed. No matter what the future holds for me, I will always be an advocate for the incredible tourism assets we have here and the people who keep these places operating. I am confident our organization's and the region's destination economy will be in good hands with the combined Shores & Islands Ohio and Greater Sandusky Partnership staff teams under Eric's leadership."

“Larry has had a tremendous impact on both this region and the destination marketing industry,” said Wobser. “He is one of the state’s most respected tourism leaders and has been an extraordinary champion for the Shores & Islands Ohio region. His leadership has built a strong foundation for the future, and we’re grateful for his continued support throughout the transition.”

The leadership transition is one of several organizational changes taking place as the integration continues. The integration is intended to create a single organization that better connects destination marketing and economic development while continuing to serve businesses, visitors and communities throughout the region.

Comments from Board and Community Leadership

Erie County Commissioner, Matt Old, commented, “It’s good to see continued implementation of the grand agreement between the county and visitor bureaus. I’m excited to see the new arrangement be fully implemented early next year.”

Erie County Commissioners have played a significant role in supporting the partnership.

“For the past 20 years both the Ottawa County Visitors Bureau and the Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau have had the opportunity to work with one of the finest in the industry, Larry Fletcher. In his tenure he managed both bureaus to promote the Shores & Islands Region as one destination. Over the past 15 years, he has worked with both Boards to create the Shores and Islands brand, which is known throughout the state as a powerhouse of a destination marketing organization. At the same time, through board support, Larry has been the go-to for regional tourism advocacy, tourism related economic and workforce development, and the health of Lake Erie,” said Shores & Islands Ohio Board Chair, David Dunn.

He continued, “Over the past two years, leadership has worked closely with Larry to ensure the bureaus and organizations are well positioned for the future, allowing him to transition into a role where he can enjoy the region as much as he has promoted it. We are excited to partner with Greater Sandusky Partnership, their board leadership, and their professional staff as we transition, all in the name of keeping this region a great place to not only visit, but live, work and invest.”

Kim Kaufman, Ottawa County Visitors Bureau Board Chair noted, “For more than a decade, I’ve had the honor and pleasure of working alongside Larry Fletcher, as he helped build something remarkable during his 20 years at the helm of our tourism bureaus. He wove Erie and Ottawa together into the Shores and Islands brand, a destination marketing powerhouse known across the country, and became the region’s steady voice on everything from tourism advocacy to the health of Lake Erie. Every partner who worked with him came away stronger and more effective for it, and our region is better for his years of service. As Larry steps into a well-earned retirement, I’m excited for what comes next: welcoming Eric Wobser and the Greater Sandusky Partnership as they take the reins. I have every confidence they’ll build on the strong foundation Larry leaves behind, and I look forward to working closely with Eric and his team.”

Brian Pieffer, Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau remarked, “The Erie County Visitors and Convention Bureau has always been committed to ensuring lodging tax dollars are invested in ways that strengthen our destination and benefit our communities. This structure preserves the bureau’s oversight responsibilities while positioning destination marketing to succeed through this regional partnership.”

Greater Sandusky Partnership Board Chair, Duff Milkie, said, "Our region is strongest when organizations work together toward shared goals. This next step builds on years of collaboration and creates a stronger foundation for promoting the region, supporting business growth and investing in our communities. We are thankful for Larry's leadership and look forward to building on the foundation he helped create.”

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