

Bringing in the tourists

Visitor center specialist helps make Auburn a popular destination

KAYLA STEWART
The Citizen

*A weekly series profiling people
who work in area tourism.*

AUBURN — Jesse Kline has to know it all. Or at least that's what people expect.

Sitting behind the counter at the visitor center on Genesee Street, Kline fields questions about directions, costs, weather and tours. As communications specialist for the Cayuga Coun-

ty Office of Tourism, she's ready for anything.

"You never know who's going to walk through the door — it could be a couple from Kentucky or a couple from Germany," she said. "If I don't know the answer, I can refer them."

The visitor center also does the marketing and promotions for the county, a calendar of events and a yearly 20-page comprehensive guide to the area. Kline also does the marketing and promotion for the Historic and Cultural Sites Commission.

"I'm basically selling the area every day," she said.

Kline came to the center with a background in museum studies and art history after stints at the Cayuga Museum and other historical sites. Five years later, she still finds the visitor center a good fit.

"It was kind of a logical step to make," she said.

A big part of her job is coordinating collaboration among the local

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Visitor job demands personality, humor

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tourist destinations.

She places ads and writes the copy for the Cultural Sites Commission, which then advertises in national magazines and publications such as *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Ladies Home Journal*. The purpose is to package Auburn as a historic destination, she said.

"We have fine-tuned our advertising campaign," she said. "The more people can work together, the better. We're too small to compete, so it's best if everyone works together."

The new approach, which has been strongly encouraged by her office in the last couple of years, is finally bearing fruit, she said.

"It's amazing," she said. "Our numbers almost doubled from last year to this year. We've been overwhelmed."

Kline also mailed out more than 14,000 area brochures in response to Auburn historical sites inquiries since January, and about 2,500 people walk through the doors of the center every year, half local and half from out of the area.

"We used to have slow times, but it's never slow," she said.

And she never knows what questions to expect.

"I get some very strange calls,"

she said, laughing. "Someone called the other day and asked what the weather was in North Carolina. People don't understand what we do. They think we have answers to everything."

She also has spent a lot of time on the phone recently with confused out-of-towners wondering how the 50-mile garage sale works.

And it's this reason that she is an asset to the center, said Meg Vanek, director of the Cayuga County Office of Tourism.

"I think it's in her basic personality to handle different types of people and accommodate different types of personalities," she said. "A sense of humor is important."

But it isn't all laughs.

She said the challenging side of her job is convincing local people that marketing tourism is a positive thing for the community.

"The people that come here say 'It's beautiful' and they don't have misgivings," she said. "But local people are saying 'Why would people want to come here?' They're not in tune with what's going on. But I've noticed a change. People are much more on board."

She stays passionate about promoting the area because, she said, it's a place worth promoting.

"I like living here, and I enjoy giving back," she said.



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Jesse Kline, communications specialist at the Cayuga County Office of Tourism, puts out brochures in the visitors center.

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