**Background**

In 2008, the City of Niagara Falls teamed with the USA Niagara Development Corporation (USAN) (New York State’s economic development agency based in the City) to begin a program to re-establish Old Falls Street, historically one of the City’s main commercial streets, but reduced to a failed pedestrian mall as part of a massive 1970s-era urban renewal program. This involved reconstructing the street to again allow for traffic (with the ability to close it off periodically for events) and development of some key anchor uses such as the Conference Center Niagara Falls (CCNF) and the soon-to-be-completed Niagara Falls Culinary Institute. Then in 2009, the City and USAN approved a Management Agreement with Global Spectrum, LP to provide maintenance and event programming services for Old Falls Street, as an outgrowth of their management of the CCNF. This has evolved to holding over 325 annual activities and events on Old Falls Street, drawing over 36,000 people for such things as daily food vending, a concert series, health/exercise activities, cooking demonstrations, outdoor movies, and various themed events.

Given the traditional seasonality of the Niagara Falls tourism market, the City and USAN worked to explore activities that would grow visitation outside the traditional summer season. For example, in 2010, Old Falls Street hosted its first Oktoberfest celebration, which was successfully teamed with a Fall Ski Expo at the CCNF and is fast becoming a key autumn event downtown.

**The Niagara Holiday Market**

In 2011, the City and USAN teamed with Global Spectrum and Brix & Company (a real estate development and marketing firm specializing in public-private partnerships) from Boise, Idaho, to produce the *Niagara Holiday Market*, a planned 36-day winter festival attraction between the day after Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day.

The Holiday Market stretched along three blocks of Old Falls Street between Niagara Falls State Park and the Seneca Niagara Casino. It included eighty product vendors for unique crafts, gifts, and specialty food items. Other activities and events included: a high school chorus tournament, Santa’s workshop, and concerts by Aaron Neville, the Canadian Tenors, and The Buffalo Philharmonic; and various winter ambiance elements such as an ice skating rink and festive street decor.

The event was designed to attract regional attendees throughout its duration, creating a positive economic impact during the fourth quarter – typically one of the slowest times of the year for businesses and tourism in the City.
The Vendors
At its most basic, the Market is an example of the use of “Pop-up” retail—the use of temporary retail spaces for a defined period of time—to serve as the primary purpose of the event. This is where it differed from conventional winter or Christmas festivals—at the Niagara Holiday Market, you could actually do a large portion of your holiday gift shopping. Retail venues borrowed an idea used for hundreds of years across Europe at traditional Christmas markets (such as “Christkindlmarkts” in Germany), where small vendor huts are positioned in public squares and along streets during the holiday season.

Vendors at the Niagara Holiday Market were provided with a variety of options to participate in order to meet their individual capacities—ranging from rental of huts for the full 36 days of the festival, to 10-day appearances, or even just providing product to be sold at the Marché at the Market, a heated and decorated tent staffed by festival workers. The Marché featured local specialty food products from the Niagara Region—ranging from fruit butters to elaborate candied apples and artisanal cheeses, as well as chocolate and pastries—all packaged for gift-giving.

The Response
Considering that that the Market was in its inaugural year—which came with a number of typical logistical issues of a first-time event—the response was remarkably positive. The Market had heavy attendance over the Thanksgiving Day weekend, settling into a steady weekday/weekend tempo through Christmas. The Market stayed surprisingly active the week after Christmas, and served as a considerable lead-in for the Hard Rock Café® New Years’ Eve “Guitar Drop” event on Old Falls Street. Originally scheduled to close at 8 PM that evening, many Market vendors decided to stay open well into the early morning hours. Market staff members are now crunching the numbers to see where refinements should be made for next years’ event, whether in terms of operating hours, staffing, and positioning/scheduling of Market concerts and events.

Although the numbers are still being tabulated, many vendors reported their sales were well above expectations. This is proving to be one of the more lasting benefits of the Market—beginning to make believers in the merchant community that retail can indeed work again in downtown Niagara Falls. Many of the vendors have expressed strong desire to participate next year; and several are considering the establishment of a similar “summer” market and even a possible permanent presence downtown.