

Sara Capen is the Executive Director for the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area. She began working for the National Heritage Area since its inception in 2011 with an immediate focus on developing a management plan and building community partnerships to preserve, protect and promote the natural, cultural and historic resources along the Niagara River Corridor.

In 2013, the National Heritage Area transitioned from a federal commission to a nonprofit organization with Sara becoming the Executive Director. Since then, Sara has administered the National Heritage Area through strategic focus on interpreting the rich history, connecting visitors and residents to the unique landscape and heritage, creating unique cultural tourism products and fostering stewardship through educational outreach programs for youth. Examples of this work include the development of the Discover Niagara Shuttle, Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center, Fridays on the Frontier Education Program, and the Discover Niagara Mobile Application.

As a former teacher, Sara is an experienced educator who understands the importance of connecting youth to the rich history and landscape in their backyard. By connecting people to the rich cultural heritage of an area, people gain a stronger sense of place and pride for the role it had in shaping history. Sara applies that same philosophy at Niagara University where she serves as an adjunct professor instructing a class on Tourism and Destination Development for the College of Hospitality.

Presently, Sara serves as the Chairperson of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas, which is an alliance of the 49 Congressionally-designated National Heritage Areas throughout the United States. Through advocacy efforts, Sara champions the grass-root efforts of National Heritage Areas to revitalize communities, generate economic development, and preserve the places that are the fabric of our nation.

Sara is proud to be a life-long resident of Niagara County, making her home along the shoreline of Lake Ontario in Burt, where she and her husband Michael are raising their five sons, Jack, Umaru, Sam, Mac, and Thomas in close proximity to generations of family members who are near and dear to her heart.