

## **Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation**

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## **ERIE CANAL HARBOR OFFICIALLY OPENS TO PUBLIC**

### **Local leaders pay homage to canal era through "wedding of the waters" ceremony marking \$53 million waterfront redevelopment project's completion**

Today Governor David A. Paterson announced the official opening of the newly restored Erie Canal Harbor to the general public. This historic announcement was marked by a symbolic "Wedding of the Waters" observance at the harbor site, led by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton, Empire State Development Acting Upstate Chairman Kenneth A. Schoetz on behalf of Governor Paterson, U.S. Congressman Brian Higgins, NYS Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, Mayor of Buffalo Byron Brown, Erie County Executive Chris Collins and other local dignitaries and elected officials. The ceremony was held to commemorate completion of the nine-year, \$53 million Erie Canal Harbor Redevelopment Project, and was reminiscent of former New York State Governor DeWitt Clinton's famous canal celebration of 1825.

"This is a special day for New York State. The completion of Erie Canal Harbor signifies a major triumph in revitalizing Buffalo's waterfront for its residents," said Governor David A. Paterson, who announced the opening while participating in a separate event in Upstate New York. "This dynamic site will undoubtedly serve as source of great pride for the residents of Buffalo and for all of Western New York. The harbor will be a cultural, historical, and maritime hub which will spur additional redevelopment of the inner harbor area."

Details of the project include the redevelopment of approximately 12.5 acres of prime waterfront property, as well as the restoration of the historically significant public space and maritime attraction, which was spearheaded by Empire State Development (ESD) and its subsidiary Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC). Financing for the Erie Canal Harbor Redevelopment Project was obtained through a combination of federal, state, and local transportation funds secured by various local elected officials from the Federal Transit Administration, State of New York, New York State Thruway Authority, Erie County, City of Buffalo, Buffalo Sewer Authority, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Today's opening celebration paid homage to the first "Wedding of the Waters" ceremony held some 183 years ago, which featured Governor Clinton ushering in the original "canal era" by pouring lake water taken from Erie Canal Harbor's Commercial Slip into the Hudson River, thereby "marrying" the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Senator Schumer, Senator Clinton, ESD Acting Upstate Chairman Schoetz on behalf of Governor Paterson, Congressman Higgins, State Senate Majority Leader Skelos, Mayor Brown, County Executive Collins and many others paid tribute to the famous "water wedding" and ushered in Western New York's own "waterfront development era" by pouring canal water into the refurbished Commercial Slip, to celebrate the official completion of the inner harbor project.

"At long last, we are popping the cork on the enormous, pent-up potential of Buffalo's great waterfront. We have all worked long and hard to see this Inner Harbor vision come to fruition, and now we finally have a revitalized waterfront that we can all enjoy," said Senator Charles Schumer. "By reclaiming our past, we are forging our future; the Erie Canal Harbor project is an economic shot in the arm for Buffalo and Western New York that will spur business, jobs and tourism."

"Today's opening of the newly restored Erie Canal Harbor is a momentous day for the City of Buffalo and for all of New York, and it is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of countless people," said Senator Hillary Clinton. "The Erie Canal Harbor Restoration Project has not only returned acres of

beautiful waterfront property to the public, but it will once again make the Erie Canal a catalyst of economic growth and development for the City and region. One hundred and eighty-three years ago Governor Clinton christened the completion of the Erie Canal, and I'm honored that another Clinton has the opportunity represent this great State as we celebrate today's opening of the Erie Canal Harbor."

"Empire State Development is proud to have played a central role in this great project," said Kenneth Schoetz, acting chairman, Upstate Empire State Development. "I'd especially like to thank the Governor's office for its continued support, as well as all those architects, designers, construction workers, engineers, planners, elected officials, heritage-related groups, historians and concerned residents who helped see this project through to fruition. It was a long, and sometimes difficult road, but one that was no doubt worth sticking with."

"Finally we are seeing real progress along our waterfront and this is just the beginning," said Congressman Brian Higgins. "One generation built the canal, another generation buried it and this generation has created a redeveloped Erie Canal slip that pulls together our unique natural and historical identity providing an exciting destination for visitors and unlimited opportunities for associated business and job growth in the immediate future."

"This event marks a significant step forward for the City of Buffalo, much as the original ceremonies in the 19th Century that commemorated the completion of the Erie Canal," said Mayor Byron Brown. "I am confident that the redeveloped Inner Harbor will provide a lasting impact on the city's continuing revival. At last, our residents and visitors can come to the waterfront, in an area rich in history, and once again enjoy one of Buffalo's most unrivalled assets. I commend all of our federal, state and local partners who came together to get this project on track and I look forward to the other planned development actions in this area that will truly make the Inner Harbor one of the great destinations of our region."

"The Erie Canal Harbor is a critical initiative which optimizes our waterfront and creates new economic potential for Buffalo and Erie County," said Erie County Executive Chris Collins. "Erie County is serious about investing in waterfront redevelopment. Seven million dollars in county funding is being used to support asbestos abatement at the former Buffalo Memorial Auditorium and I look forward to the rebirth of that site at the doorstep of the Erie Canal Harbor. I want to thank the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. for their leadership and dedication."

Incoming visitors to Erie Canal Harbor can expect a more finished product than what was unveiled during the month-long "soft-opening" period, as many final touches have been completed at the site. The football field sized central wharf plaza is now set with sod-grass and can be utilized for sun-bathing, non-competitive sports, and other leisure activities. In addition, a dock operator has been contracted to provide marine supervision, transient boating access, waterway debris removal, and professional coordination of various waterside activities.

Other features of the harbor available to visitors include: the wooden-plank "Central Wharf," which stretches out along the Buffalo River; the award-winning "Whipple Truss" foot bridge, which accurately resembles other traditional canal spans and connects the "Central Wharf" to cobblestone "Commercial Street;" as well as the excavated foundations of the original "Steamship Hotel," which are presented alongside several interpretive exhibits showcasing the historical significance of the Erie Canal. A man-made waterfall also flows from the Scott Street railroad girder passage to help circulate water within the Commercial Slip and make the re-watered canal area more visually-appealing.

Also participating in the harbor opening event was Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) Chairman and Vice-Chairman Jordan Levy and Lawrence Quinn, additional ECHDC Board Members David Colligan, William Collins, Maureen Hurley and Mindy Rich, NYS Senator William Stachowski, NYS Assemblyman Mark Schroeder, the Office of NYS Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, Erie County Legislator Dan Kozub, and Buffalo Common Council President David Franczyk.

"This is a great day for Buffalo, and one that every Western New Yorker should be proud of," said Jordan Levy, chairman, Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation. "The harbor is a shining example of what can be done to redevelop our waterfront. Furthermore, ECHDC has every intention to harness

the positive momentum gained from the harbor project's completion, and use it towards our efforts to make additional inner and outer harbor development a reality."

"We have already witnessed an influx of visitors to the re-watered canal site, and have heard positive comments on the development of the area," said NYS Senator Bill Stachowski. "Western New Yorkers have longed for a waterfront site that they can show off to visitors, stop by for an afternoon walk, or show their children Buffalo's vibrant past. I'm very proud of New York State's multi-million dollar investment in this property."

"There would be no City of Buffalo if it were not for the Erie Canal Harbor," said NYS Assemblyman Mark Schroeder. "In 1825, Governor Dewitt Clinton, aboard the Seneca Chief, commemorated the opening of the canal with a 'Wedding of the Waters.' It was understood that a new city would rise from the banks of the canal's western terminus – and that is exactly what happened. Seven years later, the New York State Legislature incorporated the City of Buffalo. Now, 183 years after Governor Clinton's historic voyage, there is a new 'Wedding of the Waters.' And once again, a new city will rise from the Erie Canal Harbor. This new Buffalo will follow in its predecessor's footsteps by honoring its waterfront heritage and recapturing the canal side environment that cultivated its rise to greatness."

"The reliance on historic authenticity of the canal project enhances its value and veracity to the millions of people who will visit the canal for generations to come," said Fillmore District Council Member and Buffalo Common Council President David A. Franczyk.

"Erie Canal Harbor is a testament to Buffalo's historic past and equally promising future," said Erie County First District Legislator Daniel Kozub. "Western New Yorkers should be proud of this project and excited at the prospects of future waterfront development."

Representatives from Benderson Development Company also attended the ceremony to demonstrate their commitment toward further development of Buffalo's inner harbor area. Earlier this year, Benderson Development Company and Bass Pro Shops signed a pre-development agreement with ECHDC, regarding future development of nearly 28 acres of idle waterfront property. This project, dubbed Canal Side, encompasses the entire Erie Canal Harbor site, as well as an additional 16 acres of adjacent lands, and seeks to transform the long-dormant area into a bustling center of commercial and residential activity. Canal Side will also include various museums, public spaces and significant parking access in order to create a more comprehensive and contemporary urban destination.

Specific plans for various special events, food vendors, and other dynamic programming activities are expected to commence at Erie Canal Harbor the week of July 7<sup>th</sup>. A schedule of these activities and events will soon be available at [www.buffaloplace.com](http://www.buffaloplace.com).

Erie Canal Harbor is located at the intersection of Pearl and Scott streets in downtown Buffalo, and is accessible through two entrances near the Commercial Slip, and by way of a visitor's gate near the foot of Main Street, across from HSBC Arena. The harbor is open to the public 24 hours a day/7 days a week, and is monitored by licensed security personnel, as well as the Buffalo Police Department.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation is a subsidiary agency of Empire State Development Corporation. Its vision is to revitalize Western New York's waterfront and restore economic growth to Buffalo based on the region's legacy of pride, urban significance and natural beauty. ESD is the New York's chief economic development agency and also oversees the marketing of "I Love NY," the state's iconic tourism brand. For more information, visit [www.nylovesbiz.com](http://www.nylovesbiz.com).

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