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GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

## GOVERNOR HOCHUL OBSERVES THE 200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ERIE CANAL

*Historic Gathering in New York City Commemorates Governor DeWitt Clinton's Original Voyage By Welcoming the Erie Canal Boat Seneca Chief at its Last Stop Since Leaving Buffalo on September 24*

*As the Erie Canal Begins its Third Century of Operation, Focus is on Maintaining a Safe, Resilient, Navigable Waterway that Supports Economic Development, Accessible Recreation, Arts and Culture, and Sustainability*

Governor Kathy Hochul today marked the 200th anniversary of the opening of the original Erie Canal in New York City with the arrival of the Buffalo Maritime Center's Erie Canal Boat Seneca Chief. The boat is a replica of the original vessel Governor DeWitt Clinton traveled on from Buffalo to New York City in 1825. The current voyage began September 24 in Buffalo. The Seneca Chief made 28 stops along the Erie Canal and Hudson River before ending its journey at Pier 26 at Hudson River Park in New York City on October 26.

Today's Erie Canal is now part of the 524-mile New York State Canal system managed by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and New York State Canal Corporation. As the Erie Canal enters its third century of operation, it has primarily become a recreational and cultural destination, with a focus on arts and culture, sustainability, and accessibility, while still moving cargo too large for other means of transportation.

"For two centuries, the Erie Canal has been a symbol of ingenuity and perseverance, shaping the economic and social landscape of New York and the United States," **Governor Hochul said.** "As a Buffalo native, I have logged hundreds of hours on the canals and know first-hand of the impact and beauty. As we celebrate this incredible bicentennial milestone, we look forward to the Canal's third century of operation and are committed to ensuring a resilient and accessible Canal system for all New Yorkers for centuries to come."

The Governor was introduced at today's event by DeWitt Clinton's 15-year-old great-great-great-great-grandson, DeWitt Silber.

The Erie Canal has been a cornerstone in the development of New York State as we know it, and the nation. It has served as a vital connector for commerce, linking the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes, and facilitating the movement of goods and people. Over the years, the Canal has played significant roles in major historical movements, including the Underground Railroad, Women's Right to Vote, the expansion of religions, fostering communities and driving progress. Through their More Voices initiative, NYPA and the Canal Corporation are working to share a more comprehensive narrative of the Erie Canal's history. Topics include the stories of underrepresented communities including those of African Americans, women, immigrants, and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

To acknowledge the displacement of indigenous people during the building of the Canal, an Eastern White Pine Tree was planted at each stop of the current Seneca Chief voyage that represents the strength of the Haudenosaunee people, as well as a promise for a sustainable future for the Erie Canal. In Haudenosaunee culture, the White Pine also holds significance as the Tree of Peace.

**First Gentleman and Erie Canal Bicentennial Commission Co-Chair William J. Hochul, Jr. said,** "The Erie Canal has been a lifeline for communities, fostering growth, innovation, and unity. Today, we honor its rich legacy and embrace our responsibility to preserve and enhance this vital waterway for future generations."

**New York Power Authority Chairman John Koelmel said,** "The Erie Canal's influence extends far beyond its banks. It has been a catalyst for economic development, cultural exchange, and social progress. We are proud to support its continued evolution as a primary recreationway, ensuring it remains a vibrant asset for all."

**New York Power Authority President and CEO Justin E. Driscoll said,** "As we celebrate the Erie Canal's bicentennial, we reaffirm our commitment to innovation and sustainability. The New York State Canal system will continue to adapt and thrive, offering unparalleled opportunities for recreation and commerce."

**New York State Canal Corporation Director and Erie Canal Bicentennial Commission Co-Chair Brian U. Stratton said,** "The Erie Canal has been a testament to human ingenuity and the power of connectivity. As we look ahead, we are dedicated to enhancing its accessibility and resilience, ensuring it remains a vital resource for generations to come."

**Father of DeWitt Silber Ken Silber said,** "DeWitt Clinton was a notably ambitious, self-confident person. I don't think he'd be surprised that his leadership on the Erie Canal is getting public attention two centuries later—he'd probably say he deserves no less! And he'd be right. But even he couldn't have anticipated the history and the evolution of this transformative project. DeWitt Clinton's extended family has cherished his legacy. Our family is honored to be part of this anniversary celebration."

Since taking office, Governor Hochul has emphasized the state's continuing commitment to the long-term viability of the canal system, designating \$50 million in each of the past two state budgets to rehabilitate reservoir dams, improve earthen embankment dams, and repair aging water control structures, many of which predate Clinton's inaugural Erie Canal voyage. The funds are in addition to NYPA's annual investment for canal system maintenance and operations.

As the Erie Canal's third century of operation begins, the New York State Canal Corporation is gearing up to carry out the recently published [Canal Recreationway 2050 Plan](#). Created with input from hundreds of stakeholders throughout the canal corridor, it is structured around seven guiding principles that together form a comprehensive vision for the 524-mile Canal system of waterways, trails and parks. The guiding principles include cultural heritage, accessibility, economic impact, ecological benefit, and environmental resiliency.

Most recently, the Canal Corporation began identifying property along the Erie Canal where pollinator meadows can be created. This endeavor not only aims to reduce maintenance needs, but also aims to enhance biodiversity, support vital ecosystems, and ensure the Canal's ecological health for the next century. This sustainable approach honors the Canal system's rich history while fostering environmental stewardship and resilience, contributing to a greener, more vibrant future for generations to come. 16 acres have been identified to date, with hundreds more to come.

The New York State Canal system endeavors to become a worldwide destination for accessible recreation through [On the Canals](#), as well as NYPA and Canal Corporation's On the Canals Accessibility Education Program. Now in its sixth year, On the Canals provides free programming across the Canal system through local providers to get people recreating on the water and the Canalway Trails. With its relatively calm waters and level trail surfaces, it is an ideal location for people of all abilities to recreate. The On the Canals Accessibility Education Program, now in its second year, works with participating businesses to ensure they are receiving the correct tools and knowledge they need to guarantee that their facilities and programming are fully accessible for all who seek to enjoy recreation along the Canal system.

Considered an engineering marvel when it was built 200 years ago and the center of technological innovation, the Erie Canal today still employs cutting edge technology to help maintain and repair its centuries-old infrastructure, including robots, drones and infrared cables. These tools aid with inspections and monitoring of hard-to-reach areas. Officials recently addressed seepage on a 200-year-old earthen embankment in Royalton, Niagara County, by installing a soil-bentonite slurry wall using One-Pass Trenching Technology.

It has been a busy bicentennial year for the Erie Canal, with programming already reflecting the goals laid out for its third century of operation through:

- [September's World Canals Conference in Buffalo](#), which hosted nearly 500 international participants who exchanged ideas and best practices for caring for the world's inland waterways;
- the Buffalo Maritime Center's [Seneca Chief](#) journey, which included 28 stops between Buffalo and New York Harbor, along with the planting of 28 white pine trees to represent the resiliency of the Haudenosaunee and an environmentally sustainable Erie Canal;
- WMHT's documentary, [Reflections on the Erie Canal](#);
- the third year of the Canal Corporation's [Artists-in-Residence program](#), with a special focus on the Erie Canal's 200th birthday;
- Albany Symphony's concert series, [Water Music: More Voices](#), which focused on underrepresented stories about the people who make up the Erie Canal's fabric in five Canalside locations;
- the distribution of hundreds of thousands of copies of a commemorative Erie Canal Bicentennial poster, which is available for download [here](#);
- an Erie Canal themed [DMV license plate](#);
- a million-dollar Erie Canal-themed [New York State Lottery raffle](#); and
- hundreds of [community-hosted events](#) across New York State.

**New York Secretary of State Walter T. Mosley said**, "The Erie Canal is as important and relevant to New York's communities today as it was 200 years ago. Through transformative programs like the Downtown Revitalization Initiative and NY Forward, the Department of State is helping communities embrace their Canal heritage as a catalyst for future growth and prosperity, while reconnecting them to their historic waterfronts. So happy anniversary, Erie Canal!"

**Empire State Development President, CEO and Commissioner Hope Knight said**, "The journey of the Seneca Chief across the state made it very clear, 200 years after its opening, the Erie Canal is still a driver of tourism and economic activity. The commemoration of the bicentennial at each of the canal-based communities has given us a new appreciation for the historic public works project that solidified New York's economic dominance. We welcome the Seneca Chief to New York City and thank the Governor for her investment in the Erie Canal, ensuring it will continue to make history for generations to come."

**New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Acting Commissioner Kathy Moser said**, "We are proud of our ongoing partnership with the New York Power Authority and the Canal Corporation to celebrate New York State's rich heritage. During the Erie Canal's bicentennial year, it's especially fitting to welcome the historic Seneca Chief completing its month-long voyage from Buffalo to New York City. At each stop along the canal, communities have learned about the boatbuilding process and a fuller history of this iconic waterway. Congratulations to the Seneca Chief and full speed ahead."

**Canal Recreationway Commissioner Kal Wysokowski said**, "With over 400 events, an international canals conference, documentaries, exhibits, paintings, and yes, even the

unveiling of a new Erie Canal song, 'Two Hundred Years,' this has indeed been a memorable 12 months. Yet, the best is still ahead—the Canal Corporation's 2050 Plan urges us forward with a bold vision and a set of principles and strategies that will ensure this National landmark thrives for the next generation."

**New York State Historian Devin Lander said,** "The 200th anniversary of the opening of the Erie Canal is a time to reflect upon an achievement unprecedented in our nation's history up to that time. The legacy is a complex one, as much of the land the Canal was built on belonged to Indigenous peoples who were displaced, but the Canal in many ways established New York as the Empire State by opening up markets that did not previously exist and spurring waves of immigration across central and western New York State. And the Erie Canal remains a vital transportation and recreation corridor two centuries later."

**Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Executive Director Bob Radliff said,** "From upstate New York to New York Harbor, the replica *Seneca Chief's* journey during this Bicentennial year is reminding us all of our extraordinary waterways heritage. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is proud to partner with the Buffalo Maritime Center as the vessel gracefully showcases the significance and relevance of our still operating NYS Canal System."

**Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick said,** "New York's history and economic importance is inextricably tied to the Erie Canal. Governor DeWitt Clinton's vision and his commitment to this extraordinary project demonstrates the importance of bold action by a state's chief executive. I'm proud that we have a current Governor who recognizes the long-term impact of such actions and am grateful to live in a state that continues to lead the nation with innovative solutions to our country's most pressing challenges."

**M&T Bank Tarrytown Regional President Tyré Robinson said,** "M&T Bank grew out of the Erie Canal's spirit of innovation and connection to meet the needs of rapidly expanding businesses across New York State. We are grateful to have played a role in bringing this monumental Bicentennial Voyage experience to communities across the state, joining like-minded partners committed to the responsible stewardship of this historic waterway."

**Buffalo Maritime Center Founder John Montague said,** "From the outset of this project, our aim was to commemorate the Erie Canal and raise awareness of its profound impact on American history. By building and voyaging across New York State with our authentic replica canal boat, we have succeeded beyond our dreams. At the same time, we've succeeded in reconnecting communities and individuals around our shared canal history and heritage. We have been amazed to discover on our voyage the public's interest and commitment in shaping the canal's future."

**Melissa Parker Leonard of 7th Gen Cultural Resources said,** "The Erie Canal's story is both extraordinary and complex: A triumph of innovation that also came at a cost to the land, the waters, and the Indigenous people displaced in the years following its opening. This bicentennial voyage of the Erie Canal Boat *Seneca Chief* has been about healing

and restoration, as communities gathered water from across New York State to nourish white pine trees planted along its path. As a seventh-generation descendant of Ely S. Parker, I am deeply grateful to see Indigenous voices included in this commemoration, a reminder of how far we have come and how far we still must go.”

New York State remains steadfast in its commitment to maintaining and improving the Canal system, ensuring it remains open for through-navigation, serving as a vital and vibrant part of New York's heritage and future.

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