



Buffalo NY starts planning for Erie bicentenary 2025

TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER the grand opening of the Erie Canal, in September 2025, Buffalo invites the world's canal community back to New York State's 'Queen City', for the World Canals Conference. Here, on October 26, 1825, Governor DeWitt Clinton began the 10-day inaugural voyage on the newly completed canal, culminating in the famous 'Wedding of the Waters' ceremony in New York Harbor.

The opening of this 'Grand Canal' universally and completely altered the course and shaped the fate of the American nation. Today's Erie Canal endures as a testament to the vision and imagination of New Yorkers who dared to dream that a narrow ribbon of waterway, four feet deep and 40 feet wide and carved through 363 miles of forests, fields, and wetlands could transform not just a state, but a young America.

The Erie Canal's historic role in shaping settlement, growth and national identity was recognized by the Congress of the United States with the formal establishment of Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor in 2000. The Erie Canal as a system is still fully navigable and is proudly operated by the New York State (NYS) Canal Corporation, an agency of state government. These two organizations, in partnership with the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation and Visit Buffalo

Niagara, are planning WCC2025 as the culmination of the Erie Canal's bicentennial.

Buffalo presents an ideal conference location. The city's famous grain elevators, historically used to store canal cargo, have been repurposed to host live performances, events, and historical tours. Buffalo is receiving recognition for its vibrant art scene, diverse dining, outstanding outdoor recreation, treasured architecture, and dramatically transformed Canalside waterfront.

Rise, decline and renaissance

The Erie Canal connected the port city of Buffalo with other cities along the Great Lakes and to the Atlantic Ocean in New York City. This historic connection is central to Buffalo's history, and it is the major reason the city became a commercial and industrial powerhouse in the 19th century. After the canal opened, Buffalo became the largest inland port in the fledgling nation and the 'grain capital' of North America.

In the mid-20th century, following a steep decline in commercial traffic on the canal triggered by competition from the railroad and opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, Buffalo's once thriving Inner Harbor became desolate and underutilized. Beginning in 2005, the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) successfully spearheaded an incredible era of waterfront transformation, reclaiming

Buffalo's Canalside, where many of the conference activities will take place.

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the historic junction of its canal and lake front as one of America's brightest treasures.

ECHDC continues to revitalize Buffalo's Inner and Outer Harbor areas and restore economic growth to western New York, based on the region's legacy of pride, urban significance, and natural beauty. Today, the revitalized Canalside area in downtown Buffalo is part of a reinvigorated city bustling with new energy, business, and tourism.

Replica of Seneca Chief

Conference events will include the celebratory launch of the replica 1825 canal boat *Seneca Chief* which will recreate Governor Clinton's journey from Buffalo to New York City. Study tours will take conference attendees to both historic canal sites and major economic revitalization projects centered on the Erie Canal. Attendees will hear about next century operations, sustainability, tourism, and heritage development during sessions presented by waterway experts from around the world.

Stay tuned for updates. New York State and Erie Canal communities are thrilled to welcome the world to Buffalo in 2025. ■