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## **THRUWAY AUTHORITY AND CANAL CORPORATION ANNOUNCE OPENING OF PORT BYRON OLD ERIE CANAL HERITAGE PARK**

*First of its Kind Project Promotes Tourism on the Historic Erie Canal*

The New York State Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation today announced the completion of the Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park, an attraction for Erie Canal enthusiasts and upstate tourists interested in the history of the Canal and its impact on the economic and commercial development of both New York and the United States.

As part of Governor Cuomo’s “Path Through History” initiative and developed in conjunction with the Canal Society of New York State, the \$9.6 million park is the first facility of its kind to offer access directly from the New York State Thruway to a historic site. Visitors can enter the park directly from the eastbound Thruway (I-90) at milepost 308.7 between exits 41 (Waterloo – Clyde – NY Route 414) and 40 (Weedsport - Auburn – NY Route 34), or from NY Route 31 in the Village of Port Byron. Due to the facility’s separate entrance points, visitors will not be able to access the Thruway directly from the Route 31 parking lot and vice versa.

“Governor Cuomo is demonstrating again his commitment to fueling tourism and regional economies in Central New York,” **said Thruway Authority Board of Directors Chair and Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney.** “The newly constructed Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park is a result of the collaborative efforts between state and local affiliates and will attract tourists and locals alike to experience the history of the Erie Canal firsthand.”

“This project is a shining example of the fostered cooperation we have cultivated between the Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation,” **said Thruway Authority Acting Executive Director Bill Finch.** “The Thruway provides access to historic communities throughout upstate New York for millions of motorists each year, and the new Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park gives visitors a chance to experience the rich history of New York State and the Erie Canal by simply pulling off the Thruway.”

The park gives visitors an authentic glimpse into life on the Erie Canal in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Key historical elements include the enlarged Erie Canal Lock 52 and the Erie House Complex, which dates back to 1895 and includes the Erie House Tavern and Hotel, a mule barn, and blacksmith shop. Guided tours by the Canal Society of New York give visitors a firsthand look into the facility’s historic structures. The newly constructed Visitor’s Center, operated by the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council, offers interactive displays and educational materials. For example, a model lock featured in New York State’s exhibit at Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 is a centerpiece in the facility.

“The Thruway and Erie Canal have been major economic drivers for New York, both

commercially and recreationally, for decades,” **said New York State Canal Corporation Director Brian U. Stratton.** “With the Canal system spurring hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism-based economic activity each year, it’s clear that people want to experience its history and this park is the perfect way to tell those stories.”

“Every day, more and more people are coming to appreciate that New York’s culture and heritage is intimately connected to the development of the Canal system,” **said Canal Society of New York State President Kal Wysokowski.** The Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park is the culmination of 20 years of work on behalf of the Canal Society and became a reality because of our strong relationship with the Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation, and we are very proud to now have a place where visitors can reach out and touch history with their hand.”

The entire project was completed by New York contractors and in a three phase sequence. Phase one, completed by Cold Springs Inc. of Akron, NY, included site work, installation of ramps and the parking area. Phase two consisted of the rehabilitation and restoration of various structures and was completed by Bouley Associates of Auburn, NY. The project’s final phase which involved the construction of the new Visitor’s Center with access off the Thruway and Route 31 was completed by Bette & Cring, LLC of Latham, NY.

“The Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation have given travelers the opportunity to glimpse into a dynamic aspect of New York’s transportation history and we are very proud to have been a part of it,” **said President of Bette & Cring Construction Group Peter Bette.**

Work completed includes ramps to and from the eastbound New York State Thruway, a parking area, paved trails connecting the parking lot with the historic lock, as well as informational signage. Numerous on-site buildings have been rehabilitated, including the historic Erie House and a newly constructed parking lot accessible from Route 31. Visitors can access historical information at the new Visitor’s Center and walk the grounds on the newly connected park trails. Facility hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

“We are proud to be a part of the opening of the Erie Canal Heritage Park at Port Byron, and excited to welcome in an attraction that promotes and honors the historical significance of the Erie Canal,” **said Mike Linehan, Board Chair of the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council.** “This is a great new attraction for the Finger Lakes Region, and the FLRTC is honored to be a part of this project in partnership with the New York Canal Society and the New York State Thruway Authority.”

Originally conceived by the Canal Society of New York State, the project has come to life with the support and direction of Governor Cuomo, the New York State Thruway Authority and Canal Corporation.