



Heritage-in-Arts Initiative Fact Sheet and Status Report

June 23, 2009

Purpose

The arts are known to provide multiple benefits to communities by sparking and fostering creativity, improving quality of life, attracting new and repeat visitors to a region, and offering economic development opportunities through industry-specific employment and indirect employment to support the industry. Place-based arts initiatives are sustainable, providing jobs and money that stay in the community. The intersection of heritage and arts provides Canalway communities with ongoing opportunities to interpret place, and to tell and retell local stories through diverse arts initiatives that keep the past alive and interesting. Modernizing the lore and weaving a seamless up-to-date history will facilitate the understanding of that economic potential.

The Canalway Corridor Heritage-in-Arts Initiative provides the more than 200 communities in the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor further opportunities to strengthen the identity of a shared canal heritage. The initiative seeks to build community and regional pride in this identity, engage new partners in the arts fields, and generate excitement through its wide-ranging scope using implementation strategies identified in the Corridor's Preservation and Management Plan including projects and programs that "reinforce the Canalway Corridor's distinctive sense of place, build an awareness and understanding of the Canalway Corridor, expand the circle of friends engaged in heritage development, and stimulate economic revitalization"

This Initiative gains inspiration from the first celebration marking the opening of the Erie Canal. On the morning of October 26, 1825 the first fleet on the Canal was launched from Buffalo "accompanied by the firing of a cannon and this was echoed by the booming of a line of canons stationed at suitable intervals all the way across the state to Albany and down the Hudson to New York City – a grand salute from a battery five hundred miles long, announcing to the people of the state the completion of the most stupendous undertaking of their time." Despite several enlargements and realignments of the system, the communities (and former cannon sites) are still linked by these canals more than 175 years later. The very nature and identity of many of these communities are both drawn from the canal, its bridges, its historic structures, its people, and its stories, whether true accounts or fascinating folklore.

Background

The founders of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor understood the importance of the arts to the Canalway region as the legislation creating the management entity and plan suggested not only a consideration of documenting the music, art, poetry, literature and folkways associated with the canals but also a look at the methods to support the perpetuation of those cultural activities - Sec.806(a)(4)(B).

Arts Forum

The Arkell Museum was the location of a gathering of arts and cultural organizations, community leaders, heritage enthusiasts, artists and others for an Arts Forum sponsored by the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor with support from Art Walks on Water, Canaltown Studios and Art Trails, the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor, the Village of Canajoharie, and the Arkell Museum. Following a welcome from local representatives and an introduction to place-making and the arts by nationally-recognized planner Ronald Lee Fleming of the Townscape Institute, <http://www.townscape.org/>, the sixty-five participants in attendance broke into roundtable groups to discuss various issues related to heritage and the arts in the Canalway Corridor. The Forum provided the foundation of partnership-building that resulted in the first work plan for the Heritage-in-Arts Initiative.

Speaking Engagement at Decentralization (DEC) Regrant Program Retreat

The New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) provides funding to local artists through their Decentralization (DEC) Regrant Program Sites. Of the 36 DEC Sites state-wide, 13 are all or partially located within the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. NYSCA held the annual DEC Retreat in late April, 2009 and the Erie Canalway NHC was asked to co-present a session on cultural planning on April 28th. A number of DEC sites have provided funding to heritage-based and canal-related arts activities including Arts Niagara's award to the Friends of the Lockport Library's "Art Along the Erie Canal" year long series of events. We hope to build upon this introduction to the DEC sites and seek future partnerships for cultural activities in the Erie Canalway Corridor. Go to the following link for a list of DEC programs state-wide: http://www.nysca.org/public/resources/local_dec.htm

Arts Inventory

Following a Request for Qualification process that brought in seven exceptional proposals, the selection team of staff and commissioners reviewed the submittals and chose the New York Folklore Society to complete a selected *Inventory of the Arts and Cultural Destinations* in the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. The inventory is expected to provide the background material for a number of other projects in the Heritage-in-Arts Initiative as well locations to visit offered on the Erie Canalway NHC website.

League of Historic American Theatres and National Trust for Historic Preservation 2011 Conferences

The national trade association representing professionals involved with historic theatres has selected Proctor's Theatre in the canal community of Schenectady as its home base for its summer of 2011 annual conference. Hundreds of professionals in the field are expected to be visiting theatres in the Capital District and as far west as the Stanley Theatre in Utica. Thousands of preservationists and others will also be in the Corridor in the fall of 2011 for the National Trust for Historic Preservation annual conference in Buffalo. Erie Canalway NHC staff members will be working with the conference planning committees and the New York State Movie Theatre Corridor to provide information to attendees on the wonderful historic theatres in the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor for these audiences.

Music on the Thruway 2008 Event

On August 30th, the Saturday of Labor Day Weekend, visitors to the Chittenango Travel Plaza of Interstate I-90 were treated with a surprise rendition of "15 Miles on the Erie Canal". Musician Paul Swiatek engaged travelers of all ages with canal songs on this busy holiday weekend even giving several brave souls a turn at the microphone.