



Erie Canalway News Release

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2020 Erie Canalway Heritage Award of Excellence Winners Announced

Recipients offer models of successful heritage development

WATERFORD, NY - The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor is pleased to announce recipients of the 2020 Erie Canalway Heritage Award of Excellence: **Erie Canal Heritage Park** at Port Byron and **Gateway Harbor of the Tonawandas** in North Tonawanda and Tonawanda. The **Port of Newark** in Newark received Honorable Mention.

“We are proud to recognize these extraordinary places that have capitalized on their canal heritage to revitalize their waterfronts and communities,” said **Bob Radliff, Executive Director of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor**. “Each project is unique in scope and concept, but they all make the Canalway Corridor a more vibrant place to live and visit. They serve as valuable models for what can be accomplished with thoughtful planning, sound investments, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders.”

The Heritage Award honors significant places of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and recognizes excellence in advancing the goals of the Erie Canalway Preservation and Management Plan. A five-person independent jury selected award recipients based on a written application and a virtual site interview with community leaders and stakeholders.

2020 RECIPIENTS

Erie Canal Heritage Park, Port Byron

What was once an abandoned canal lock along the NYS Thruway is now a regional destination featuring a visitor center, restored historical buildings, and the unearthed Lock 52. Years of perseverance, fundraising, and sweat equity provided by the Canal Society of New York State, working in partnership with the NYS Thruway Authority and others, are behind every facet of the park.

Visitors begin at the park’s visitor center, where displays of historic canal objects and an 1893 large-scale lock model orient them to the site. They are then invited to walk through the massive stone structure of Lock 52, built in 1853, and tour the restored 1894 Erie House Tavern & Hotel, mule barn

and blacksmith shop. Interpretive signs and volunteers share information and stories about the 19th century waterway.

Located along the NYS Thruway between exits 40 and 41, the park is accessible from a dedicated eastbound Thruway exit, as well as from NY Route 31 in Port Byron. In 2019, patrons came from every state in the nation and 60 countries. The park's unique location enables the Canal Society to reach a whole new audience. Travelers who might not otherwise take the time to stop for an off-route historic attraction, are introduced to New York's canal heritage and to the many places where they can visit the canal today.

"On behalf of the Society, I want to express our great appreciation and thanks for this recognition," said **Cabryn Gurdo, Executive Director of the Canal Society of New York State**. "Even more, the award gives us a chance to thank in return the staff of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor for their many years of expertise and making the Heritage Park such a great success. The national recognition conveyed by this award is still more assistance! It will help draw attention to the Park among the national audience that travels the New York State Thruway. We hope that it will provide just that little bit more incentive to pull off the Interstate and experience the legend of the Erie Canal."

Gateway Harbor of the Tonawandas, North Tonawanda & Tonawanda

Decades of collaborative investment and waterfront revitalization have built Gateway Harbor of the Tonawandas into a vibrant public space and regional destination. By crossing county and community boundaries, Tonawanda and North Tonawanda created a single campus that unites north and south by water and enhances both communities.

Projects included: developing 1,000 feet of dockage and amenities for boaters, creating paddlesport access, converting an adjacent street into pedestrian-only green space with passive and active recreation, developing a network of trails, attracting mixed-use commercial development, designating a downtown historic district, and connecting the harbor with adjacent downtowns.

The collaborative efforts between Tonawanda and North Tonawanda were funded in part by the NYS Department of State Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, the Buffalo Billion Smart Growth Community Fund, and NYS Canal Corporation Canalway Grant Program.

The harbor's success has sparked reinvestment in long-abandoned commercial properties along the waterfront and attracted new businesses to both cities. Visitors and residents are drawn to the waterfront restaurants, local attractions, and recreational opportunities at Gateway Harbor, extending their stay and boosting the economic impact of tourism in the region.

"The Erie Canal has historically been the most influential, defining feature of the Twin Cities of North Tonawanda and Tonawanda," said **Arthur G. Pappas, Mayor of North Tonawanda**. "Gateway Harbor Park's development has transformed the downtowns of the Tonawandas into a vibrant summertime destination and allowed thousands of visitors every year to experience the history, heritage, and recreation that the Erie Canal offers. We are so honored Gateway Harbor Park has received the Erie Canalway Heritage Award."

Port of Newark, Newark

The Village of Newark capitalized on its canal waterfront resources to create a vibrant port sustained by a strong community, recreation and arts, and private partnerships. The Port of Newark includes canalfront with 1,200 feet of floating docks, T. Spencer Knight Park, and a Welcome Center run by the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce. The Canalway Trail runs through the park, bringing cyclists, runners, and walkers to the village and waterfront.

The active port has attracted new businesses as well, including Erie Shore Landing-- a former industrial building just steps from the park that now offers a gift shop, café, ice cream parlor, and print shop run by The Arc Wayne. Newark's downtown district is an easy walk from the port; new streetscape and landscape improvements make it safer and for pedestrians to enjoy the park and access the Village.

Community events during the summer enliven the park and attract thousands of visitors each year. A wide assortment of stakeholders contributes time, talent, and expertise to make the port a community showpiece. The Port of Newark is a testament to sustained planning and investment to create a premier destination on the Erie Canal in the heart of the Village of Newark.

"It's an honor for our community to have the Port of Newark recognized with an Erie Canalway Heritage Award Honorable Mention." said **Jonathan Taylor, Mayor of the Village of Newark**. "We are thankful for the vision that started many years ago with the Port of Newark. Today we continue to build on that vision with both public and private investments and will have more development centered around our beautiful port in the future. We are proud to say our port is a destination for boaters, bikers, and hikers alike."

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor would like to thank **Environmental Design & Research, Landscape Architecture, Engineering, & Environmental Services, D.P.C. (EDR)**, for their support of the 2020 Heritage Award of Excellence program.

"Congratulations to Gateway Harbor of the Tonawandas, Erie Canal Heritage Park, and Port of Newark!" said **Patrick Heaton, Director of Cultural Resources of EDR**. "The winners of this year's Heritage Awards are outstanding projects that truly capture the spirit and character of the Erie Canal. Congratulations to all of the volunteers, planners, and community leaders whose vision and commitment made their ideas come to life. I was honored to be part of this year's selection committee and was inspired by all of the applications that we reviewed."

The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor has conferred the Erie Canalway Heritage Award of Excellence on exceptional sites since 2008. Learn more about this year's recipients and prior winners at eriecanalway.org/get-involved/awards.

ABOUT THE ERIE CANALWAY

Nearly 200 years after its construction, the Erie Canal remains an iconic symbol of American ingenuity and determination. The **Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor** preserves our extraordinary canal heritage, promotes the Corridor as a world-class tourism destination, and fosters vibrant communities

connected by more than 500 miles of waterway. It achieves its mission in partnership with the National Park Service, New York State agencies, non-profit organizations, local residents, and more than 200 communities across the full expanse of upstate New York.

www.eriecanalway.org

Attached photos courtesy Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor:

1. Erie Canal Heritage Park at Port Byron, credit: Keith Boas
2. Gateway Harbor of the Tonawandas, credit: Pierre Williot
3. Port of Newark

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