

Erie Canal Greenway Grants: Revitalizing New York's Original Main Street

by Carmella R. Mantello

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, the State of New York and the country as a whole were forever changed as the Canal spurred the first great population movement westward and provided an avenue for economic growth and prosperity. Today, more than 180 years later, the New York State Canal System is being redefined as a world-class tourism destination, attracting visitors from around the globe who come to cruise along its 524 miles of pristine waters or bike along the Canalway Trail.

The New York State Canal System is comprised of four historic waterways, the Erie, the Champlain, the Oswego and the Cayuga-Seneca canals. Spanning 524 miles across New York State, the waterway links the Hudson River, Lake Champlain, Lake Ontario, the Finger Lakes and the Niagara River with communities rich in history and culture.

Over the last decade, the Thruway Authority and State of New York have invested more than \$500 million to preserve the Canal's historic infrastructure and develop full service harbors, ports and visitor amenities such as docks, electricity, potable water, showers and bathroom facilities. Individual communities along the Canal System are revitalizing their waterfronts by working with public and private partners to develop restaurants, marinas, retail shopping, and lodging to cater to a myriad of visitors.

Greenway Grant Projects

In an effort to build on these investments, the Erie Canal Greenway Grant Program, administered by the Canal Corporation, was created in 2006 to help spur revitalization and encourage greater tourism along the Canal System. As part of this program, more than \$8.4 million was approved in the 2006/2007 State Budget for capital projects that will enhance and promote tourism, recreation, historic interpretation, and community revitalization.

In August 2006, more than 81 applications for grant funding were received totaling more than \$12 million. After an extensive review process, the Canal Corporation selected 54 projects spanning 19 counties to receive funding through the Program.

Individual projects were awarded on a competitive basis to local communities and not-for-profit organizations. The projects were evaluated based on specific criteria, including consistency with the goals and objectives outlined in the 1995 Canal Recreationway Plan and, "A Report on the Future of New York State Canals," (December, 2005) prepared by the NYS Canal Corporation Intergovernmental Task Force.

Examples of projects in Central New York receiving grant awards include:



Courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

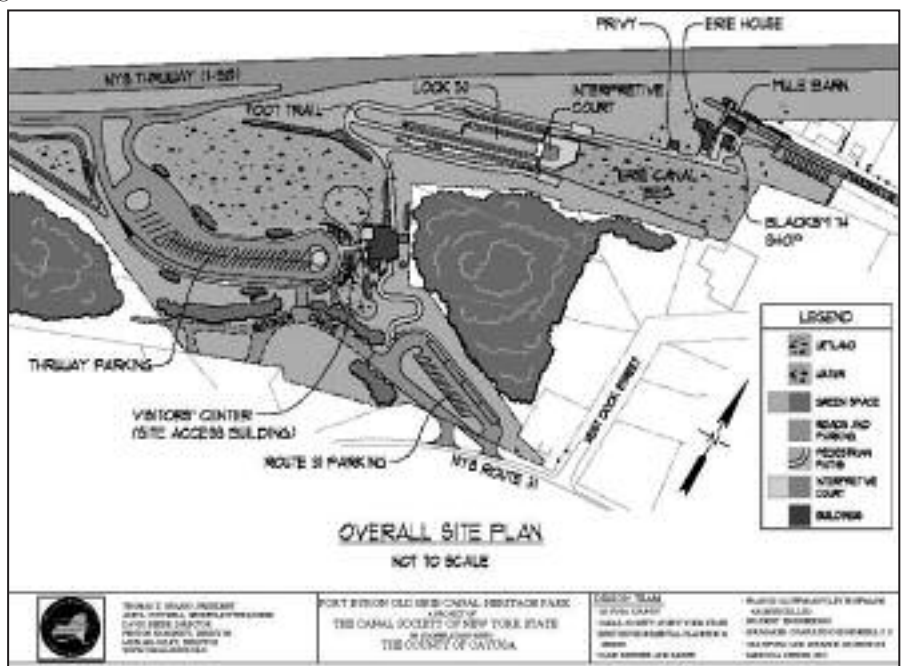
The NYS Canal System comprises four branches – the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals.

Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park Restoration (\$225,000) – Funding will be used to rehabilitate and restore the Erie House, mule barn and blacksmith shop (listed on the National Register of Historic Places), located off the NYS Thruway in Port Byron (see below map).



Photo courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

Targeted today for park restoration, Port Byron's lock was once an active access point to the waterway.



Courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

Park makeover plan for Port Byron's historic Canal bed surroundings.

Erie Canal Museum Interpretive and Educational Exhibits (\$225,000) – Funding will be used to redesign this Syracuse museum’s first floor exhibition gallery to incorporate state-of-the-art design and technology with artifacts and archives drawn from the museum’s extensive collection.

Oswego West Pierhead Lighthouse Project (\$225,000) – Funding will support acquisition of the Oswego West Pierhead Lighthouse, as well as remedial cleanup and rehabilitation to preserve this National Historic Site.

City of Rome/Canal Greenway Access (\$225,000) – Funding will be used for infrastructure improvements that will provide connections between the Canal, the Canalway Trail and the city’s downtown Main Streets District. The project includes parking, public docks and interpretive signage. The City also received a \$135,000 grant to fund development of performance space and other improvements at Bellamy Harbor Park.

Seneca Falls/Canalside Community Boatshop (\$160,115) – Funding will support renovation of a non-motorized boat launch on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal by installing 100 feet of floating dock, and construction of restrooms, showers and laundry facilities for boaters.

These grants are the beginning of a renewed era of progress and rejuvenation along New York’s historic canals. Local communities will utilize the funds to increase public access, amenities and development along the

Canal System to attract more visitors to this national treasure. As these projects begin to break ground over the next several years, the Canal System will once again become an

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Photo courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

The acquisition of the Oswego West Pierhead Lighthouse is part of a Greenway grant project.

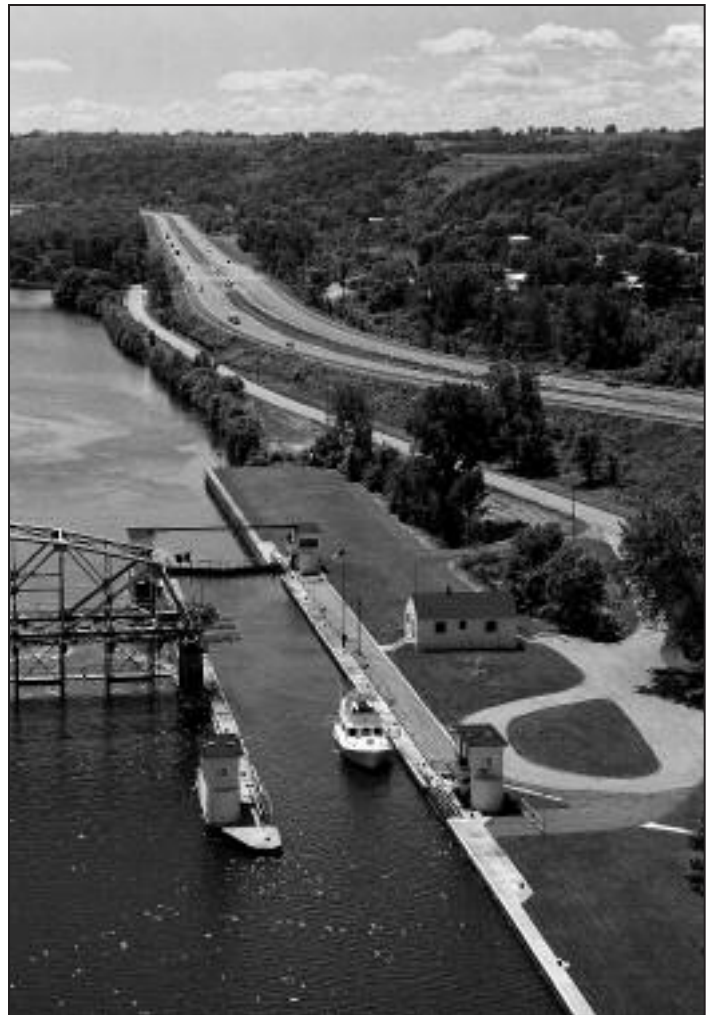


Photo courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

New York’s first “thruway,” the Erie Canal parallels the NYS Thruway at Lock 15 near Fort Plain.



Photo courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

Boats dock at the Seneca Falls Harbor on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal.



Photo by Darren McGee, I Love NY/DED

Walking along the scenic Erie Canal – a popular pastime

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engine for change and a catalyst for revitalization of our upstate communities.

The Canal Corporation looks forward to continuing its strong partnerships with local communities, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and state and federal agencies to implement this successful grant program as we work to revitalize New York's original Main Street.

For more information about news and events along the New York State Canal System, please visit the Canal Corporation's website at www.nyscanals.gov, or call 1-800-4CANAL4.

Carmella R. Mantello is Director of the New York State Canal Corporation.



Photo courtesy of NYS Canal Corporation

The Canalway Trail in Schenectady County hosts enthusiasts of Cycling the Erie Canal, an annual eight-day, 400-mile bike tour from Buffalo to Albany along the historic and picturesque Erie Canal.

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