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Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation Announces The Ice at Canalside Grand Opening

*Fourth annual holiday celebration will kick off a season of festive fun, food
and activities on New York State's largest outdoor ice rink*

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) invites the public to the Grand Opening of The Ice at Canalside presented by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York ([see picture here.](#)) The \$20 million project, created under the leadership of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, provides visitors a skating surface that is bigger than two NHL rinks, three unique bridges ([see picture here](#)) and 22,000 square feet of towpaths lining the canals to reinforce the pedestrian experience and allow for future development as Canalside grows. Winter visitors to the Ice will enjoy skating, ice bikes and other winter activities, along with music and food. The holiday celebration takes place on Thursday, December 18, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. It includes an on ice demonstration of the activities available at The Ice at Canalside, the lighting of the holiday tree, an appearance by Santa, fireworks and free public skating to kick off the most colorful season of the year.

This family-friendly site brings old fashioned traditions to the waterfront using the very latest technology. The historically aligned canals are kept cold with more than 70 miles of refrigerated piping under a multi-layered surface. Visitors will hear all of the sounds of the season piped through an extensive speaker system that lets skaters move to the beat of their favorite music. Warm nuts, hot cocoa, pretzels and cold craft beer are just some of the offerings for rink side tasting.

“This transformative year-round activity space is bringing the crowds to Canalside during the winter season,” said ECHDC Chairman Robert Gioia. “The Ice at Canalside looks like a scene right out of a Currier and Ives painting now that it is bustling with skaters, food vendors and families enjoying the festive atmosphere at this historic site. I hope everyone makes plans to

visit the Ice and see how Governor Cuomo's vision for making Buffalo a year-round destination has become a reality we can all be proud of now and for generations to come."

Skate rentals will be free the night of the Holiday Celebration. If you don't skate, don't worry; starting on Friday, December 19, Water Bikes of Buffalo will be renting ice bikes that can be pedaled on the frozen canals right alongside the skaters ([see picture here](#)). There will also be curling, broom ball and other activities available throughout the winter season.

The magnificent 30-foot tall Canalside Holiday Tree presented by First Niagara Bank came from the Arboretum on Blue Hill in Delevan, New York. It is decorated with hundreds of lights and will remain on view into the New Year. The tree will be surrounded by a stunning and festive holiday landscape that is sure to be a picture perfect setting for skaters and others looking for a new way to enjoy the season.

"Like the Erie Canal and Aud, the redeveloped historically aligned canals will drive people, excitement and economic opportunities to a place that is uniquely Buffalo," said Congressman Higgins. "Today we drop the puck on the next period in our waterfront future and continue the momentum contributing to Western New York's rise."

"Buffalo should be very proud of the progress being made at Canalside, and especially proud of opening the biggest ice rink in the state of New York," said Senator Tim Kennedy. "By investing in Canalside, New York State is providing winter activities to attract visitors, honoring the extraordinary history of the site and continuing to be a magnet for additional investors and businesses. There is a great deal to celebrate on Buffalo's waterfront this holiday season."

Assemblyman Sean Ryan said, "The exciting activity at Canalside continues with the opening of the "Ice at Canalside", and I am thrilled that people from across Western New York will be able to enjoy this great new aspect of Buffalo's waterfront. My thanks to Governor Cuomo for investing in our waterfront, which has seen unprecedented growth in recent years. The Canalside skating rink is sure to be a wonderful new Buffalo tradition."

"The grand opening of the ice rink at Canalside continues a great year of progress in Buffalo," said Mayor Byron Brown. "While city residents and visitors continue to enjoy our other outdoor skating venues, including ice skating at Rotary Rink and Martin Luther King Jr. Park, they now have a new place to go and it's the biggest rink in New York State. Partnering with Governor Cuomo, we continue to create affordable, fun activities in Buffalo and this new rink will draw even more people to our waterfront during the winter season."

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said, “The unveiling of the ‘Ice at Canalside’ brings an added dimension of wintertime fun to Erie County and adds vibrant cold-weather seasonal excitement to Canalside’s many summertime offerings. There isn’t another skating venue like this anywhere, and the Ice promises to draw families and visitors downtown for years to come to enjoy outdoor recreation and make memories on a historical site that has a rich past of its own. With thanks to Governor Cuomo and our partners, our waterfront is being reborn as the year-round destination we have envisioned.”

The Ice at Canalside is located at the corners of Main and Marine streets in downtown Buffalo. Visitors can take the NFTA Metro Rail to the Erie Canal Harbor Station stop or parking is available in adjacent parking ramps and lots. Additional information on the schedule of events, parking and updates can be found at www.canalsidebuffalo.com.

The project generated approximately 47 construction jobs, with approximately three full time and nearly 30 part-time positions being created for the operation and maintenance of the grounds and equipment.

Master architect for the spectacular Ice at Canalside is Perkins Eastman (formerly EEK), supported by C and S-Watts, Quennell *Rothschild* & Partners, Architectural Resources, Tillotson Design Associates, and Cloward H2O. Biederman Redevelopment Ventures (BRV) is providing programming and activation of The Ice at Canalside.

The construction, operations and programming for the Ice at Canalside was funded by New York State, the New York Power Authority and by National Grid.

“The grand opening of The Ice at Canalside is another sure sign of the amazing comeback of the waterfront area with a series of ambitious initiatives that underscore Buffalo’s revitalization,” said John R. Koelmel, chairman of the New York Power Authority and president of the HARBORCENTER. “The Power Authority is pleased to be part of this effort through our accelerated annual funding contributions to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation under a 2010 agreement. The Ice at Canalside project is exactly the kind of transformative initiative that we envisioned.”

History of Canals

As we celebrate an exciting new chapter in the history of this site, it’s important to note the many ways the location of the Ice has influenced our great city.

At the height of the Canal District dubbed the Canal Era Days (1830-1865), the Grand Canal (which also acquired more dubious nicknames such as Clinton's Ditch and Dante's Place) put Buffalo on the map as the terminus of the canal system and "portal to the west," becoming a centerpiece for world commerce in the 19th century both for legitimate and "illegitimate" businesses alike. The site was a main thoroughfare with waterfront industries and housing, as well as brothels, beer halls and saloons.

Thousands arrived at the Immigrant Steps hoping for a better life in Buffalo. These steps have been recreated, as have the historic Lloyd and Commercial streets in the canal district, along with the Swartz and Whipple Truss bridges that gave people a clear view of the beehive of activity. The Towpaths that provided waterside walkways for commerce have also been recreated.

In his forward to the 1993 book *America's Crossroads* by Michael N. Vogel, Edward J. Patton, and Paul F. Redding, Professor Marvin Rapp wrote: "Too few realize that more immigrants passed through these streets during the height of the canal era than passed through Ellis Island."

When the railroads put an end to the canal era, the site eventually became the location of the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium-which opened in 1940. "The Aud" was home to the NHL's Buffalo Sabres and before that the AHL Bisons, the Buffalo Braves of the NBA, professional soccer team the Buffalo Blizzard and lacrosse team the Buffalo Bandits, as well as countless performances from the circus to professional wrestling. Some of music's biggest names performed at The Aud including Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Ray Charles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Frank Sinatra, Prince, Johnny Cash, and the Grateful Dead. The Aud was closed in 1996, replaced by what is now First Niagara Center. It sat vacant until demolition began in 2008 to restore the site to its original landscape.

About Canalside

Canalside is a growing regional destination and entertainment district, situated on 21 historic acres along downtown Buffalo's emerging waterfront on the Buffalo River. Canalside earns its name from its storied past, when the Erie Canal Harbor was built in 1825 as the western terminus of the Erie Canal. Until five years ago, the land was barren and inaccessible, but the area has been reclaimed by the state's Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. and developed with millions of dollars in public and private investment. With more than 1,000 yearly events and nearly 1 million annual visitors, Canalside is fast becoming the go-to place for in- and out-of-towners of all ages to learn, play and relax. For more information, visit www.canalsidebuffalo.com.

About Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation

The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) is governed by a nine-member board consisting of seven voting directors and two non-voting, ex-officio directors. The seven voting directors are recommended by the New York State Governor and are appointed by the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development as sole shareholder of ECHDC. The two non-voting, ex-officio director positions are held by the Erie County Executive and the City of Buffalo Mayor.

As a subsidiary of Empire State Development, the state's chief economic development agency, the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation supports and promotes the creation of infrastructure and public activities at Canalside, the Ohio Street corridor and the Outer Harbor that is attracting critical mass, private investment and enhance the enjoyment of the waterfront for residents and tourists in Western New York. Its vision is to revitalize Western New York's waterfront and restore economic growth to Buffalo based on the region's legacy of pride, urban significance and natural beauty. For more information on ECHDC, visit www.eriecanalharbor.com.

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