



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**June 12, 2025**

Media Contact:

Kelsey Hanks

(401) 714-5981

kelseyrhanks@gmail.com

### **Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Providing Lead Support for International World Canals Conference 2025 as Part of Erie Canal Bicentennial**

Buffalo, New York (June 12, 2025) — World Canals Conference 2025 (WCC 2025) organizers today announced the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is providing lead support for its upcoming global gathering of inland waterway experts, enthusiasts, and stakeholders, which will take place between September 21-25, 2025 in Buffalo, NY.

The grant support from the Foundation correlates directly with the theme of the 2025 conference—‘sustaining our multidimensional inland waterways’—during which national and international attendees will exchange ideas, discuss pressing challenges, and highlight innovative projects taking place along inland waterways.

“Beginning with the vision for the Empire State Trail development and Reimagine the Canal investments in the Erie Canal system, the State of New York has provided a clear pathway for public-private partnerships to take root to support a number of cultural, recreational and economic development opportunities,” said JJ Tighe, Senior Director of Parks & Trails Initiative, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “The World Canals Conference is a great opportunity to showcase the many ways Buffalo and the Western New York region has worked together to leverage its natural resources and waterways.”

The Foundation’s substantial commitment to Western New York’s parks, trails, and economic development has been demonstrated through its support of numerous regional projects along our waterways which was highlighted by the historic trip of the new pedestrian bridge traveling from Italy through the Erie Canal to Ralph Wilson Park in Buffalo in July 2024.

The Foundation has made investments to rehabilitate the Empire State Trail in Medina and to build a new pedestrian bridge spanning the Erie Canal that will open later this year in Brockport. In March 2025, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation also announced eight ‘Trail Town Grants’ to

fund amenities for residents and visitors and enhance local economies, including Erie Canal destinations Lockport and Brockport.

“We are thrilled to have the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation’s support as Buffalo and the Erie Canal are put on the international stage during WCC 2025 and during the Canal’s Bicentennial celebration,” said Bob Radliff, Executive Director of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, a conference co-host. “The Foundation’s dedication to inland waterways and our Great Lakes, and its subsequent impact on quality of life and local economic growth is far-reaching, felt throughout local communities, and significant, as we strive for long-term environmental and economic sustainability.”

### **World Canals Conference 2025**

WCC 2025 offers attendees: keynote speakers and presentations from inland waterways experts and enthusiasts from around the globe; exclusive full-day field sessions to significant canal and cultural sites in Western New York; networking events designed to foster collaboration and prompt discussions around the significance and impacts of inland waterways everywhere, shared challenges, and visions for transforming them for the future; pre- and post-conference tours that extend from New York City to Canada, along with community events and activities, which explore the impact of the Erie Canal on the region’s history, arts, culture, and specialty food and beverages; the Bicentennial voyage departure of the *Seneca Chief*, a full-sized replica of the same boat that opened the Erie Canal in 1825, which will recreate its inaugural journey from Buffalo to New York Harbor accompanied by a historic flotilla.

This year’s conference holds special significance as it coincides with the Bicentennial of the opening of the original Erie Canal, one of the world’s most iconic waterways, commemorating its pivotal role in shaping the economic and social landscape of the United States.

WCC 2025 is organized by the [Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor](#), the [New York State Canal Corporation](#), [Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation](#), and [Visit Buffalo Niagara](#) (the "Hosts") in collaboration with [Inland Waterways International](#).

### **Registration Information**

[Registration](#) for WCC 2025 is now open. Conference passes include access to field sessions, presentations, networking events, meals, and Bicentennial commemorations, as well as the option to sign up for pre- and post-conference tours.

###

### **About the World Canals Conference**

The World Canals Conference (WCC) is an international event with a long tradition. The first conference was organized in 1988, and since then there have been 34 editions. The event changes location every year between countries on three continents. WCC is the premier platform for dialogue and knowledge sharing about the management, history, and future of the world’s inland waterways. Since its inception, it has brought together participants from diverse sectors, including canal managers, engineers, historians, and local government representatives.

**About the Erie Canal Bicentennial**

The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, revolutionized transportation and trade in the United States, linking the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean via the Hudson River. This engineering marvel sparked economic growth, westward expansion, and technological innovation, earning its place as a National Historic Landmark. WCC 2025 will honor this significant milestone with special programming dedicated to the canal's enduring influence.