



## **‘Powerhouse’ Keynote Speakers Announced for Erie Canal Bicentennial’s World Canals Conference**

*Leaders in waterway innovation, infrastructure and accessibility*

*Richard Millar and Haben Girma selected for global gathering*

BUFFALO, NY (July 8, 2025) — World Canals Conference 2025 (WCC 2025) organizers today announced two keynote speakers for its upcoming global gathering of inland waterway experts, enthusiasts, and stakeholders, which will take place September 21-25, 2025 in Buffalo, NY.

"We're thrilled to welcome two powerhouse changemakers who bring bold ideas and transformative stories to our global canals community," **said Brian U. Stratton, Director of the NYS Canal Corporation.** "Their vision, expertise, and passion will help us continue to make our canals more inclusive, sustainable, and innovative spaces. You won't want to miss the insight and inspiration they have to share."

The WCC 2025 keynote speakers are as follows:



### **Richard Millar — Chief Operating Officer of Scottish Canals**

Once facing steep decline, Scotland's canals are now a model for sustainable revitalization, and no one has been more central to that transformation than Richard Millar. As Chief Operating Officer of Scottish Canals, Millar helped lead the ambitious Millennium Link project, reawakening the Lowland canals and setting the stage for innovative projects like The Kelpies, Falkirk Wheel, and smart canal technologies. [Learn more about Richard and Scottish Canals.](#)

### ***“Forging the Future” — Sept. 22, 11:15 a.m.***

*Millar's WCC 2025 keynote will dive into how these blue-green corridors now power Scotland's future—supporting urban housing, renewable energy, low-carbon transport, and public health—and how canal systems around the world can follow suit.*



### **Haben Girma — Award-winning Advocate, Author, Speaker**

As the first Deafblind graduate of Harvard Law School, Haben Girma has spent her life breaking barriers and helping communities do the same. Recognized by Forbes 30 under 30, the Helen Keller Achievement Award, and a 2013 White House Champion of Change, Girma is an inspiring voice for accessibility, inclusion, and innovation.

[Meet Haben and explore her work.](#)

***“Canals and Recreation for All” — Sept. 22, 6:30 p.m.***

*Girma’s WCC 2025 keynote will explore how people with disabilities engage with parks, trails, and canal spaces—and how designing for inclusion can create richer, more resilient communities for everyone. Expect storytelling, practical insight, and a call to action.*

**Bob Radliff, Executive Director of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor** said: "As we commemorate the Erie Canal's 200th anniversary, these highly accomplished speakers promise to expand our vision of what's possible and encourage us to go boldly into the Erie Canal's next century of service. The World Canals Conference sets the stage for attendees to think big, work smart, and make their impact last."

**World Canals Conference 2025**

The World Canals Conference gathers experts and enthusiasts from all over the world to share innovative practices related to economic and community development, waterway management, tourism, and historic preservation along inland waterways around the globe.

WCC 2025 offers attendees: keynote speakers and presentations; exclusive full-day field sessions to significant canal and cultural sites in Western New York; networking events; pre- and post-conference tours that extend from New York City to Canada; community events and activities; and attendance at the Bicentennial voyage departure of the Erie Canal Boat *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.

This year’s conference holds special significance as it coincides with the Bicentennial of the 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 for full conference and single day attendance.

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.

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**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.

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