

VISITORS CENTER OF THE TONAWANDAS opens in Gateway Harbor Park

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO
Tribune Editor

On May 15, the Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas, the Gateway Cities Promotions committee and city officials from both Tonawanda and North Tonawanda took part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the new Visitors Center of the Tonawandas located in Gateway Harbor Park.

The overarching Visitors Center project actually includes the opening of two visitor center sites – the first, a year-round operation located at the Chamber of Commerce Offices, 254 Sweeney St., North Tonawanda. Hours of operation will be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thursday, and 9 a.m. to noon Saturday.

The second facility – where the opening ceremony was held) is a seasonal, volunteer-run operation located at the North Tonawanda Harbor Master building in Gateway Harbor Park, 99 Sweeney St. Both visitor centers will be at no cost to the public.

The Gateway Harbor visitor center will be open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. as the tourist season picks up.

Robert Pecoraro, president of the chamber's board of directors and North Tonawanda Common Council president, said the visitor center project was the chamber's largest initiative this year.

"It's all about bridging the communities together and showing that there's something here in North Tonawanda and Tonawanda that we can offer tourists and other groups to come and see," he said.

Visitor center employees will be certified per the EXP Niagara training program, the official destination education and visitor services online training program facilitated by Destination Niagara USA. EXP Niagara is an online

training program aimed to help create the quality visitor experiences by readying staff to service international guests as well as knowing the surrounding area so they can recommend ways to extend the visit. The program is currently comprised of eight video-based programs.

Calling it a "grand day for a grand opening," North Tonawanda Mayor Arthur Papas talked about the excitement surrounding the new visitor centers and the prospect of building the Twin Cities reputation as prime destinations for tourists.

"When someone comes to this visitor center, they're in a nucleus ... We're within a two-, three-minute walk to many of the sites and many of the historical places, as well as new businesses – all within a two- or three-minute walk," Pappas said. "People here can go down Webster Street, they can go down Main Street. ... If they want to go to another city, like Tonawanda, or another county, it's two minutes over the bridge. So, we have a nice hub, so to speak; a nice nucleus for a visitor center."

"When people visit, they visit for a lot of reasons. Some, just out of interest in traveling. Some come to make new friends; meet new people; get an idea of what else is available to look at. It does a lot for the economy, as well as the visitors. So, it's something to be proud of."

"And it goes back to the idea that cooperation brings it all about. The chamber, businesses, the parks and recreation departments, the governments of both cities, counties – everybody put together: The end result is always positive. It's an old concept, (but) working together works."

The Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas is a membership organization that provides services, support and networking for business and industry in



Laura K. Bernsohn, Gateway Cities Promotions Committee cuts the ribbon for the new Visitors Center of the Tonawandas located in Gateway Harbor Park as members of the Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas, city officials from both Tonawanda and North Tonawanda, and others look on.



the Tonawandas. The group vigorously promotes business and economic development to enhance the quality of life through proactive involvement with government, community and education leaders

Per an event press release,

"The Gateway Cities Promotions Committee is dedicated to promoting tourism in the Tonawandas. Their goal is to build on the many existing tourism assets and continue to drive more visitors to the Tonawandas."

"The Gateway Cities Promo-

tions Committee was instrumental in the development of the Tonawandas Heritage Tour in 2019, which provided users with an audio tour of 26 historic sites throughout the Twin Cities."

IN THE NEWS

JCOPE posts 2020 financial disclosure statements for statewide elected officials

Filings of governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general &

comptroller can be viewed online. The New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics announced it has posted the 2020 annual statements of financial disclosure of the statewide elected officials who were in office as of the statutory May 15 filing dead-

line. By law, those disclosures are required to be posted to the JCOPE website at <https://jcope.ny.gov/financial-disclosure-statements-elected-officials>. Most disclosures are due to the Commission by May 15 each year, except when that day falls on a weekend; this year's filings were due May 17. The disclosures for members of the Legislature and legislative staff were also due May 17, but those are first submitted to the legislative ethics commission

and then turned over to JCOPE by late June for public disclosure and posting to the commission's website. Another notification release will be issued at that time.

In addition, the financial disclosure statements of the following are available upon request:

- √ State officials and employees who are required to file because they have been determined by their agency to be a policymaker or because they earn an annual salary that is equivalent to a CSEA SG-24 job rate (currently

- (\$101,379);
 - √ Legislative employees who have been determined to be policymakers or who earn above the CSEA SG-24 job rate;
 - √ Candidates for the four statewide elected offices; and,
 - √ Candidates for the Legislature.
- Those requests can be made by going to https://jcope.ny.gov/records_request and submitting the fillable form.

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