

American Patriot stop includes visit to Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls State Park was the destination for a busload of travelers who had docked in Buffalo last Friday on the first cruise ship the area had seen in decades.

American Cruise Lines' vessel, American Patriot, a 130-passenger, U.S. flagged cruise ship, sat at the Erie Basin Marina in Buffalo after docking on Thursday. According to Empire State Development, the arrival of the ship builds on Gov. Kathy Hochul's commitment, "to the renewal and economic reinvestment of Buffalo's waterfront."

"Today we are embarking on a new chapter for Buffalo's waterfront," Hochul said in press release. "As we welcome the American Patriot, we are bringing new visitors, new revenue and a sense of pride to Buffalo. This is the first of many arrivals that will showcase our world-class cultural institutions like the AKG and the Darwin Martin House to travelers from across the country. We are proving once again that Buffalo is a premier destination and, with our future cruise terminal on the horizon, the best is yet to come for the Great Lakes."

The cruise line's itinerary included a day trip to Niagara Falls by bus.

Mayor Robert Restaino was there to greet passengers as they arrived at the state park.

"I know it's been a long time coming," he said while waiting for the passengers to arrive. "I know that both our governor and any tour operators in the Western New York area were hopeful that we would get on this American Cruise Line's agenda and we would become a spot. ...

"I say it all the time: We're the crown jewel of Western New York. For more people to come, in a way that is new, by boat, is great. Just great. ... We want them to know that Niagara Falls is a place to come to have fun."



The American Patriot docks at the Erie Basin Marina in Buffalo. (Photo by Benjamin Joe)

The visitors were also happy to be in Niagara Falls.

Northern California resident Gayle Albo said she was "excited."

"It's the first trip of this cruise line that they've done, so we're all excited about it, too," she said.

According to Visit Buffalo, the lead tourism bureau for Buffalo and Erie County, the American Patriot will be in the Erie Basin Marina on June 11, July 20, Aug. 27, Sept. 9, Oct. 4 and 17 as part of cruises between places as close as Toronto and as far away as Milwaukee. The cruise company will be highlighting the Great Lake's best attractions including the Thousand Islands and the Welland Canal. Cities such as Buffalo will also be in the spotlight.

Back in Niagara Falls, the cruise line passengers were led into the park along with press and Capt. Joe Curtis, the vice president of operations for the Maid of the Mist Corp., who said this

was an important moment for the park – and planning was in the works for over six months.

"I started in August last summer and I knew they were coming about a month after or so," he said. "It's a big deal for everybody. Buffalo, Niagara Falls. There's a lot of these smaller cruise ship companies that are operating all over the country, so to have one come here is a pretty big deal."

In a press release, American Cruise Lines President and CEO Charles B. Robertson said, "American Cruise Lines is looking forward to calling on Buffalo with our small ship, American Patriot. Buffalo's investment in its waterfront inspires us to continue investing in our fleet on the Great Lakes. We are honored to be the first U.S. cruise line to visit Buffalo regularly and look forward to a growing partnership with the city."

This year, American Cruise Lines is running seven cruises that embark or disembark from

Buffalo: the nine-day/eight-night Great Lakes and Thousand Islands cruise that operates between Syracuse and Buffalo and explores the Thousand Islands, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie; and the company's signature, 800-mile, 14-day/13-night American Great Lakes cruise that operates between Buffalo and Milwaukee, and explores Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Lake Michigan.

Buffalo will also serve as both an embarkation and disembarkation port for American's 2026 Great Lakes cruises. The company offers an included hotel stay on all its U.S. cruises, so guests automatically have extra time to explore local areas before departures, as well as during the cruises. Each itinerary is comprised of days filled with excursions, and time spent cruising the lakes, including curated enrichment onboard. All itineraries begin, end and remain in the U.S., making a passport or international flight unnecessary for American travelers.

American Patriot features private balcony staterooms including suites, plus amenities including a top deck lounge and walking track, a main restaurant with views from every seat, a casual café, chart room, fitness center, laundry room and elevators to all decks.

Visit Buffalo President and CEO Patrick Kaler said, "The arrival of cruise ships to Buffalo harkens back to the city's past, when passenger steamboats ferried thousands of passengers between Buffalo, Cleveland and Detroit in the early 1900s. The return of cruise ships to Buffalo emphasizes the resurgence of interest in the city as a tourist destination. These passengers will experience the Queen City's cultural institutions and culinary offerings and share the word once they're back home."

Visit Buffalo has created a landing page with information for both cruise ship passengers and locals. Visitors to the page can find the upcoming cruise schedule, as well as the best places to watch the ships come in and out, and guides for passengers on what to see and where to eat.

Hochul recently revealed the renderings for a cruise ship terminal on Buffalo's Outer Harbor. It will open at Slip 2 parcel on Fuhrmann Boulevard, the former site of the Pier Restaurant, for the 2028 summer season.

American Cruise Lines is the largest river cruise line in the U.S., with 28 small ships and 50-plus domestic itineraries on the Mississippi River, the Columbia and Snake rivers, the Great Lakes, and protected waterways around the country, from Alaska to Florida.

(Senior Contributing Writer Benjamin Joe contributed to this report.)

Wheatfield considers added Sunday hours for cannabis store

BY BENJAMIN JOE
Senior Contributing Writer

Love Nug, a cannabis dispensary owned by Adam and Joleigh Wylucki in the Town of Wheatfield, is one step closer to changing its Sunday hours from noon to 5 p.m. to 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The husband-and-wife shop owners appeared in front of the Town of Wheatfield Board on Monday and were accompanied by their lawyer, Aleece Burgio. The three stated during a public hearing that Love Nug is suffering with short Sunday hours – while competitors outside of Wheatfield are reaping the rewards.

"It is a legal store that is licensed by New York state. You guys get tax revenue, 3% goes back to you at your only cannabis store in your area. So, your money is coming back," she said.

"It's not about whether the consumer can get it between 12 and 5 p.m.; it's whether this business is going to be in the black or the red."

The board, however, was divided, as the question to allow new hours – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays – came to the floor.

Supervisor Don MacSwan

moved to make the changes, on the condition of both the Town of Wheatfield Planning Board and the Niagara County Planning Board approving the measure. Town Attorney Matt Brooks and Engineer Tim Zuber both expressed doubt the county board would feel the need to consider the issue, as it was only a change of hours.

The Town Board meeting became dead silent as MacSwan asked for a second on the motion.

Councilman Curt Doktor asked, "What can you do to trim those hours?"

Councilman Randy Retzlaff asked the merchants to keep the doors closed until after noon.

Doktor noted he was against the idea of cannabis, as Burgio asked whether a liquor store would face such opposition.

"Would you ask that of a bar? Would you ask that of a liquor store?" she asked.

MacSwan opined the dispensary is like any small business in Wheatfield – "just trying to thrive" – and he supported the change in hours.

After some more back and forth between Doktor and Burgio, Dok-

tor relented and said he'd support an 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday schedule for the shop. Retzlaff, who had been against opening before noon, noted the rest of the board would override his "no" vote, which did occur.

Retzlaff had reasoned the shop's patrons should know what hours the dispensary is open and get there accordingly. He also said it was his opinion that no cannabis should be sold on Sundays at all.

"My initial reaction was 'No! No, no, no!'" he said. "I still have that (reaction) for in the morning."

The motion was passed 3-1 with Retzlaff dissenting and Councilman Larry Helwig on vacation and excused.

In other news

•A hazardous waste drop off will take place between 9 a.m. and noon at Town of Wheatfield Town Hall at 2800 Church Road. Paints, batteries and other solids, which cannot be collected with regular trash, can be dropped off at this event.

Registration is required and can be done online at <https://circular.eco/event/wheatfield-hhw-collection>.

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