

Local leaders welcome Canadians back to WNY, 'offering a warm welcome to friends, colleagues & customers' as border reopens

Congressman Brian Higgins and Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz were joined by Patrick Kaler of Visit Buffalo Niagara, Tom Kucharski of Invest Buffalo Niagara and Mary Roberts of Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House in welcoming Canadians back to Western New York on Monday. The border reopened to land travel after being closed for nearly 20 months. The event, held in the Greatbatch Pavilion on the Martin House estate, commemorated the long-awaited resumption of binational travel and commerce that officials had advocated on behalf for months.

"The interconnected relationship between Western New York and our Canadian neighbors cannot be overstated," Higgins said. "We are business colleagues, trading partners, friends and family. We own property on opposite sides of the border, share restaurants, cultural destinations, and retail stores, travel out of cross-border airports, and cheer on each other's sports teams. This long-overdue opening represents a homecoming for people living in border communities. Both countries have suffered economically as a result of the pandemic. Returning to a robust cross-border exchange will help with recovery."

His team said, "The prolonged border closure disrupted binational business of all kinds, with tourism suffering a particularly devastating loss of revenue. Hotels, restaurants, retail and attractions like the Martin House were hit particularly hard when the border closed."

The speakers noted the reopening of the border presents Western New York with the chance to show renewed appreciation to Canadian visitors and customers and bring them up to date on the changes that have taken place in the region over the last couple of years.

Visit Buffalo Niagara President and CEO Patrick Kaler said, "Prior to the pandemic, Canadians made hundreds of thousands of cross-border trips – both day trips and overnight stays – amounting to nearly a billion dollars of annual expenditures and related taxes flowing into New York state and Erie County coffers. That's a very big deal for our economy. And something we should never take for granted. On behalf of thousands of Erie County hospitality industry employees, I'd like to say welcome back to our Canadian friends."

Invest Buffalo Niagara President and CEO Tom Kucharski said, "Buffalo Niagara is truly a binational economy. Since 2000, our organization has assisted over 100 Canadian companies in expanding into the U.S. While we have continued to prevail through travel restrictions, we are excited to field the pent-up demand and more readily capture the job and investment opportunities of Canadian business expansions to Western New York."

Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House Executive Director Mary Roberts said, "Canadian visitors account for up to 15% of our visitation each year, and we've missed the opportunity to open our doors to our friends from the north. Throughout the many months of border closure, we've received countless messages from Canadians who can't wait to come back."

Visit Buffalo Niagara has created a landing page on its website aimed at potential visitors from Canada that features travel tips, including guidance for travelers entering the U.S., updated information about flying out of Buffalo Niagara International Airport, duty limits and articles highlighting new developments in Buffalo and Erie County.

That page can be found here: <https://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/if-you-go/welcome-canadians/>.

City of Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said, "This is a huge step toward recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The two-and-half-hour wait for Canadians to cross the Peace Bridge into Buffalo early this morning demonstrates the pent-up demand on the part of our Canadian neighbors to visit their family and friends, have fun, and do business in Buffalo and Western New York."

He added, "I urge the Canadian federal government to lift that testing requirement for fully vaccinated travelers. It's a financial burden for many Buffalo and Western New York residents, as well as Ontario residents who will forego day trips to shop, dine, go to Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres games and do business. It is a hurdle in getting back to pre-COVID economic conditions."

Leaders Call for PCR Removal

Brown wasn't alone in offering that statement.

In a virtual press conference Monday, four border city mayors – three Canadian and one American – along with Higgins, and two voices of border businesses, celebrated the U.S. opening of the land border, but called on the Canadian federal government to drop what they called an "unnecessary PCR test requirement" for travelers crossing into Canada.

The group said, "The border closure order was originally enacted 20 months ago, and border communities, border residents and border businesses have paid the heaviest price."

They called the Canadian polymerase chain reaction tests "unfair, expensive and not justified by science."

Beyond that, all the speakers were united in the message that the closure of the land border – and now these tests – are "a question of economic equity, while also acting as a continued barrier to recovery."

Higgins said, "For the last 19 months, all of us have been admonished to follow the science. Science

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NY Power Authority invests \$500,000 in Power Vista upgrades

A popular destination for tourists recently received a significant upgrade.

The New York Power Authority invites visitors to rediscover its Power Vista Visitors Center in Lewiston, following an infusion of \$500,000 worth of upgrades, including the addition of two new games to add to its roster of multimedia experiences designed to make learning about clean energy fun for all ages.

The upgrades took place over the past six months, and the new visitors center attractions were opened to the public last week. The Power Authority first undertook a comprehensive redesign and reconstruction of the facility in 2016, adding such features as a "Power Up" 4-D simulator, hands-on interactive technologies, large touch screens, and internet connectivity. The 2016 improvements also included redesigned floor layouts to enhance accessibility, including a new elevator, to complement the existing escalator. Pre-COVID-19, the Visitors Center regularly drew close to 100,000 visitors annually. The popular tourist attraction first opened in 1963.

In accordance with New York state indoor family entertainment centers guidelines, the Niagara Power Vista visitors center, located at 5777 Lewiston Road, has resumed seven days a week operations (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.). Among the upgrades is a state-of-the-art indoor air filtration system to protect visitors and NYPA employees.

NYPA continues to offer reserved or walk-in opportunities for school groups, families or individuals with a mix of guided and self-guided experiences.

To protect visitors and NYPA employees, all visitors must wear masks. Due to changing conditions in response to COVID-19, up-to-date information regarding the facilities is available at nypa.gov/VisitorsCenters or by calling 716-286-6661.



tells us that the vaccine is highly effective in keeping people from getting and giving COVID. Requiring a test is a redundant and costly requirement for those fully vaccinated, and it presents an unnecessary obstacle to returning a prepandemic flow of people across the border, which benefits the economies of both nations."

City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino said, "While everyone wants travelers to be safe and be mindful of public health standards, if our push for vaccination – on both sides of the border – means anything, then let's respect and incentivize those who have responded to the call to be vaccinated and simplify the land border crossing to showing your full vaccine status ... period."

Niagara Falls, Ontario, Mayor Jim Diodati said, "In Niagara Falls, we are like one city divided by international border. With vaccination rates among the highest in the world, it's time to allow our families, friends and visitors who are fully vaccinated the ease of safe travel that we once enjoyed."

Sarnia Mayor Michael Bradley said, "Eliminating the testing to return to Canada by Canadians is a matter of fairness and doesn't endanger public health in Canada according to experts. The federal government needs to do the right thing on the road back to recovery and normalcy and eliminate the testing."

Susie Grynol, president and

CEO, Hotel Association of Canada, said, "I hear it every day from my members: This PCR test is blocking travel. Whether you are trying to visit family, or planning your Christmas holiday, or travelling for business, or a global account looking to book an international event, many are taking a pass on Canada because the process is too complicated and expensive."



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