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To the Editor/Times Union:

Monday afternoon, without much fanfare, the cruise ship *Grande Mariner* slipped from the Erie Canal into the Hudson River. On another cold fall day, 186 years ago, thousands of New Yorkers lined the banks, fired canons, and marched in parades to celebrate the opening of the Erie Canal. Although it was much quieter than Governor DeWitt Clinton's 1825 voyage from Buffalo to Albany on board the *Seneca Chief*, this week's event was momentous in its own right.



Floodwaters from Tropical Storms Irene and Lee took homes and lives across eastern New York. They also caused unprecedented damage to the New York State Canal System. Many structures along the Mohawk River section of the Erie Canal were undermined or washed away entirely. The raging waters carved new channels around locks, destroyed bridges and cut dams off from shore. The dams remained standing, but were bent, broken, and choked with debris.

The extent and the sight of this havoc were simply shocking. It seemed a crippling blow to the Erie Canal, a world-renowned public work that opened the American continent and made New York the Empire State. It would take a Herculean effort to reopen the canal. New York delivered.

From Governor Cuomo and senior officials of the Thruway Authority and New York State Canal Corporation to lock operators, dredge crews, and contractors, repairing the canal became a priority, not for the indefinite future, not for next year, but for *now*.

Repairs to the canal system are essential for it to remain in service supplying water, hydropower, an avenue for commercial navigation, and recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors. Moreover, hundreds of canal-side businesses across the state depend on a thriving system of navigable waterways. Recent studies show that New York's canal system generates nearly \$400 million in annual tourism revenue.

Most of the emergency work that has been done since September had to be performed to control erosion and allow the canal to be shut down safely for the winter. Reopening navigation to allow boats trapped in the Great Lakes to make it to the sea and others to make it from tidewater to the lakes was a significant added benefit.

Monday's successful trip by the *Grand Mariner* is hugely symbolic. It reminds us of the can-do attitude of New Yorkers in general and canallers in particular; people who cut a channel through forests, swamps, and ledge rock across largely unmapped and unsettled territory nearly two-hundred years ago and their successors who made heroic efforts over the past three months to keep the canal system alive.

We are tremendously grateful to today's canal workers. Thanks to them, and their leaders, we are reminded why New York remains the Empire State.

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