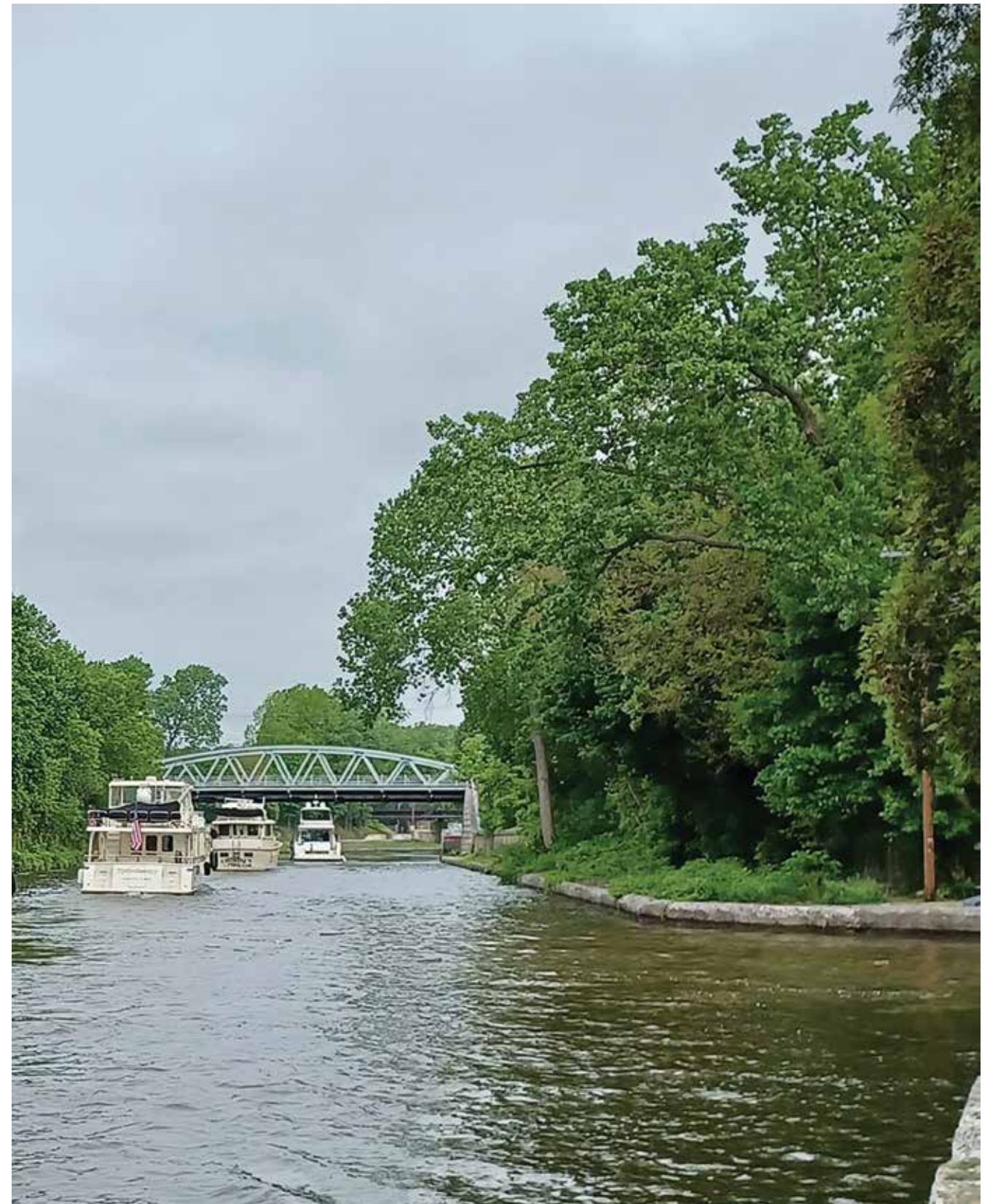


# The Canal System

Raises Upstate  
New York's  
Economy



Boats from far and wide travel the length of the New York State Canal System. Vessels like these use the Erie Canal to transit to the Great Lakes, Canada and the interior United States. Some, flying the pennant of the America's Great Loop Cruisers Association (greatloop.org) are on a 6,000 mile adventure circumnavigating the entire eastern USA!



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**M**ost Boating on the Hudson & Beyond readers have read about the canals, and likely thought about doing a trip to "the Locks". Maybe you have done one, or two, or three. And maybe you have found the voyage

fascinating and fun. Or (like my wife and son) you might find the locking process a bit tedious but put up with it in order to please a family member (in this case, the captain) and/or because the interesting sights, lakes, rivers and anchorages seem worth the hassle. Whether you enjoy the canal, or tolerate it, there is no question it is a useful conveyance to get to places in New York State one might never dream they could reach by boat.

But the 524-mile New York State Canal System is much more than that. It is a vital economic engine for the upstate New York economy, literally bringing in billions of dollars to communities that might otherwise waste away, as literal backwaters abandoned by the onrush of time and technology. As recently as 2014 it was estimated that non-tourism revenue for the canals totaled \$6.2 billion, and tourism impact was about \$1.3 billion (source: "The Value of the NYS Canal System, New York's Multidimensional Waterway", Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, 2020). Were it not for the canal which connects them, many inland New York towns with the word "port" in their names would be forgotten. Instead, boaters

Past and future juxtaposed in Canastota, as the \$1.5 million "Reimagine" project takes shape in that central New York community. Many of these former canal towns are reinventing themselves and embracing aspects of modern lifestyles to create unique and welcoming places to live. Canastota, an outer suburb of Syracuse and home to the International Boxing Hall of Fame, is one example of this approach.

Photo courtesy of the New York State Canal Corporation.



transiting the canal can stop in places like Brockport, Spencerport, Fairport, Lockport, and the list goes on and on.

Even some of the communities separated from the modern canal system by the closure of sections of the original 1825/1842 Erie Canal are getting in on the act. Take Canastota, which hasn't seen a working canal barge since 1917. In 2018 they were awarded a grant of \$1.5 million to renovate the old canal waterfront and revitalize their community, adding a modern, mixed-use development on 2.5 acres along the historic old waterway. Boats may not pass that way anymore, but kayaks are welcome, and bicyclists will be able to ride the trails along its shores. Plus, in the age of Uber, it's easy to get a ride from the current canal to some of these places that are no longer accessible directly via water.

In many places out west, the canal still runs through its original location in the middle of town, so hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and many attractions and amenities are within walking distance. Those that aren't are just a taxi or Uber ride away, so lots of places are within reach for those enterprising enough to look for them. It's really hard to understand how anyone can get bored on the Canal System!

Of particular interest though, is the potential for the resurrection of commercial shipping and alternative-fueled vessels on the canals. Boating on the Hudson & Beyond has been a key player in helping develop

and promote solar-electric vessels designed by Professor David Borton, for instance. It's worth remembering that Solaris, the hand-built solar electric tour boat operated by the Hudson River Maritime Museum in Kingston, got its start from a slightly smaller prototype hand built in a school garage in Schodack, near Rensselaer. The original Solar Sal carried a cargo of recycled cardboard from Cascades Recovery near Rochester to Cascades Tissue Group's Mechanicville plant in 2015, as a test and demonstration of the ability of a solar electric vessel to actually do something useful. That voyage directly led to the design of tour boats such as Solaris which can carry an even heavier payload, but of people. Eventually perhaps much larger boats can be built, say, from 100-300 tons capacity, which is still a trifle compared to a conventionally propelled tug and canal barge (1500 tons) but is a leap forward from some of the small sail freight vessels that have been carrying cargo south of Troy.

The jury is still out on whether these alternative fueled vessels will make a dent in the transportation of cargo across our state, but with the major changes coming up in the next decade for our energy grid and the propulsion systems used by cars and trucks, there is much reason to believe that something may eventually rise to the surface. The Albany Times Union reported recently that the schooner Apollonia is considered a success by its crew and benefactors, and they have moved about 110,000 pounds (not tons!) of cargo in their three years of operation. Based on that model, it's possible to visualize that solar-electric vessels, which can be scaled to larger sizes, carry their own onboard propulsion system and self-recharging capability (i.e., a perpetually filling "fuel tank" that costs zero) may be able to carve out a very productive and profitable niche on our inland waterways. Let's hope so, because the canal towns will get a huge boost from such an industry.

Looking for information on the New York State Canal System and upstate New York? Visit [capitalregionchamber.com](http://capitalregionchamber.com) or stop by the Clifton Park rest area information center just above Exit 9 on the I-87 Northway.

For interesting relocation information to the 8-county Capital Region, visit [GoCapNY.com](http://GoCapNY.com).



This demonstration cargo delivery project aboard the original *Solar Sal* was eight years ago, yet people still look skeptically at solar-electric power as being something "of the future". Designs are being conceptualized for vessels of 100-, 200- and 300-ton capacity, building on the work of Professor David Borton and the volunteers from Cascades Recovery/Cascades Tissue Group who showed it could be done back in 2015.



As shown in this 2021 photo, Fairport is one of the popular canal towns that straddles the present-day Erie Canal just as it did since 1825. Their events draw many thousands of people each year. Photo courtesy of the New York State Canal Corporation.