

Canal Place Heritage Area

A visit to the Canal Place Heritage Area in Cumberland is a perfect way to explore the area's rich transportation heritage and enjoy a variety of fun, educational activities for the entire family. In fact, visitors to Canal Place can take a ride on an authentic steam train, hike and bike the canal towpath, learn about the history of the canal by touring a new visitor center or climb aboard a full-scale canal boat replica.

"Canal Place is going to be one of the premiere historical sites in the East," says Senator J. Glenn Beall, a former United States Senator and Chairman of the Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority. The authority was created by the State of Maryland in 1993 to preserve the heritage of Cumberland, and the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal. "This project is a great example of the utilization of local, state, federal and private resources in restoring and preserving an important part of our national heritage."

Located at the western terminus of the C&O Canal, the Canal Place project celebrates the historic significance of the area known as the "Gateway to the West." With its strategic location at the junction of Wills Creek and the North Branch of the Potomac River, the city of Cumberland

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was an ideal place for the canal, the railroad and the historic National Road to come together. When the canal opened in 1850, the city was firmly established as a hub for all modes of transportation.

"Canal Place focuses primarily on the history of the C&O Canal and Cumberland's rich transportation history to provide a heritage park for the whole family," says Dick Pfefferkorn, the executive director of Canal Place, who has overseen the progress of the project in the eight years since its groundbreaking. Major construction began in 1996 and since then he has presided over an impressive list of renovations and restoration projects that have made it a model for others. "I like to look at it as building critical mass here at Canal Place," said Pfefferkorn, referring to the extraordinary array of heritage attractions that are part of the project, with some already completed but many more planned for the future. "The more things you add to the whole heritage area, the more things you will be able to do on a visit here."

Today, Canal Place is home to many distinctive attractions like the Western Maryland Railway Station, the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, the C&O Canal National Historical Park, Cumberland Visitors Center, the "Cumberland," a full-scale canal boat replica and the historic C&O Canal and towpath.

And within the next few years, some of the most breathtaking plans are about to unfold as Canal Place moves into its next phase. The construction of the Crescent Lawn Festival Grounds began this past summer and the Trestle Walk along with the Canal Street Promenade is being completed. The Trestle Walk will provide a crucial link from the



Beautiful detail can be seen in this life-size bronze of a canal boy and his mule, used to pull the boats on the Canal.

The Visitor Center is home to the Canal Place Museum, run by the National Park Service. The museum has a life-size reproduction of a canal boat and a sampling of canal-era memorabilia. The center is also home to the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad.

canal towpath to the Western Maryland Railway Station Plaza. It will carry the walkway over the newly restored and rewatered canal, which is scheduled to be finished in five years.

Senator Beall is very proud of how Canal Place has taken shape in recent years but he says it's the future plans for rewatering the canal that get everyone excited, and will surely make it a special destination. "With the renewed national interest in historical preservation on the rise in recent years, our plans for rewatering the canal are attracting interest from all over."

Beall also points out that there's a lot to be learned by studying the canal and Canal Place has a great deal to offer. "I think educational institutions will take a great interest in the canal as a place to bring students and teach them something about the history of our country. Cumberland was the Gateway to the West and the vision was to come here by water and go overland to the West. George Washington and others had the vision of opening up the country by using the canal and the Potomac River." He says the transportation industry of our country can be traced right back to the beginning of the canal, the railroad and the National Road.

According to Dick Pfefferkorn, a visit to Canal Place is guaranteed to have something of interest for every member of the family and it's a great way to discover our past. "We want people to come here and spend time enjoying a variety of activities and events that are interesting,

This is the first of a three part story. In the next Mountain Discoveries look for part two, which will reveal the current and future plans for Canal Place.



informative, fun and low-cost. We're not building a Disneyland but it's a type of heritage tourism that appeals to a lot of people out there."

Canal Place offers plenty of opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and experience life as it was when America was expanding and the C&O Canal was an integral part of the nation's transportation network.

