



Media Release

Hats off to the opening of the Welland Canal

Port Colborne, ON (March 8, 2019) – As clocks spring forward this weekend and the first day of spring is less than two weeks away, the opening of the Welland Canal is sure to follow! Port Colborne's Top Hat Ceremony celebrates the opening of the Welland Canal and start of the 2019 shipping season by welcoming the Captain of the First Downbound Vessel.

Kicking off the festivities on Sunday, March 17, 2019, St. James and St. Brendan Anglican Church (55 Charlotte Street, Port Colborne) will host a Mariner's Service at 7 p.m., filled with music, prayers, dance and fellowship, followed by a reception in the Guild Hall (across the street at 72 Charlotte Street).

The Top Hat Ceremony will be held on Friday, March 22, 2019 in the pavilion at Lock 8 Gateway Park (163 Mellanby Avenue, Port Colborne), hosted by Mayor William C. Steele, along with representatives from upper levels of government and the marine industry. Starting at 8 a.m. Port Colborne's Fair Trade Committee will once again provide a Pancake Breakfast with students from McKay Elementary School offering entertainment. The ceremony will begin at 8:30 a.m.

FUN FACTS:

- Port Colborne became Ontario's first Fair Trade City in 2009! We're proud of our status and committed to making our world a better place by offering, using and educating the public about fairly traded products.
- The present Welland Canal is the fourth Canal to be built and was officially opened August 6, 1932.
- The Top Hat Ceremony began in Port Colborne in the early 1970s under Mayor John Buscarino.
- The Top Hat that is currently presented to the Captain of the first Downbound Vessel has been loaned from the Port Colborne & Historical Museum since 1999. It's a beaver felt fur hat that was donated to the Historical & Marine Museum by an anonymous donor. It's a turn of the Century Tress and Co. from London, England. The Founder of the Tress & Co. hat firm was Cooper Tress Sr (1787-1869), son of William Tress and Sarah Clifford, of Upchurch, Kent, England. He was joined at the firm by his son Cooper Tress Jr. and later by Cooper Tress Jr.'s sons, Sidney Cooper Tress and Herbert Charles Tress. The company was active in England for over one hundred years being established in 1846 and finally selling to Christy's in 1953 in the neighbouring suburb of Bermondsdey.

- After the Ceremony the Top Hat is stored in an acid free box in the Captain John W. Sharpe Heritage Resource Centre, a climate controlled building that was built in 1995 to house over 17,000 artifacts and archives. But don't worry, the Captain is given a keepsake Top Hat to take with them on their downbound journey!
- New from 2017, in celebration of Canada's sesquicentennial celebrations, the Captain will also be presented with a silk tuxedo scarf bearing the Canada 150 logo.
- Every Civic Holiday long weekend Port Colborne celebrates their Marine Heritage during Canal Days. August 2 – 5, 2019 marks the 41st Annual celebration. For more information, visit www.canaldays.ca.

About City of Port Colborne

Located on the south coast of the scenic Niagara Region, Niagara's Port of Call has found the perfect balance – successful industrial and commercial sectors, comfortable and scenic residential areas, white sand beaches, unique culinary choices, the world class Sugarloaf Marina, fishing, golfing, trails, shopping districts along the historic Welland Canal and an energized festival and entertainment scene that includes live theatre – truly a community that adds to the overall Niagara Experience.

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