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Raymond S. Burton Welcome Center Dedicated During Official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at Northbound Facility

Authentically New Hampshire Experience Unveiled at New Welcome Center in Hooksett

HOOKSETT, NH – In a ribbon cutting ceremony, New Hampshire Governor Maggie Hassan joined with state officials and private partners to dedicate the northbound Welcome Center in Hooksett in honor of late Executive Councilor Ray Burton.

Named the Raymond S. Burton Welcome Center, the facility honors the longest-serving Executive Councilor in New Hampshire history. Burton was a long-time supporter of the state's tourism industry and was committed to promoting the state and serving the people of New Hampshire.

“The Hooksett Welcome Centers are an innovative public-private partnership that will help boost our economy and support our tourism industry by providing a high-quality welcome for all visitors to the Granite State, and I thank all of the partners who came together to help make this uniquely New Hampshire welcome possible,” Governor Hassan said. “I am honored to help dedicate the northbound Welcome Center in Councilor Ray Burton’s memory, which is a fitting tribute to his legacy of dedicated public service.”

The official ribbon was cut to the brand new amenities that have transformed the visitor experience. The facility features a new 20,000 square foot NH Liquor & Wine Outlet, a 3,000 square foot interactive visitor center, NH General Store, Common Man Roadside eateries in a 10,000 square foot food court, including the Hi-Way Diner, a Merrimack County Savings Bank branch, League of New Hampshire Craftsmen store, 16 Irving fuel stations, upgraded restrooms and more than 300 parking spaces. All of it was made possible through a unique and innovative public-private partnership with Granite State Hospitality.

“In considering this project at first, it seemed only national companies could do something like this,” said Alex Ray, owner of the Common Man family of restaurants in New Hampshire, and partner in Granite State Hospitality. A variety of Ray’s well-known Common Man restaurant concepts make up the food offerings at the center. “Then, we thought, ‘We should give this a whirl.’ We’ve changed the model, made it all local, all New Hampshire, and are customizing the experience for our guests.”

Ray’s partner, Rusty McLear of Mill Falls at the Lake in Meredith, said of all the projects he’s been involved with, revamping these welcome centers was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and he’s glad they accepted the challenge. “I couldn’t be more proud of the project and all the team has accomplished together with our partners at the state,” said McLear. “The response has been overwhelming. It’s turning out to be exactly what we hoped it would be.”

Other unique features of the building include an 8’ x 13’ foot video wall highlighting attractions in the state, a rock waterfall with a likeness of the Old Man of the Mountain carved into a cliff, a large topographical map of New Hampshire and a suspended covered bridge.

Under a 35-year ground lease with the State of New Hampshire, Granite State Hospitality funded the design and construction of the project, and is responsible for the maintenance and operation of both north and southbound facilities, with the exception of the NH Liquor & Wine Outlet stores, which are funded and operated by the NH Liquor Commission (NHLC).

“The Liquor Commission is proud to play a supporting role in this groundbreaking public-private partnership,” said New Hampshire Liquor Commission Chairman Joseph W. Mollica. “As an agency that operates 78 retail locations throughout the state, we know how important first impressions can be. Together with the Common Man, the Department of Resources and Economic Development and Irving Oil, our two new 20,000 square foot flagship NH Liquor & Wine Outlet stores provide a truly welcoming atmosphere and first-class shopping experience to millions of New Hampshire visitors each year. We are confident these two new NH Liquor & Wine Outlet locations will deliver up to \$40 million in combined annual sales, a \$6 million increase over the previous locations.”

Tourism is the state’s second largest industry, and the welcome centers are often the first impression visitors have of New Hampshire. These facilities will showcase New Hampshire hospitality in a whole new way for visitors and residents alike.

“Visitors stopping here will find an authentically New Hampshire experience,” said New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development Commissioner Jeffrey Rose. “Both the northbound and southbound facilities were built with New Hampshire pride. This pride is the foundation of an innovative partnership, and a testament to New Hampshire ingenuity.”

The redevelopment project is setting a new standard for the traveling public. “The new Hooksett Welcome Centers will greatly enhance the motorist experience along the I-93 corridor, allowing for a rest stop and providing a unique New Hampshire range of services,” said acting NHDOT Commissioner Jeff Brillhart. “This is a win-win for the residents of New Hampshire, and a private-public partnership that will generate revenue for the State.”

Originally scheduled to open in May, the northbound side and many of its offerings are now available daily to area residents, who can access the northbound side via route 3-A, and visitors who are traveling up Interstate 93. The southbound eateries are about six weeks from a full opening, though the NH Liquor & Wine Outlet, the Welcome Center, 24-hour NH General Store and Irving fuel pumps are open.

“For travelers, we hope this northbound welcome center becomes the start of their vacation,” said McLear. “When they get into their cars for their family trips and they pull in, they’ll say ‘We’re back in New Hampshire, this is where our vacation starts,’” said McLear. “When they head home and pull into the southbound center, we’re going to show them how they can stay here full time and make New Hampshire their home. They can work here, get a quality education here, and we’ll have information on how they can do that.”

For more information about the Hooksett Welcome Centers redevelopment project and Common Man Roadside, visit www.thecman.com/arewethereyethn .

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