

Erie Canal face-lift begins

◆ Improvements will include a visitors' center with a sure-fire magnet for boaters: bathrooms.

By Amy Cavalier
Messenger Post Staff

Typically in February, the Erie Canal in Brockport is empty.

However this year, a glance into the section of the canal between the Park and Main Street bridges reveals something unusual.

Repairs have begun on the lower part of the north side wall, and workers can be seen standing in the canal bed most days of the week.

Canal employee Bill Clifford said that "the wall in Brockport was among the worst on the canal."

Village Public Works head Frank Perrine said the wall has deteriorated over time, causing large cracks and leakage.

The work was initially scheduled to begin on the lower canal wall next year, Mayor Josephine Matela said, but was moved up because the village wanted to start on improvements to the upper wall this year.

"It just didn't make sense for us to start on the upper wall this year and then have to tear up all that work next year to repair the lower wall," she said. "This way, we can make one big mess rather than two."

The lower wall repairs, funded by a \$700,000 grant from the State Canal Corp., include water and electricity hookups and docking space for smaller boats.

The village has received a \$106,000 grant from the Department of Parks and Recreation for work on the upper wall. Canal Revitalization Committee member Bill Andrews said that the money will pay for bathrooms, lighting, park benches, landscaping and a small amphitheater along the canal.

A \$25,000 Small Cities Grant, along



STAFF PHOTO/JOHN D. HANLON

Crane Hogan Structural System workers prepare the Erie Canal wall between the Main Street and Park Avenue lift bridges for refacing last Thursday. Tim Hume (left) and Al Lowery (center) used air drills to bore holes for reinforcing bars. Forster Thompson (right) uses a jackhammer to remove concrete.

with \$25,000 in matching funds from the village's Canal Revitalization Capital Fund, will go towards the construction of a visitors' center on the canal.

Economic Development Marketing Manager Scott Winner hopes to complete the visitors' center by the end of the construction season.

Recently, the village board sent Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's office a letter requesting \$140,000 to acquire Fay's Garage on Clinton Street and to pay for environmental tests on the site. Matela hopes to see the old build-

ing converted into an Erie Canal Museum.

Day Environmental Engineering of Rochester is currently completing an environmental study of the site.

Matela said the entire canal revitalization project is being done at no cost to the village taxpayers.

State Sen. George Maziarz, who was instrumental in getting the state funding for the project, said "these improvements will bring Brockport up to par with other communities on the canal."

Matela believes it's important to

preserve the canal.

"Our community is here because of the interstate commerce that the canal fostered in the early 1800s," she said.

She said many people think that the project is for tourists only, but disagrees. "This isn't just for boaters and hikers," she said. "This is to enhance the quality of life of our full-time residents. It's something they will be proud of."

"We already get quite a bit of

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STAFF PHOTO/JOHN D. HANLON

A rotary grinder removes concrete from the Erie Canal wall between the Main Street and Park Avenue lift bridges to prepare it for refacing.

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tourism on the canal. We'll see maybe five to six boats tied up in the canal at night sometimes," she said. "However, in the towns on the canal that have bathroom amenities, there may be 20 boats docked and they may stay two or three nights."

Tom Sheehan, an engineer

with the project, said there will be fresh-looking concrete canal walls and a 40-foot-long lowered landing to allow easier access for smaller boats by the time it's done in mid-April. He said there will also be new safety ladders installed along the canal.

The repairs to the lower wall are expected to be complete in time for the opening of boat traffic on the canal in May.