

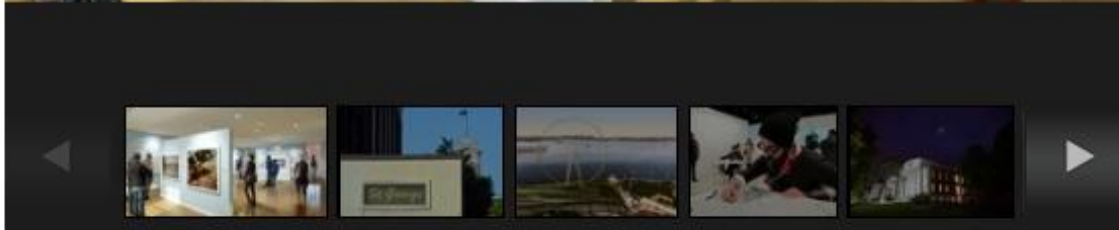
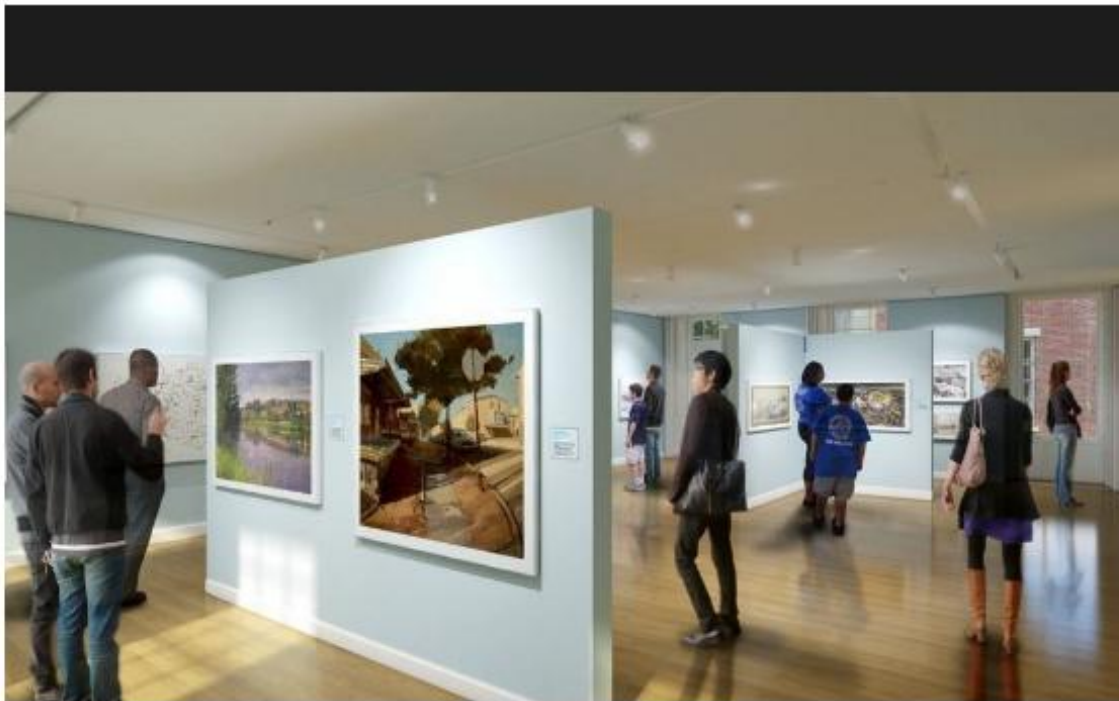


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Obstacles ahead for Island cultural institutions with Wheel on horizon



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Staten Island Guide





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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- When the world's largest observation wheel starts turning in 2017, an estimated 4.5 million annual tourists will gravitate to Staten Island for what promises to be the most stunning view available of New York City's skyline.

They'll ride the New York Wheel, perhaps do some shopping at the new Empire Outlet Mall. Then what?

That question may be a shock to the borough's museums and cultural institutions, which, for so many years, watched those visitors come via ferry only to circle back to Manhattan.

But an influx of tourism of this scope could provide a much-needed boost in revenue for the venues, in addition to showcasing Staten Island's cultural offerings.

"This isn't just buildings going up," said Monica Valenzuela, interim director of Staten Island Arts. "This is economic development."

Now with a little more than two years to go, many have devised a plan to capitalize on the tourists. Still, many more are unsure and perhaps unprepared to welcome the new visitors.

WHAT PLANS ARE IN PLACE

Two years may seem like plenty of time to prepare for the influx of tourism. But many of the organizations hoping to reap the benefits have their work cut out for them. Here's a sampling of the plans to garner more tourists:

**NORTH SHORE BOOM:
Will the borough be ready?**

This is part of a series on the massive development planned for the North Shore, looking at what needs to be done for the borough to face the challenges ahead and realize the potential benefits.

- ***The first report focused on traffic issues.**
- * **The second outlined Island benefits that come with the projects.**
- * **The third tackled plans to handle the parking difficulties.**

Points of interest

Transportation

Much more S.I. Guide »

Photo of the Day



Staten Islanders On the Road

Active Discussions

- 1** **Mayor Bill de Blasio's popularity continues to fall, poll shows**
(12 comments)
- 2** **It doesn't take much to create 'Traffic-geddon' on Staten Island (editorial)**
(23 comments)
- 3** **5-year-old catches tiny shark off Staten Island coast**
(23 comments)

Staten Island Museum: By 2017, it will have two functioning locations: The original hundred-year-old city-owned building on 75 Stuyvesant Place in St. George and a soon-to-be-opened one on the grounds of Snug Harbor (Building A), plus an addition (Building B) to be opened later.

Cheryl Adolph, the museum's interim executive director and CEO, calls the St. George location the gateway into the borough's cultural offerings, since tourists can see it from the Ferry entering Staten Island.



The Staten Island Museum will expand into the ground of Snug Harbor in the fall.

"People have to like what they see there to know if they're going to visit the other locations," she said.

Adolph said the main feature of the museum will be an exhibit about the Staten Island Ferry and one of local art. But the space is still in need of \$5 million, already requested from the city, for renovations and wheelchair accessibility.

Bill Lyons The museum is also aggressively fundraising to complete projects on its two buildings in Snug Harbor. Building B needs about \$7.6 million more. Building A, set to open in the fall, needs \$300,000. If they don't raise that money, officials plan to borrow against their assets, with the goal of replenishing that fund later, said Henryk Behnke, the museum's vice president for external affairs and advancement.

The museum also needs another \$2 million for an endowment. Behnke said the latter is not necessarily a priority at this point.

Raising the money will be an uphill battle. Museum tax records for 2010 through 2013 show an average of about \$1.7 million per year in contributions.

St. George Theatre: Plans are to increase its budget by up to 40 percent and add about three additional performances a week to their lineup over the next five years. It means increasing staff and selling more tickets. About 70 percent of the theater's revenue comes from ticket sales. They're also working on installing a marquee, so that visitors are more drawn to the old theater.

Already the landmark venue is part of the Wheel's marketing campaign to appear in the lineup of entertainment options on Staten Island. Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanic Garden is also in on the deal.



A view from the balcony at The St. George Theatre.

(Photo courtesy of the St. George Theatre)

The benefits from that partnership are valued at approximately \$80,000, according to the Wheel's Chief Marketing Officer Travis Noyes. The theater is among several cultural organizations that received donations from New York Wheel LLC. However, none of those organizations, nor Wheel reps, would disclose amounts.

When asked how the Wheel selected Snug Harbor and the St. George Theatre, Rich Marin, president and CEO of the Wheel, said both made efforts early on to be involved in the process.

St. George will also be adding guided tours for a small fee to attract tourists during the day -- but, as the theater's director Wayne Miller said, "There's no way of knowing whether someone who buys tickets to the Wheel is going to want a backstage tour of a historic theater."

Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden: Plans are to expand on existing events, like the Harbor in Bloom Festival in May, to draw more tourists. Snug Harbor also aims to work with the Wheel to be part of a joint pass -- where riders of the Wheel will also get special access Snug Harbor attractions like the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art and the New York Chinese Scholar's Garden.

This year, the cultural center added original performance art programming to its repertoire, but its CEO and President Lynn Kelly said the programming is more for current and future residents, not so much tourists.

"Ideally we would love to add more programming," Kelly said. "But we also have an obligation to maintain and operate [Snug Harbor] too."

Kelly did not disclose how much money will be set aside in their budget for added programming, despite saying such planning would need to happen early-on. Snug Harbor is in the process of creating a fundraising plan to reflect its goals for 2017. They're hoping for more grants, which comprise about a third of their revenue, as well as donations.



Music Hall at Snug Harbor.

(Staten Island Advance/Bill Lyons)

Alice Austen House Museum: The former house of a Victorian-era photographer is off the beaten path from much of the development expected on the North Shore. But it's still poised to benefit from the tourism, said Janice Monger, executive director of the Rosebank museum.

Monger hopes to facilitate tours buses for tourists. This would require more staff and some logistical considerations, since the house is relatively small. Monger said she does not know how much this would cost at this time.



A statue Buddah watches over the garden at the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art Saturday, May 10, 2014.

(Staten Island Advance/ Bill Lyons)

Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art: Though not part of the North Shore, this venue represents part of the challenge in garnering tourism from other parts of Staten Island.

The museum in Richmond hasn't reached out to or been contacted by the developers regarding any marketing partnerships. Many of its visitors come via ferry and take the bus, then walk up Lighthouse Hill, said Meg Ventrudo, executive director.

Ventrudo said she at least hopes for better signage from the city Department of Transportation, so that the tourists who do seek out the museum can better locate it. The most she's hoping for is more interest from the developers, she said.

"The museum has been here 70 years," Ventrudo said. "We know who the visitors are and being part of the conversation is important. I would hope that any development of that size would come in and be a good community partner."

TRANSPORTATION IS AN ISSUE

Snug Harbor is perhaps best positioned to cash in on the new visitors: Its 83-acre campus includes a range of attractions any tourist would enjoy.

Lynn Kelly, its president and CEO, spearheaded the redevelopment of another popular tourist destination, Coney Island. Kelly was also just tapped for a high-level position in the city's main tourism board. A top-level executive with the Wheel, Travis Noyes, sits on Snug's board.

But even with the advantages Snug Harbor has, it still faces one major obstacle in getting tourists to its site: Transportation.

For a visitor to get from the Wheel to Snug Harbor, their options are limited, and perhaps not convenient enough for the casual tourist.

The plan now is that every third shuttle bringing tourists to the Wheel from the ferry will also go on to the 83-acre campus, beginning when the wheel starts turning, Marin said.

"But it will depend on demand," he said. "We're not going to run empty buses just to run empty buses."

The shuttle will not only benefit Snug Harbor as an entity, but also the others it houses, like the Noble Maritime Collection and the soon-to-expand Staten Island Museum.

Other cultural institutions, like the Alice Austen House, may have to pool their resources for something similar, like a shuttle to Staten Island hotspots, independent of the Wheel.

"We're a small cultural organization," Monger said. "We're just trying to keep our doors open, so it is sort of a complicated effort. I don't know how you would arrange for it, unless there was some kind of new entity to facilitate that."

A COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Though most cultural institutions say they're interested in collaborating with one another to make the Staten Island cultural experience a more cohesive one when the Wheel gets started, no tangible efforts to make this happen have come to fruition.

For the most part, each appears to be in competition for tourists, said Kamillah Hanks, president of the Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership, and an observer of the shifting dynamics of the North Shore.

"I think everybody is kind of concerned with their own cultural institution," Hanks said. "There should be more of a collaborative effort to make that happen."

"We're just trying to keep our doors open, so it is sort of a complicated effort." – Janice Monger



Perhaps the Chamber of Commerce, the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation or Borough Hall -- something as simple as a comprehensive pamphlet that includes directions and brief descriptions of Staten Island's main cultural attractions, Hanks

suggested.

"More needs to be done to bring together one message about what's offered in downtown Staten Island and what you can do there," Hanks said. "Staten Island wasn't planned to be what's it becoming and we quickly have to go back to the drawing board."