



Foreign Trade Zone No. 41

For Immediate Release

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Port Milwaukee marks successful 2024 cruising season

More than 13,500 cruise passengers visited Milwaukee this season

MILWAUKEE – Port Milwaukee is proud to announce that more than 13,500 global cruise passengers visited the City of Milwaukee this year, marking another successful season for the city’s growing cruising industry.

Le Bellot concluded Port Milwaukee’s 2024 Great Lakes cruising season on Sunday, October 13. In 2024, Milwaukee welcomed 13,568 passengers who traveled to-or-from the city via international cruise ships. This represents a total of 27 vessel calls between seven vessels that host itineraries in Milwaukee.

Port Milwaukee kicked off its cruise season on May 1, 2024, with the arrival of the *Viking Octantis*. At that time, Port officials estimated over 12,000 global passengers would visit the city this season.

“Port Milwaukee remains a premier destination on the global cruising map,” **Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson** said. “This year’s successful season is a reflection of the hard work of Port staff and our partners. As we look at 2025 and beyond, I am confident Port Milwaukee will continue to reinforce its role as an essential economic resource for the City of Milwaukee and Wisconsin. The importance of cruise passengers is reflected in my proposed capital budget. We are investing \$5-million in a new cruise ship facility, and we are optimistic that will attract even more visitors.”

Mayor Johnson recently announced his 2025 Proposed Budget, which would complete the financing package for the redevelopment of South Shore Cruise Dock, located immediately east of the Lake Express High-Speed Ferry terminal. This will serve as the future docking space for

Seawaymax vessels. Port Milwaukee previously received \$3.5 million in Capital Tourism grant funding from the State of Wisconsin to build this new infrastructure at South Shore Cruise Dock. The project is slated to be complete for the 2026 cruise season.

“Port Milwaukee is excited about the success of the 2024 cruise season, and grateful for the potential opportunity to grow that success with the new Seawaymax cruise dock,” **Port Director Jackie Q. Carter** said. “Having a dedicated space for Seawaymax cruise ships, outside of the commercial cargo space, will support our efforts to grow the tourism side of our business, generating revenue for the City and contributing to services for Milwaukee residents.”

After a seven-year hiatus, Port Milwaukee is also excited to announce the return of Victory Cruise Lines in 2025. The cruise line will call on Milwaukee once again with vessel *Victory I*. The vessel has a passenger capacity of approximately 200 people.

“The success of the 2024 cruise season demonstrates Port Milwaukee’s role as an economic powerhouse for Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin,” **President of the Board of Harbor Commissioners Tim Hoelter** said. “The Port’s momentum as a Great Lakes cruising destination is a gateway to continued growth for our city, and we expect to see our growth persist in the years to come.”

“Port Milwaukee’s successful cruise ship season is a key contributor to our City’s growing tourism industry,” **Harbor Commissioner and Alderman Peter Burgelis** said. “I’m proud of Port Milwaukee’s dedication to helping showcase our diverse culture to global passengers. The City’s exciting investment in next year’s budget for a permanent cruise ship dock will prepare our community to thrive for generations to come.”

Several ongoing efforts remain underway to promote the passenger cruise business in Milwaukee and throughout the Great Lakes. Port Milwaukee is the founder of the Milwaukee Cruise Collaborative, a local group promoting the city as a cruise destination. The Collaborative, which includes a cross-section of the local hospitality industry, has planned, promoted, and prepared for increased Great Lakes cruising passengers. VISIT Milwaukee and various local stakeholders are also proud partners in promoting Great Lakes cruising activity in the city.

The Port is also a participant in the Cruise the Great Lakes initiative of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers. The Port previously signed a Cruise the Great Lakes pledge to promote environmental stewardship practices and efforts.

Port Milwaukee is an economic entity of City government governed by the seven-member Board of Harbor Commissioners, a panel appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council. It administers operations on the 467 acres that make up the Port. It promotes regional

shipping and commerce by providing access to domestic and international ships, rail, and over-the-road transportation.