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New park highlights Cohoes falls

By: Danielle Sanzone , The Record

COHOES - Area residents now have a new park to view the beauty of the Cohoes falls, the second largest waterfalls east of the Mississippi River.

Spanning 1,000 feet across the Mohawk River, the falls created the large backdrop to the ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday, officially opening the new Falls View Park which is located adjacent to the hydroelectric plant on land owned by Brookfield Renewable Power.

"We're extremely proud to be part of this project," said Tom Uncher, general manager of Brookfield Renewable Power's Hudson River operations. "This park will benefit the city and the residents of the Capital District."

It took about a year to receive the proper permits for the four-acre park and about two months to build the main area which includes an amphitheatre, a bus drop-off area, a 192-foot pedestrian bridge, several areas to observe the falls, picnic tables and handicap access to fishing platforms.

The multimillion dollar project, however, is not yet complete since crews are still working on paths and a staircase leading down the gorge to the base of the waterfall. In the same area, they hope to build another fishing desk as well. These remaining projects should be complete as early as the fall, officials said.

"With Falls View Park, visitors have an unobstructed view of the beautiful Cohoes Falls," said Mayor John T. McDonald III. "The new park also serves as a historic link between the falls and the Cohoes' historic Harmony Mills district. We are pleased to be part of this milestone public and private collaboration between Brookfield Renewable Power and the Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor."

Before working on this park, Brookfield upgraded the already existing Overlook Park which is further away from the falls near the mill's row housing. The power company sponsored a fireworks display over the falls last year, commemorating the work on the park.

These projects are part of a 40-year operating license for the School Street hydropower plant which was granted to Brookfield by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 2007.

"The license represents a diverse and comprehensive array of public interests including increased year-round flow over the Cohoes Falls and protection of fish and wildlife," said Uncher.

The falls discharges 27,000 cubic feet of water per second which helps power the 38 megawatt hydroelectric facility that creates enough energy to serve 26,000 households a year. In comparison,

about 100,000 cubic feet of water goes over the Niagara Falls.

"Isn't it phenomenal?" said Assembly Majority Leader Ron Canestrari, D-Cohoes, about the falls and the new park. "What a day in history for our hometown."

Along barriers on the cliff facing the 75-foot high Cohoes Falls, there are several signs giving the historical and geological significance of the area.

First accounts of the falls date back to the Dutch settlement in 1640. There are also Native American and early settler folklore revolving around the falls.

The park is open daily from dusk to dawn during the warmer months from April 1 to Nov. 1.

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