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NEW CUSTOMS NETWORK HELPING TO DRIVE GROWTH IN GREAT LAKES CRUISING

Chicago, Illinois – Great Lakes cruising is having its most successful year ever and a big reason why is a new network of U.S. Customs and Border Protection facilities enabling more seamless cross-border travel. New clearance facilities are now operating in the gateway cities of Duluth, Minnesota and Cleveland, Ohio, joining existing facilities in Detroit and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Previously, cruise ship operators had to work individually with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to arrange for agents to process passengers using remote “jump kit” equipment at different locations around the region. The availability of personnel and equipment was frequently uncertain, making it difficult or impossible for the cruise ship operators to plan itineraries that depend on on-time connections to shoreside transportation and activities. Even when available, the customer experience was highly variable and, in some cases, resulted in hours-long waits.

In response, the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers joined with the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation and the American Great Lakes Ports Association to work with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to develop a new four-port customs solution. Strategically positioned at key Great Lakes cruising ports of call, this quartet of customs facilities forms a network that now provides predictability for itinerary planners and an improved passenger experience.

“Our region is a unique two-nation destination for cruise passengers. This is one of our greatest assets and now U.S. Customs clearance facilities are well-placed to support excellent itineraries and market growth,” said **David Lorenz, Chair of Cruise the Great Lakes and Vice President of Travel Michigan**. “With a record-breaking number of cruise ships and passengers this season, the Great Lakes is taking its place among the top cruising destinations in the world.”

Cruise the Great Lakes is the region’s cruise marketing program focused on attracting more passengers. Our region’s Governors and Premiers launched Cruise the Great Lakes and it is now managed by the Conference of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers. Partners such as cruise lines, ports, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, associations and others work toward shared goals with participating States and Provinces.

Nearly 150,000 passengers will visit Great Lakes ports this year--up by more than 25% from 2019. Nine ships are cruising the Great Lakes, including ones operated by Pearl Seas, American Queen Voyages, St. Lawrence Cruise Lines, and for the first time ever, Viking Cruises. Altogether these cruises will generate an economic impact of over US\$120 million and create great experiences for passengers and the communities they visit. Condé Nast Traveler named Great Lakes cruising one of the top 22 travel options worldwide in 2022.

"It's costly and impractical for our ports and U.S. Customs to establish passenger clearance facilities everywhere. By allowing U.S. Customs to clear passengers in a handful of designated locations, the four-port model has struck order into a potentially chaotic network of Great Lakes cruise itineraries," explained **Steve Fisher, Executive Director of the American Great Lakes Ports Association.**

David Gutheil, Chief Commercial Officer for the Port of Cleveland, said, "The Port of Cleveland has always enjoyed a very strong relationship with U.S. Customs, and that has recently been enhanced with the opening of our new clearance facility for cruise passengers. The growth of the cruise industry in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence System has led to more stops in Cleveland, and the new clearance facility provides a more efficient process for visitors to enjoy their time here. Passengers we have spoken with have been enthusiastic about the quickness of the clearance process and enamored about all that Cleveland has to offer. We look forward to the continued increase in cruise calls in the future."

"Through this initiative a strong partnership has developed between U.S. Great Lakes port authorities, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the cruise lines," says **Rebecca Yackley, Director, Office of Trade and Economic Development, Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation.** "Our ports are doing a fantastic job; they have provided CBP with the tools they need to keep our country safe and arriving passengers with a seamless clearance process to their port cities."

"This new iteration of Great Lakes cruising has been an exciting development for Duluth, both economically and culturally, and it wouldn't be possible without the collaboration of U.S. Customs and Border Protection and our cruising coalition partners. This cooperation is integral in making Great Lakes cruising an alluring, enjoyable experience for passengers and an orderly, fruitful opportunity for port cities. We're looking forward to a bright future for cruising in Duluth and on the Great Lakes as a whole." **Kate Ferguson, director of trade and business development, Duluth Seaway Port Authority, and chairperson of the Great Lakes Cruising Coalition**

"Cruise passengers routinely rank Detroit as one of their favorite destinations, and we are working to improve every portion of their Detroit onshore experience. A solid working relationship with CBP is critical for that and we are proud of the work we do with them. The four-port customs solution has reduced the number of inspections necessary in Detroit. However, we will continue to work toward a "Great Lakes Loop," similar to the 'open jaw'"

processes seen on Caribbean cruises. We believe it is more efficient, but can be implemented without sacrificing safety." **Mark Schrupp, Executive Director of the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority**

The Great Lakes customs network has been developed and implemented collaboratively. Regional partners look forward to continued work with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and cruise ship operators to further improve the passenger experience and grow cruising on the Great Lakes. Particular challenges remain, in particular in Detroit, and will be a focus of future work.

About the US cruise customs facilities:

Cleveland, Ohio: Began operation in 2022 at the Port of Cleveland.

Detroit, Michigan: Land border crossing also able to process cruise passengers at the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.

Duluth, Minnesota: Began operation in 2022 at the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center.

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan: Land border crossing also able to process cruise passengers at the International Bridge.

For more information about Cruise the Great Lakes: www.cruisethegreatlakes.com

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