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Navy Pier Celebrates 103rd Birthday With New Look, New Attitude

Written by Lisa Fielding



CHICAGO (WBBM NEWSRADIO) – It's 103 years old, but some would say it's getting better with age.

"It's like a fine wine," laughed Payal Patel, Senior Communications Manager, Navy Pier.

If you've walked the Pier lately, you'll notice major changes and additions.

"It all kinda began in 2011 with the transition to non-profit status. We became a non-profit. It really set the tone. It helped us spearhead this huge project that was ahead of us. We had some major donations, major gifts come in and this lead to what you see now," she said.

In 2016, Navy Pier kicked off the 100th birthday and the Centennial Wheel.

"What once was vacant storefronts is now new dining options, new retail shops. We've renovated the Fifth Third Bank Family Pavillion which is the space inside. It's a lot more aligned with Chicago and Chicago dining," Patel said.

"People are recognizing that Navy Pier is making strides to being more authentic to Chicago experiences."

The newest additions are on the East end of the Pier.

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Centennial Wheel
WBBM Newsradio/Lisa Fielding



New hotel coming to Navy Pier
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“We’re currently under construction for the seven-story hotel. It’ll be 220 rooms operated by Hilton and it’ll be open in 2020. In the meantime, we have Offshore, the largest rooftop venue. We just opened that around Memorial Day. It’s been vibrant. Every single day, there’s people there. There’s a glass enclosure so it’ll be operated all year long.”

Patel said the end goal is to attract locals and not just tourists.

“I think all the moves that we’ve made so far are resonating with Chicagoans. We have free programs all year round like our movies, the Jazz series, we have yoga, we have fitness. That’s all catered to local,” she said.

The next big project is the construction of marina on the North Side of the pier.

“On the North Side of the dock, the boating community will be able to dock their boats and hang out at the Pier. Now you can get here any way possible, you can walk here, drive here, pull your boat here,” Patel said.

Annual visitor projections reported by Choose Chicago, the city’s tourism bureau, show 57.6 million visitors in 2018 – a 4.3 percent jump over 2017’s record of 55.2 million.

“We’re also really contributing to the local economy too. All of the construction jobs right now, tourism dollars. It all goes back to the city,” she said.



Offshore Rooftop at Navy Pier
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New arrivals at Navy Pier
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