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EMPIRE STATE DEVELOPMENT ANNOUNCES GROUNDBREAKING OF \$1.8 MILLION VISITOR CENTER AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS AT THE THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE IN CATSKILL

Project at National Historic Site in Greene County will Support Regional Tourism Economy



Cole Center design by Stephen Shadley, Illustration by M. K Tan

Empire State Development (ESD) today celebrated the groundbreaking of the \$1.8 million Master Plan, with a new visitor center as its centerpiece, at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, located in the village of Catskill, Greene County. The new 1,800 square foot visitor center, to be named The Cole Center, will serve as a multi-purpose open concept space designed to improve visitor experience. It will include a gift shop, a café, and a public patio, and will host visitor orientation, events and creative activities. The Cole Center will incorporate high-efficiency heating and cooling pumps, with electricity sourced from regional solar. This project is being supported by a \$360,000 ESD capital grant recommended by the Capital Regional Economic Development Council.

Lieutenant Governor Antonio Delgado said, “Thomas Cole dedicated his life to conservation while using his talents as an artist to capture the wonder of our natural surroundings, including the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains. The Thomas Cole historic site is not only an essential component of our economy, but also serves as an important reminder that the beauty of our countryside is awe-inspiring, and its preservation is vital to the well-being of our environment.”

Empire State Development President, CEO and Commissioner Hope Knight said, “Investing in regionally-significant industries that align with the strategic plans developed by our Regional Councils is a cornerstone of our economic development efforts. This is especially true for tourism businesses, which were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. ESD is proud to support the establishment of the Cole Center at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site and the growth of the regional tourism economy.”

“It is an honor to celebrate this milestone with Lt. Governor Delgado and Empire State Development,” said **Elizabeth B. Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.** “The support from Empire State Development has been critical in transforming this important place in American art into a world-class destination and community resource. In 2021, Lt Governor Delgado nominated the Thomas Cole Site for a National Medal and we were named one of 15 museum finalists across the entire country. A recent economic impact study found that the Thomas Cole Site has a \$2.5 million value added impact on the county every year. The new building designed by Stephen Shadley is supremely elegant and fulfills a critical need to welcome and orient our growing audiences. We are so grateful to Stephen for donating his masterful design for this landmark project.”

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an economic driver in the Capital Region, and the project will implement improvements and upgrades necessary to accommodate higher visitation, increase efficiencies and visitor safety, and improve climate conditions for historic preservation. The project also supports neighboring tourism assets including the Hudson River Skywalk and Olana State Historic Site. Over the twelve rounds of the Regional Economic Development Council Awards, New York State has awarded more than \$1.8 million to support the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

The new Cole Center was designed *pro bono* by Stephen Shadley, a New York City-based architectural designer who is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The Cole Center is the first cultural building that Shadley has designed. It puts the natural setting and historic campus in the foreground of the new structure, which opens onto a new outdoor public patio through an expanse of 18-foot-high windows. Those windows embrace and reflect the dramatic view of the Catskill Mountains, and the Cole Center’s forest-green exterior allows it to recede into the landscape. The exterior design references and draws inspiration from Thomas Cole’s own 19th-century architectural designs, one of which – his 1846 New Studio – was previously reconstructed and is part of the historic campus now framed by the new building. The historic campus consists of the 1815 Main House, the 1839 Old Studio, the reconstructed 1846 New Studio, and the gardens and grounds against the backdrop of the Catskill Mountains.

Capital REDC Co-Chairs Ruth Mahoney, Executive Vice President, President of Wealth Management and Regional President at NBT Bank and Dr. Havidán Rodríguez, University at Albany President, said, “The Thomas Cole Historic Site is key to the continued growth of the regional economy, not only showcasing the beauty of the Capital Region, but drawing thousands of visitors each year. These grants will provide upgrades that further support the region’s tourism economy, and we are proud to offer our support.”

Senator Michelle Hinchey said, “As one of the Hudson River School of painters, Thomas Cole was an iconic figure in American art history who helped spark the environmental movement that showed the world the magnificent beauty of our region. This legacy lives on through the Thomas Cole National Historic Site in Catskill, a major economic driver for our region that will be boosted significantly by the

exciting addition of a visitor center. I thank Governor Hochul, Lt. Governor Delgado, and ESD for supporting this smart investment in elevating our profile as a destination for cultural tourism.”

Assemblyman Chris Tague said, "I am very proud to see our great Catskill community breaking ground on the new and improved Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The Thomas Cole National Historic Site will continue to be a driver of tourism and economic development for the region. I am proud that state leaders recognized a need in our community, and delivered a \$1.8 million dollar upgrade that will further spotlight the wonderful tourist aspects of our more rural communities. New York State is rich in Beauty, and improvements like the ones celebrated today will continue to drive tourism opportunities for the surrounding attractions such as the Hudson River and Skywalk and Olana State Historic Site."

Greene County Deputy Administrator Warren Hart said, "Tourism is an important economic driver for Greene County. The Thomas Cole National Historic Site continues to grow in visitorship in part, because of the leadership and strong vision in support of the arts and the multiple benefits it brings to county residents and visitors alike. The site also does an exceptional job at improving facilities and welcoming visitors to Greene County."

Additional significant support for the project is provided by the National Park Service, The Bay & Paul Foundations David Bury, Hudson River Valley Greenway, Nina Matis & Alan Gosule, Brown Foundation, Evelyn Trebilcock & Douglas Hammond, Christopher Buck & Dr. Hara Schwartz, Anne Miller & Stuart Breslow, the Warner Foundation, The Educational Foundation of America, Robert Miller & Kathy Klingenstein, The J. M. Kaplan Fund, Hudson River Bank & Trust Foundation, Lisa Fox Martin, Kristin Gamble, Jimmy & Micaela Bulich, Alison Lankenau, Carolyn B. MacDonald, Betsy & Al Scott, Stainman Family Foundation, and many other generous individuals and foundations.

About Empire State Development

Empire State Development (ESD) is New York’s chief economic development agency. The mission of ESD is to promote a vigorous and growing economy, encourage the creation of new job and economic opportunities, increase revenues to the State and its municipalities, and achieve stable and diversified local economies. Through the use of loans, grants, tax credits and other forms of financial assistance, ESD strives to enhance private business investment and growth to spur job creation and support prosperous communities across New York State. ESD is also the primary administrative agency overseeing the New York State Regional Economic Development Councils and the marketing of "I LOVE NY," the State’s iconic tourism brand. For more information on Regional Councils and Empire State Development, please visit www.regionalcouncils.ny.gov and www.esd.ny.gov.

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an international destination presenting the original home and studios of the artist and early environmentalist Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Cole founded the first major art movement of the United States, now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. Located on six acres in the Hudson Valley, the Site includes the 1815 Main House, Cole’s 1839 Old Studio, the reconstructed 1846 New Studio building, and panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains. It is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System. The Thomas Cole Site’s activities include guided and self-guided tours, special exhibitions of both 19th-century and contemporary art, print publications, lectures, extensive online programs, school programs, the Cole Fellowship, free community events, and innovative public programs such as the Hudson River School Art Trail—a map and website that enable people to visit the places in nature that

Cole painted—and the Hudson River Skywalk, a new scenic walkway connecting the Thomas Cole Site with Frederic Church’s Olana over the Hudson River. The goal of all programs at the Thomas Cole Site is to enable visitors to find meaning and inspiration in the full historic context of Thomas Cole’s art and ideas. The themes that Cole explored in his art and writings—such as landscape preservation—are both historic and timely, providing the opportunity to connect to audiences with insights that are highly relevant to their own lives. The hours of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site vary by season. For details see: www.thomascole.org/visit.

For photos of the event visit <https://adamthomasdeen.pixieset.com/colecentergroundbreaking>.