As the above image indicates, winter has arrived at the Buffalo Naval Park, announcing itself loudly just a few days before the Thanksgiving holiday. Our primary focus leading up to the storm was preparing our ships for the rigors of the season.

Our Vietnam-era PTF boat is looking better than she has in many years, thanks to the hard work and dedication of our volunteers. We’ve patched, painted, planned, purchased and put into motion our ships’ winterization program. We’re heating the interiors of the ships, deploying bubbler deicing systems and dehumidifiers to provide the best possible protection against ice, snow, heavy winds and rapidly changing sea states.

We’ll go into greater detail as we proceed, but the work will continue at the more aggressive pace we’ve set, and we’re excited about what we’ll accomplish during the winter months.

Our goal is to improve our guest experience next year – more spaces opened to explore and new displays to tell their stories.

Our survey of ships is now scheduled to commence December 5th, with preliminary work and data collection already well underway. The surveyor, Joe Lombardi, will be focusing his initial efforts on The Sullivans hull condition to provide at the earliest date possible the repair recommendations. Once identified, we’ll be ready to begin the actual repair planning.

To ensure those major repairs and restoration efforts aren’t undone by a severe winter, our staff has sealed all exterior openings, covered the pilot house, and wrapped all her guns.

We’re looking forward to adding the final touches in her restoration in the Spring.
WINTERIZATION

Getting our ships prepared for winter brings its own complexities and challenges.

First, the ships inherent power distribution systems were modified to provide common household 110-volt electricity in their roles as museum ships. As we take more aggressive approaches to protecting and maintaining our ships, we know that a more robust 220-volt power availability is preferable for heating the interiors of The Sullivans and Croaker, among other applications. Ice and frost development within the skin of the ships has led to additional deterioration and damage. We’re working with a very skilled master electrician to develop a workable, effective solution.

For the exterior of the ships, we will be deploying a greater number of bubblers – basically electric submersible motors with a propeller set within a protective cage to keep the water around the hull in motion, thereby preventing the formation of ice around the ship. Again, with the assistance of our electrician, we can calculate the draw on the electrical system and spread demand among the available circuits to prevent overload.

Dehumidifiers, air movers and enhanced daily checks are part of our new standard operating procedures for winter conditions. We will continue to look for new ways and methods to protect these precious artifacts to ensure our ships will be here and available for generations to come.

A RIVER OF CHALLENGES

A protective barrier surrounds the ships which is intended to prevent large pieces of debris being carried by the Buffalo River from coming in contact with the hulls of our ships. Waterlogged timber can still pass beneath the barrier, and it recently experienced a break at the bow of the Little Rock, which allowed the river current to flow into the protected zone, carrying large logs and miscellaneous detritus.

After calls and coordination with Bidco Marine, we were able to bring in sufficient equipment and personnel to direct the hazards out of the protected zone. In addition, it was discovered that a connecting ‘spine’ on the barrier had broken and will need to be repaired. A temporary fix has been made in order to reestablish the protective zone around the ships until parts for a permanent repair can be obtained and installed.
CROAKER

Through generous support from the Croaker Committee of our Sub Vets, we were able to purchase 6 dedicated bubblers and 4 robust heaters to enhance the protective measures deployed aboard Croaker.

With the addition of the heat, our caretaker of the boat, Jim Marzullo will be able to continue his work through the winter months improving the interior spaces and follow through with plans to enhance her displays.

As with our other ships, we need access to the right types of electricity. In the Croaker, shore power is provided at the pier at 480-volts. From there the power cable runs into the aft end of the pressure hull of the boat to a transformer that converts the power to 110 volts to supply lighting, fans, displays, etc.

As with The Sullivans, we are calculating the power draw on the system as we add the deicing and heating units, keeping in mind its age and limitations.

Despite the challenges, we are excited about what is possible with this historic vessel.

A project we intend to tackle in the near future is the Croaker’s control room – a critical space that witnessed the intensity of combat in the South Pacific at the height of the Second World War. Our intent is to add the sounds of a submarine on wartime patrol, the appropriate red combat lighting, and illuminate the instrument panels and indicators throughout the space. We think these improvements will help our guests better understand what it must’ve felt like for the young sailors risking their lives to free the world from tyranny. With a bit of luck and support, we hope to begin that work soon.
The Sullivans

Work continues aboard The Sullivans, with emphasis on the main bus tie (a thick power cord) that links her main electric distribution panel in the aft engine room with her forward distribution panel in the forward engine room. We’re also working on creating capacity for 220V power to provide for heat throughout the waterline spaces of the ship, and to have power to use welding machines.

As the harshness of a Buffalo winter manifests itself, we’re continuing our work with flood alarm systems funding. Once we have the resources available, we will act on the research we’ve done and have flood detectors installed throughout her bilge spaces. If there should be a future flooding event, notification will be made remotely via Bluetooth, and our Emergency Flooding Response agreement with Bidco Marine goes into effect. A quick response team of divers and equipment will be on its way to address the threat before it becomes catastrophic. This agreement covers all three of our vessels afloat, including simultaneous flooding events.

Prior to the snowstorm in November, we’d been able to make substantial repairs aboard The Sullivans to badly corroded metal using a steel epoxy product. Areas at the junction of deck and bulkhead were particularly bad, with small sections of the bulkhead completely eaten away. Using a combination of screen backing material and applying thin layers of epoxy, the structural and watertight integrity of the effected areas have been restored, and it’s now hard to see where the repairs have been done.
LITTLE ROCK

We have a long list of projects aboard the Little Rock we’re pretty excited about, but nothing comes before her preservation.

Since the last newsletter, we applied a weatherproof rubber coating material to the entire deck at the 06 level to stop water penetrations to the decks below. In addition, the forward gun director had areas open to the weather, which also resulted in significant damage in the spaces beneath. We’ve cut and shaped new temporary wood covers that are sealed and weatherproof, so we can begin the process of assessing and planning repair to the affected spaces.

Thanks to our curator, Shane Stephenson, we now have as much historical information on the look of the Admiral’s spaces while the ship was in service as is available. Armed with that information, we can begin developing cost, labor and time estimates for refurbishment.

Our goal for these winter months is to reclaim and restore areas of the ship that haven’t been accessible to the public in the past. The Little Rock has so many important stories to tell, and we’re passionate about rejuvenating the ship in a way that guests will be able to hear them.

Weapons Control, CIC, Damage Control – just a few of the important spaces we intend to revive. With our staff and corps of dedicated volunteers, we’re confident next season will have many new things to see.

Of a crew in the neighborhood of 1200 sailors, very few would have been allowed anywhere near the Weapons Control spaces. At the height of the Cold War, this space would have been the focal point of the fleet, with the ability to launch nuclear weapons (the photo to the left indicates the exact spot where "The Button" was mounted). This space has never been available to the public, but it’s so important to our historical understanding, it’s our intention to revitalize this space and make it available for guided viewing. It'll take time and hard work, but we’ll get there. In the meantime, stay tuned for updates.
Confirming rumors started by staff, Santa has indeed made an appearance at the Buffalo Naval Park. Rudolph might rightly be concerned about his future employment prospects when he sees how comfortable - even natural Santa looks perched in the captain’s chair of The Sullivans.

Our sincere thanks to Jane Wittmer, a local artist who refreshed the paint on Santa after years of rough storage aboard Little Rock. Jane did an amazing job, even changing Santa’s expression from something bordering on painful to the jolly character you see in the image above.

In addition, we’re in the process of replacing the Christmas lights on the Little Rock’s bow antenna and bringing the good cheer of the Holidays to the sail of the Croaker.

If you find yourself walking along the waterfront this season, don’t miss the opportunity to check out our festively festooned ships!
As things shift from this hectic spring and summer into the quieter winter months, I have been feverishly working on completing the historic image book “The Buffalo Naval Park”. The book, being published by Arcadia Publishing, will expose the reader to 181 historic photographs with detailed captions. It’s nearing its final editing stage, and will be published on May 15, 2023 for sale in our gift shop.

To throw out a teaser to our newsletter readers, you’ll see the cover of the book. This is USS Little Rock from her first cruise down to South America from October 1945 – March 1946. You can see her original Cleveland Class configuration with the bristling 6” and 5” guns and original superstructure while the first plankowner crew populates the main deck.
Our ships afloat and the artifacts displayed at the Buffalo Naval Park have important stories to tell, and we invite you to help us share them.

**DOCENTS**
Our uniformed, trained cadre of docents are the guides and storytellers aboard our ships afloat. They know the histories, battles, sailors, and personal anecdotes related to these ships. If you're interested in becoming a docent, we'd love to hear from you!

**MAINTENANCE**
If you enjoy working with your hands and have an interest in restoring rare artifacts so essential to American history, we've got an abundance of opportunities! We're especially interested in having skilled metal workers, electricians, plumbers and carpenters volunteer with us, but all, regardless of skill level are welcome.

**COLLECTIONS**
Caring for and cataloging our unique artifacts takes a great deal of time, patience, and dedication. Under the direction of our curator, you could help preserve these precious objects so they'll be available for future generations.

**EVENTS**
The Buffalo Naval Park is the premier location in all of Western New York to celebrate, participate and elevate. Making these events happen in a seamless, organized and timely way requires a committed staff of volunteers to help in setting up, promoting, staffing, organizing, and putting everything away after it’s all done so it’s ready for the next event.

Online volunteer form: Click here!
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: Click here!
Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: Click here!