PROGRESS REPORT FEBRUARY 2023

Following the Christmas blizzard this past December, the efforts of the park revolved around damage assessments, repair planning and working with the respective insurance companies to restore us to pre-blizzard conditions.

The survey of our ships is nearing completion and we expect the recommendations to be in our hands within just a few weeks.

In addition to that critical work, we are forging ahead with our commitment to create an improved experience for our guests in the season that fast approaches. We are particularly excited about debuting the renovated Admiral’s quarters aboard Little Rock, and the unveiling of an incredible find aboard her that will be well worth the effort to make it accessible.

Aboard The Sullivans, we are cleaning and preparing spaces that haven’t been open to visitors and we’re on the cusp of a major leap forward in an important part of her restoration.

The Croaker has heat for the first time since she came to Buffalo and we’re working on a more interactive and enhanced experience in her control room.

We’ll go into greater detail in all these areas as you read on.

MARINE SURVEY OF OUR THREE SHIPS AFLOAT

We’ve been informed by OTS principal and founder Joe Lombardi that the data collection aboard The Sullivans is completed and he’s compiling a report of his findings and accompanying recommendations for repair.

Aboard all three ships, Joe and his team have been assessing the integrity of their hulls and internal support structures, their topsides and superstructures, and checking the contents of all tankage aboard our ships for oil (fuel and hydraulic), lubricants and other fluids in order to develop a plan for their removal.

Once completed, the work of choosing the best repair solution in accordance with the survey recommendations, which includes its affordability, begins. The document will be presented to the Naval Park board and the City of Buffalo and the hard work of taking this project from the assessment phase to the planning and execution phase will begin.
GENERAL INITIATIVES

As the caretakers of these incalculably important Naval artifacts, we are charged not only with their maintenance and care, but their overall security and that of all who enter them.

In December, members of staff met with a security consulting firm and a security technology and installation company to discuss a plan and its associated costs for a more robust system for protecting our ships. Plans include enhanced technologies and design for flooding alarms, fire and smoke detection as well as intrusion, and vandalism incidents.

We recognize the costs will be substantial, but our commitment to the safety of our staff and guests is paramount. We are seeking funding sources that include appropriate grants, sponsorships and other capital sources to begin and see to completion this important work.

STORM DAMAGE ADJUSTOR’S REPORT

At the end of January, a separate storm damage report was produced by an insurance adjustor as part of the claim process. That report was provided to the Naval Park and the insurance company covering our three ships afloat.

As you may have read in the last edition of our newsletter, the Christmas blizzard of 2022 damaged our ships (thank goodness not catastrophically) and their supporting infrastructure. Mooring towers, mooring lines, fresh water lines, brows, davits, and winches all suffered substantial damage. In addition, The Sullivans developed a minor leak in her main engineering spaces which remains closely monitored.

Once all the cost estimates are provided to us by the relevant contractors, we will submit them for coverage, and barring the unforeseen, immediately begin scheduling these critical repairs.

This past year has presented the Buffalo Naval Park and its staff with unique challenges, but our optimism for what the future holds remains entirely undeterred. These ships have incredibly important stories to share, and this season you’ll have the opportunity to hear them and view the spaces where they occurred.
**The Sullivans**

**Electrical Distribution Panel**

While it’s just shy of a minor miracle, the ship’s inherent electrical distribution system is about to be resurrected from the ravages of her extended period of submersion. Mario Roy is an exceedingly dedicated and hard-working volunteer whose efforts, in conjunction with generous help and guidance from Barry Witte and his team from the Slater in Albany, have resulted in what appears to be the safe reenergizing of the aft distribution panel. This means the power that we receive from shore will be available through the after half of the ship’s own circuitry rather than the temporary panels positioned on the main deck. After additional safety checking, cleaning and testing, her lights and internal power sources could be available within a matter of weeks. That’s a huge leap forward in her overall recovery. Well done Mario and all those who participated in this effort. If you refer back to the Saving Our Ships newsletter edition in September of 2022, we go into detail about the extent of the work necessary – it was truly a major feat of dedication.

**New Displays and Open Areas**

After her partial sinking in April 2022, the majority of the ship had, of necessity, to remain off-limits to our guests. By the end of last season, only the topsides of the ship were available for access and viewing by our guests. As we approach the Spring and Summer season of 2023, we intend to have a great deal more cleaned and prepared for viewing. Some of what we’re working on includes, for the first time, opening the 3” 50 storage space in the aft end of the ship just above the main deck. We will also be opening areas inside of the ship on the main deck level including the barber shop, the aft heads, and the galley just forward of midships.

The work required to make this happen is considerable, but the maintenance team is determined to set the bar high in terms of guest experience this season.

We’ve got a ways to go, but The Sullivans caretaker Andrew has been hard at work cleaning out and prepping for paint the 3” 50 ammo locker in the image above - for the first time it’ll be open for public viewing.
Admiral's Quarters

Work in the Admiral's spaces is progressing at a solid pace – once we’ve got the aft bulkhead repaired and painted, and the new carpet is in, it’ll be all detail work and furnishing thereafter. We’re refinishing furniture that was found aboard but not original to her period of service. We're sanding the pieces down to bare wood, staining and varnishing them so they have the look, feel, and utility of the originals. Once completed, we’ll reupholster the seats to a color that will as closely match those we found in pictures of quarters furnishings as possible.

As we’d written in a past issue, the Admiral’s quarters were a place where dignitaries, politicians and famous people were entertained (along with their official duties as spaces for fleet-level military meetings and planning). The Little Rock’s list of special guests includes Prince Ranier and Grace Kelly, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Robert Kennedy and many more. We intend to restore the space to a semblance of that former elegance and share it with those who wish to experience it.

A Very Exciting and Historic Find

In our work to maintain the fleet of Naval Park ships, staff was exploring an infrequently visited space that had for years been a collection area for debris. After closer inspection, it was discovered that that area had played a pivotal role in Cold War strategy as it applied to forward-deployed fleet operations in a nuclear Navy. The space was cleared of all the decades-worth of detritus and examined more closely.

Those examinations resulted in an exciting, if not chilling find. Very, very exciting.

We are carefully considering how best to share the news of this discovery as you will come to find out, it’s place in history is truly global. Stay tuned to future editions of this newsletter and Buffalo Naval Park communications for more on this major find.

Improved Habitability

As has been discussed in previous issues, we’re working on expanding the availability and quality of accommodations aboard ship including berthings, staterooms, and bathrooms. We’d mentioned improvements to the ship’s sewage or CHT system with the addition of a new pump, and over the course of the last month, considerable improvements to the forward head (bathroom) and showers. The aft male heads have been completely removed to make way for new, modern and better designed bathroom conditions.

A number of previously unusable staterooms have been cleaned and renovated, allowing for improved comfort and accessibility for our Encampment and Sea Cadet over-night programs.

We still have much to do, but the maintenance team can look back over this past year and have much cause for satisfaction in their labors.
LITTLE ROCK PROGRESS IN IMAGES

Above: Tour path in the renovated Admiral’s quarters being measured and mapped out.

Above: An old and much abused chair being disassembled and refinished to be brought back into useful service.

Above: the very tired and abused chair frame prior to sanding and refinishing.

Above: The chair pictured left after initial stages of refinishing work has started.

Above: Newly refinished shower stalls with FRP decks to stand on as opposed to the rusty deck that preceded it.

Above: Creating safe access to the as-yet unannounced and historic find aboard Little Rock.
Heat

After much weekend work, our two most dedicated volunteers Mario and Karl were able to energize the two 440 volt heaters they’d previously installed. We have one providing an abundance of heat in the forward torpedo room and one in the after torpedo room. During working hours, our caretaker Jim opens the interior hatches and energizes box fans to distribute the heat toward the center of the boat. That allows for more comfortable working conditions – something she hasn’t had in the past, and it provides value in terms of halting the development of damaging frost and ice within the skin of the pressure hull.

Ballast Tank Accesses

During the course of the marine survey work being conducted aboard the boat, it was found that a number of the exterior ballast tank access hatches and sounding ports were permanently welded shut. Since we need access to ascertain their contents and, going forward, for staff to make regular soundings to detect potential leaks or flooding, a plan had to be devised to create a means of access and measurement. Bidco Marine Group was contracted to drill 2 inch holes in each affected tank and insert measuring devices and cameras. Once the work was completed, the ports were threaded and fitted with a watertight cap that can be removed for checks, but won’t compromise the watertight integrity of the exterior tank. Bidco did a great job in the less-than-ideal freezing temperatures and choppy water.

Bubblers

With the generous financial assistance of the Croaker Committee of the SubVets, we were able to procure 6 three-quarter HP bubblers to position around the boat to prevent ice from developing around her exterior. We have 4 up and running, and we’re looking for dedicated circuits and conduits to run to the exterior of the boat to get the remaining two units deployed in the forward end of the boat.

Forward Mooring Cable

One of the more urgent repairs required after the damages wrought by the Christmas blizzard was the restoration of the 3/4" steel mooring cable that secured the bow of the boat to a shoreside bollard. During the course of the storm (if you haven’t watched it in action at the Buffalo Naval Park on our YouTube channel, we highly recommend it) the boat was rocking and rising so significantly, that her steel cable completely parted. Without that cable in place, the next storm could result in other mooring line failures as a result of increased load and ultimately lead to additional failures. While it must have been quite a sight to see the Croaker underway, we’d prefer that any such activity in the future is the result of human intent and not the effects of a Great Lakes tempest.

The good and skilled people at Bidco Marine provided us with new 3/4" steel braided cable and the bow of the Croaker is once again safely moored to the pier.
One of the attendees of the Curator Tour this past year, was a young man named Ryan. He was in attendance from Sayer, PA, and was very excited to see parts of the ships not normally on the tour route. One of the spaces I showed this group was the engineering blueprint room below the tour route on USS Little Rock. When he saw these untold thousands of folders from the ships construction and reconfiguration, he lit up. He met with me later in the year and with his background in blueprints we worked on a plan to digitize and index the blueprints from both USS Little Rock, and USS The Sullivans. Since Ryan lives a couple of hours away, the agreement is for him to come in, take 3D photos of the blueprints that allow for digital rotation and zoom. He then takes the digital files back home to create the index using the data from the photographs. These blueprints are integral parts of the collections here at the Buffalo Naval Park. I’m so pleased to have someone with Ryan’s passion interested in helping us catalog these important ship architecture plans.
The 2023 season at the Buffalo Naval Park is shaping up to among the most exciting in her long history in this great city. New exhibits on the ships, breath-taking discoveries, exciting and meaningful celebrations at the park, and an abundance of opportunities for you to become an integral part of this history-making year.

Whatever your skill level or interest, we’ve likely got a volunteer opportunity for you!

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! Our ships once had crews in the hundreds but now it’s left to a much more modest number to preserve these important and historic vessels. 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.

**GARDENS AND GROUNDS**
If you’ve visited the park, you’ve no doubt seen the beautiful flowers and immaculately maintained grounds enjoyed by so many. Our team of garden and grounds volunteers have made the areas surrounding the memorials and monuments places of beauty and reflection. If you enjoy gardening and wish to be a part of this dedicated team, please let us know – we’d love to have you join us!