SAVING OUR SHIPS

PROGRESS REPORT
MARCH, 2023

The 2023 season at the Buffalo Naval Park fast approaches, and we are wrapping up a number of major projects that we’re excited to introduce to our guests.

We’re continuing the storm recovery process which has regrettably taken a good deal longer than we would have liked. Our hangar building was the worst affected and will require extensive internal reconstruction.

The marine survey is very close to completion and we expect the full report for each of our three vessels afloat to be delivered soon. Once in hand, we will take time to digest the findings and begin in earnest the work necessary to get our ships repaired, with The Sullivans as our most urgent priority.

The shipboard staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to maintain and improve our three veteran warships over the course of this challenging winter, but we’re confident the results of those efforts will provide an improved experience for all.

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Little Rock caretaker Brendan took the time to completely restore two of the wall-mounted sound-powered phones and placed one where we believe it had been located on the bulkhead of the Admiral’s quarters. He disassembled, cleaned and refinished the artifact right down to the hardwood mounting block. It’s a fantastic piece in its finished form and will add considerably to the elegance of that historic space.

To the left is another phone restored by Brendan, and now mounted in the also-newly restored Marine sentry station, positioned just outside the Admiral’s quarters.
Any of the potential sites would first have the transit route approved by the Coast Guard and Army Corps of Engineers (depending on the areas impacted), surveyed to ensure there is sufficient depth for the deeper draft of the Little Rock, and the same would have to be done where she would be moored. Supporting infrastructure will need to be tested (if still in existence, such as bollards or bitts), or set up (security fencing, shore or temporary power and water).

Whatever the effort required, saving The Sullivans for future generations will be well worth it.

Marine surveyor Joe Lombardi of Ocean Technical Services has completed the physical assessments aboard all three vessels and is now nearly finished with the final reports, complete with repair recommendations.

Included in the report’s scope of work will be the removal of remaining oils aboard all three ships, the presence of which badly hampered the speed of recovery of The Sullivans in her partial sinking in April of 2022.

Our three repair options remain an in situ possibility (some or all of the work completed pier side in Buffalo), drydocking at the closest available repair facility to replace much of the ship’s hull plating at and below water level, and lastly, building a large cofferdam, or steel watertight wall that would surround the three vessels to protect them and after pumping out, provide a dry platform for future repairs.

Each of the above options have their unique benefits and disadvantages which will be carefully weighed and examined. Cost and financial limitations are a major factor. With the exception of an in situ repair, the options may require dredging to remove sediment barriers that have built up over time around the hulls of the ships. The Little Rock will need a temporary home during the duration of removing the Croaker and The Sullivans from behind the mooring towers, at least one of which will have to be removed using divers and a barge crane. Site surveys have been conducted of both inner harbor and outer harbor locations as potential temporary mooring locations.
Progress in the complete restoration of the Admiral’s quarters continues to be made, and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Main space, sleeping space and bathroom have all undergone significant restoration and improvements.

When the Little Rock arrived in Buffalo nearly a half century ago, the aft bulkhead in the quarters had been roughly cut to provide a window, presumably for food service. We have restored the integrity of the bulkhead and included unique and interesting features that we found in the drawings from her late 1950’s refit.

Once completed (very soon), the space will more closely reflect the elegance of the large quarters and will appear as it did when it was used to entertain such famous people as Grace Kelly, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Robert Kennedy, Zsa Zsa Gabor among many others. This renovation starts from the port side exterior entry way, includes the Marine sentry watch station and the ladder leading to the spaces above. We hope you'll visit us for the grand opening - stay tuned!

The other areas we’ve been working on include the Weapons Control space in the aft superstructure, including creating easier means of access. The forward heads have been renovated, another 6 staterooms have been cleaned, painted and in some cases restored, which will add to the comfort and capacity of our overnight guests. The encampment offices, which had been rough and unrestored staterooms on the main deck have been completely renovated.

The work aboard will continue, and we're looking forward to providing a new and better visitor experience.
Work aboard The Sullivans reached an exciting milestone when we were able to energize the main distribution panel (see image below) for the first time since her partial sinking last April. This important work continues, with an emphasis on the safe restoration steps to the shore tie (the cable that provides power from the shore to the ship) and to the main bus tie (the cable that connects the aft electric distribution panel to the forward distribution panel). Once restored, the ship’s internal electrical circuits will function as well, and likely better than they had prior to the incident last April.

This season, which starts in just a few short weeks, will feature the open spaces aboard The Sullivans on the main deck and superstructure. The areas below decks will remain closed both for the security of the vessel as well as for the preparatory work needed for her long-term repairs.

We’ll be opening her newly restored barber shop as well as her 3” 50 ammo handling room, complete with stacks of brass replica ammunition.

There are a number of spaces that we’ve been cleaning and assessing for future repair and possible display.

Another exciting project that we’ll be starting soon is updating the interior lighting of The Sullivans to LED, which, when the ship’s own electrical distribution system is fully, safely online, it’ll reduce the load to operate. We’ll be starting in the engineering spaces, then working into the aft workshops and berthing, which will coincide with another restoration project in those areas. When completed, we’ll continue throughout the ship, including exterior topside deck lighting. It’s a major undertaking, but well worth the time and effort to complete.

The Sullivans has endured a great deal over the last year, but with the survey wrapping up and indications of the best repair methods already revealing themselves, this year and next should prove impactful in a very positive way. We anticipate having major announcements to make in the weeks and months ahead. More to follow very soon.
The survey for the Croaker is, we’re told, the next to be completed and we’re looking forward to reviewing the recommendations once the final reports are received. We know that she is in need of significant repairs to her superstructure and her ballast tanks have been an area of concern. Along with The Sullivans, Croaker needs more substantial work by ship repair experts.

While not yet a certainty, it’s in the works for groups of SubVets to join us in Buffalo as working parties to apply their skills in improving conditions aboard the boat. Whether it’s painting, cleaning or working on new displays, there’s always lots to be done, and rarely enough people available to do it. With visiting working parties living aboard the Little Rock for the week, then walking over to the Croaker for their work day, a lot could be accomplished in a relatively short period of time. We’d be excited to have them aboard and will update as things develop.

Caretaker Jim has done a phenomenal job in maintaining the boat. He’s been introducing enhancements to existing displays, while working on plans for new ones. Our attention will be turning to the Control Room soon as we lay out plans for new and better experiences.
As we all know and experienced, 2022 was a hectic and emotionally trying year. One of the projects that I am so proud of was the refurbishment of the Polish Armed Forces Exhibit onboard USS Little Rock.

Working with a tight and energetic team of 10 individuals from the Polish community, we were able to tell the story of the Polish people in new and profound ways. In addition to the exhibit unveiling we also had a rededication ceremony in the Veteran’s Memorial Garden.

The Buffalo Naval Park received an extremely generous grant from the Permanent Chair of Polish Culture at Canisius College. This grant allowed us to purchase a new display case, materials to refresh exhibits, a TV to show pertinent videos about Poland during World War II, and there are monies remaining that will be used towards an endowment to address future needs.

Working closely with the community, the project’s interns, Matt Opalinski and Rachel Temple, did a marvelous job at cataloging the artifacts, changing the narrative and story of the exhibit, while bringing overall passion to the project.
Welcome to our new docents, maintenance, events, grounds and gardens, and collections volunteers! We’re very glad to have you aboard and look forward to working with you in the upcoming season!

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

**DOCENTS/TOUR GUIDES**
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. Making these events happen in a seamless, organized 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 immaculately maintained grounds enjoyed by so many. 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!

Online volunteer form: https://www.buffalonavalpark.wufoo.com/forms/zljxfaq1uqolw0/
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
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