PROGRESS REPORT
APRIL 2023

We’ve geared up for our 2023 visitor season and have much to share in this edition of Saving Our Ships.

This past winter, we set the bar high with the number of projects we wanted to get accomplished. Our guiding objective was to ensure our visitors have more to see, to hear, and to learn while visiting the Buffalo Naval Park fleet of veteran warships. We believe we’ve achieved that objective and look forward to hearing feedback from our guests.

The marine survey is complete with the exception of a few needed numbers from contractors. Once we have the final draft of the document in hand, it’ll go to the Buffalo Naval Park Board of Directors for their review, and then on to the City of Buffalo. With the information provided, we anticipate having a clear path forward for getting our ships repaired.

This year promises to be a busy one with equal measures of challenge and opportunity. We’re looking forward to showing new spaces aboard our ships and inviting more volunteer tour guides (docents) to join us to help share these stories.
The marine survey is very nearly wrapped up and the majority of the information necessary for the complete final report is in.

The scope of the survey is, by necessity, comprehensive. We need to have the clearest and most complete understanding of the condition of all areas of our ships, including their tankage. Part of the repair project will involve the removal of all oil and oil-related liquids from tanks aboard our ships that have been there since they were in active service decades ago.

Based on the amounts of oil that remain aboard the ships, removing it without a precise reballasting plan (replacing the oil in tanks with fresh water after tank cleaning is complete where appropriate) could jeopardize their stability.

We’ve also inspected the superstructures of all three vessels and are exploring repair options to restore their weather-tight integrity which, due to advanced corrosion, has led to significant areas of deterioration.

We now anticipate the completed survey to be delivered in May. Once the Buffalo Naval Park Board of Directors and the City of Buffalo have had time to carefully review, we expect a public announcement to be made shortly thereafter.

We were able to paint the majority of the topside areas of The Sullivans last season. We intentionally refrained from painting the hull since all of the potential repair options proposed would include a multi-layer application of protective coatings on the entirety of the hull from the keel to the main deck edge.

As with all projects of this magnitude and complexity, the additional funding required presents a major hurdle. Based on the pledges of financial support to date, we’re still well shy of the mark for one vessel to make it to drydock and may have to wait for another season to get a full hull and structural repair under way for the Croaker.
A major project completed this month was the restoration of the Little Rock’s original accommodation ladder. Bidco Marine removed the ladder and completely refurbished it - the image to the left is the railings before work and the image to the right is how they appear today.

Progress aboard Little Rock has been tremendous - too much to cover in any detail, but in addition to the small feature sections below, we’ve completed an LED light update project in a section of the ship, we’ve epoxied floors in the forward heads (bathrooms), we’re nearing completion of a complete overhaul of the aft men’s heads, and restored power and lighting to areas of the ship that have been dark since their arrival in Buffalo.

We’ve continued work in the Admiral’s spaces as well as the passageways leading into them. Stay tuned for a grand opening soon!

Below is a picture of a space we’ll be sharing much more on soon - Weapons Control. Volunteer extraordinaire Karl has gotten the space repowered and relit.

We were exceedingly fortunate to have the skills of Sara applied to the Admiral’s quarters. Sara has an MBA in costume design and offered to reupholster a chair and sofa on display in that space. In addition, she’s worked on all the curtains, conference table cloth, and may be taking on more related projects – thank you Sara!
Aboard The Sullivans, our focus remains on restoring the ship’s inherent electrical distribution system to full, safe function. Leading the way on this project is our volunteer Mario, who’s worked tirelessly on cleaning, testing, and researching the system in consultation with a retired Navy electrical engineer and our local retired military electrician.

Another major project that we believe will be successfully funded soon is the cutting edge flood alarm system. This technology when installed will allow us to monitor conditions aboard ship remotely, and be alerted on our Smartphones immediately via cellular technology if a problem occurs. This early warning system would also work in conjunction with our Emergency Flooding Response agreement to have trained personnel responding quickly with all necessary gear and equipment.

Since The Sullivans is the first priority for repair, preparations will soon be underway to ready her for that scope of work. As a result, we’re keeping all below-decks areas off limits to visitors until the ship is repaired. In the coming weeks and months, you’ll see more activity as this work begins in earnest.
Work aboard the Croaker continues topside with the replacement of a number of damaged stanchions as well as repairs to areas around her brows.

We’re very excited to be hosting our first of what we hope will be many Croaker working parties next month, thanks to the hard work of our local SubVets. One of the areas we, as is the case with most museum ships, struggle with is having enough volunteers to conduct the critical work of maintaining and improving our vessels. Thus far, it appears we’re going to have a dozen or more participants in this working party, which is an excellent start.

What we offer to support these efforts is free overnight accommodations in staterooms aboard Little Rock, and when possible, a small meal stipend to offset the costs of food. We have a list of projects we’d like to get accomplished aboard the boat, and depending on the skills and experience of the volunteers, we believe the results of their labors will be apparent to guests who visit.

If you’re a local SubVet, or would just like to volunteer to assist, feel free to contact us via the information provided on the last page of this newsletter.
CURATOR’S CORNER

BY SHANE STEPHENSON

These images above and below were from my first trip down into USS The Sullivans after the Unified Command successfully raised and pumped out the ship. I was the first staff person allowed below as the next step was to gauge the damage to the hundreds of artifacts on board. I have noted the steps and actions taken in previous issues of our newsletter.

Part and Parcel with the conservation and preservation is the report to our insurance company. Throughout 2022 and into 2023, I have been keeping an exhaustive and extensive list of all the items that needed disposition, all the while researching values of these items. I worked with a company out of Toronto, Fine Art Appraisal + Services, that helped with the loss appraisal of primary source materials like photographs, letters, and manuals as they had the required expertise. Recently, I have finished the report of losses, and will be submitting it to our insurance company. The monies secured from this report will allow us to bring back the historic fabric of the ship through reconstruction, restoration, and reproduction.

To the left and above are images taken shortly after The Sullivans had been righted. You can see the damage to artifacts in the sleeping quarters (left) as well as the irreplaceable loss of one-of-a-kind crew photos.
In this issue of the Saving Our Ships newsletter, we’re going to focus on just one of our volunteer groups – our tour guides, or docents.

This dedicated body of men and women are the face of the park – those who know intimately the details of our ships and the courageous sailors who sailed aboard them and share those stories enthusiastically with the guests who visit us.

As we expand the numbers of viewable spaces and displays aboard our ships we have an increasing need for volunteers – particularly docents.

Our cadre of guides provide comprehensive training and guidance to those who join us. You’ll learn not only the facts and figures but also the personal anecdotes of the sailors and their families. As a docent, you’ll have opportunities to enrich people’s lives in memorable ways. You’ll interact with guests from all walks of life and from countries all over the world.

If you’re looking for an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way, we invite you to consider becoming a docent.

Volunteer: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org/volunteer
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@buffalonavalpark