SAVING OUR SHIPS

PROGRESS REPORT
MAY 2023

The month of April and these first days of May have kept apace with the months that preceded them in terms of significant developments here at the park.

The marine survey is complete and the first meetings regarding the repair path best suited for The Sullivans and her fragile condition have been conducted.

Aboard our ships, major improvements continue, and new projects are underway.

Activity aboard our ships afloat has increased with the advent of the more genial seasons. We have our Sea Cadets and Scouts aboard, bringing life to these ships as only they can. We have school groups, private and curated tours, and a broad variety of public activities occurring throughout our ships.

As our guests experience what’s been accomplished over the winter months, the maintenance team continues work aboard all three ships afloat.

Stay tuned for more in this and future editions of the Saving Our Ships newsletter.

THE ADMIRAL’S WEATHER BRIDGE

A huge thank you to the hardworking volunteers from L3Harris! Not only did they provide the financial resources to fund the prepping and painting of that key space, but they all donned their work clothes and provided the labor necessary to make it happen.

To the left you see the L3Harris crew hard at work to help us restore this important and historic space aboard the Little Rock. When in service, the admiral in charge of the 6th Fleet would have used this area to observe, command, and conduct real-world fleet operations while deployed to the Mediterranean Sea.

Above, the group of volunteers that opted to take on the admiral’s weather bridge. This can only be the ‘before’ picture – when they wrapped up for the day after the large volume of chipping and painting, this same crew was observed wearing large quantities of glossy black paint that never made it to the surfaces they were working on. That’s okay – well done!
As indicated on the cover page of this edition of Saving Our Ships newsletter, the marine survey is complete, the recommendations are in hand, and the hard work of carefully weighing each of the repair options is underway.

Due to the fragile condition of The Sullivans hull plating, distance to a repair facility is a critical factor. There are a limited number of facilities on or near Lake Erie with the capacity to complete the scope of work recommended, and the amount of time required in transiting must, by necessity, be kept to an absolute minimum. Every mile of distance that has to be covered is an added risk to the ship.

Another critical factor is time. Of the available ship repair facilities, not all have openings in their drydock schedules to accommodate The Sullivans within the near future. Some wouldn’t be able to bring in the ship till some time in 2025, which would require The Sullivans to weather two more Buffalo winters without any significant repairs to her fragile hull – a situation the Buffalo Naval Park would very much like to avoid.

Of course, all of the aforementioned requires very substantial quantities of money, and as of this writing, we are well short of the funding levels required to successfully complete this repair.

While our first priority is The Sullivans due to her vulnerable condition, we are also working on our long-term repair and maintenance planning for the Little Rock and Croaker. Both vessels have been found to be more stable than their sister, as identified through the marine surveys, but they too, in time, will require a period of substantial repair.

The next steps following the marine survey include an evaluation of the information by the Buffalo Naval Park Board of Directors, followed by an in-depth review by the City of Buffalo. Due to the weakened condition of the ship, it’s anticipated that an accelerated decision-making process will lead to the ship getting to a repair facility as expeditiously as possible.

A pair of ducks closely inspects the hull of The Sullivans. The quality and reliability of their inspections has yet to be determined. There’s reason to believe they may be little more than a couple of quacks.
Work aboard the Little Rock has been progressing at an energetic pace. Our focus is moving from the interior areas of the ship to the exterior now that the weather has turned decidedly more favorable. We’re wrapping up the final details in the aft male head (bathroom), Admiral’s spaces and staterooms that we tackled through the winter, and we’re now getting the exterior of the ship prepped and painted.

We’re extremely fortunate and grateful to have so many good people from M&T Bank willing to organize volunteer work groups and assist us in preserving this precious and historic vessel. We recently had 40 volunteers out on deck getting the signal bridge, or as we sometimes call it the observation deck due to her magnificent harbor views, ready for a fresh coat of haze gray paint.

After a great deal of planning, time and resources, the aft male head project is wrapping up. We’ll be putting up new mirrors and laying down epoxy on the steel deck but the contrast between the before image to the left (nothing screams quality quite like an improvised cardboard cover over a broken toilet) and the after image to the right is impressive. The final goal for the project will be restoring and adding additional showers in the space – stay tuned.

To the far left is an image of the Admiral’s quarters while in use as the flag ship of the Commander of the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean. After a winter of focused effort, the Buffalo Naval Park curator, maintenance team, and volunteers were able to bring back this important space to appear very much as it did during its years of active service.
While the decisions are being made as to the ultimate repair plan for The Sullivans, the work to restore, stabilize and improve the ship continues. A huge leap forward in the safety of the ship is under way now – the installation of a state-of-the-art flood detection system. We anticipate the work to be complete and the system fully operational by the end of May 2023. In the event of a flooding incident, whether minor or major, key members of staff and Bidco Marine Group with whom we have an emergency flooding response plan and contract, will receive a smartphone notification through a cellular transmitter installed aboard ship. Sensors will be placed throughout her hull to identify the exact location of the problem area, expediting the response.

Work has also begun on updating all the interior lighting to LED, thereby reducing the electrical load on her distribution system and circuits. In conjunction with this program, we’ve applied for a grant to help us fund and acquire all the necessary safety equipment and materials to clean, repair, and restore all circuitry aboard. We’ve been able to re-energize her original electric distribution panel – a goal we’d been told previously would be impossible, and this grant will allow all her internal lighting and power supply points to be brought back into service.

The effects of the Christmas weekend winter storm are still being rectified. Our debris barrier that protects the ships from smaller floating debris travelling down the Buffalo River in substantial quantities is awaiting repair and reinstallation. Something the debris barrier couldn’t have prevented before being torn away during the storm was this massive tree trunk – roots and all, that made its way down river and settled inboard of The Sullivans between the steel retaining wall and the very delicate skin of the ship. Bidco Marine was able to remove this monstrosity after considerable effort.
CROAKER didn’t escape the vicious winter storm unscathed. The most critical project will involve rethinking and repairing her shore power cable. Work should begin within the next few weeks and will result in a safer, more flexible power supply cable, allowing for the full range of the boat’s movement while moored without damaging the structures through which the cable passes.

Another project that’s been ongoing is updating and increasing the number of emergency lights we have operating in the sub. In the event of a loss of power, the emergency lights would immediately energize using back-up battery power so guests and staff can safely exit the boat.

As with The Sullivans and Little Rock, the Croaker also continues.
It’s been a busy time for the collections lately. I’ve been working with some volunteers in the photographic collections while also preparing and scanning some collections for digitization. Having digital collections will make them more accessible for researchers and users to search items they may be looking for. I have been working with the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC). They are working with me to upload a collection to a couple of sites: NY Heritage, a home for digital collections found throughout New York State, and Consider the Source, an online collections tool used by teachers across New York State to build curriculum.

The collections are from a POW who was captured in Belgium in late 1944. He was placed in a prisoner camp until April 1945. The collections will consist of letters to and from home during his time in the prisoner camp and also POW newsletters his family received from the Red Cross and the YMCA. It’s my hope these collections will give students, teachers, and researchers insight into the life and trials of a POW in the European theatre.
Join Us

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/zljxjxjgluqolw0/
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
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