9/11 DAY OF CARING

On September 11th, 2023, no less than 160 volunteers from National Grid, Highmark, Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, and a group of our friends from the museum ship Slater converged on the Buffalo Naval Park. This extraordinary army of hard-working and dedicated people achieved in a day what we couldn’t dream of achieving in years.

The first of the organizational staff arrived before 6:30 in the morning to ensure all the important details were covered - and they were. Due to the complex nature of some of the projects to be tackled, safety was the primary concern of all involved. Plenty of safety gear was available for all, and multiple safety briefs were conducted to start the day’s evolutions, both by the volunteer organizers and by Naval Park staff. Fresh coffee and donuts were also available to kick off the morning right.

Above, National Grid volunteers stand by to distribute all necessary safety supplies to ensure the day’s events wouldn’t be tainted with an avoidable injury.

Once the group was properly fueled, briefed, and broken into their respective project groups, they wasted no time getting straight to the work at hand. Electricians, carpenters, welders, cleaners, painters; all worked in perfect synch, side by side to complete the myriad tasks we’d laid out. Each of our three ships afloat received much-needed attention, all of which will be described in detail below.

Below, members of the electrical crew, welding team, and carpenters gather to discuss the work assignments.

The Sullivans in the predawn light, with her red tactical lighting energized on her bridge.
As might be expected, our project request list aboard The Sullivans was extensive, and the vast majority related to our Survivability Program. To best describe all that was accomplished, perhaps it’s best to break it down by the individual work groups, and how they relate to the program.

**WATERTIGHT INTEGRITY**

Knowing that we will likely encounter additional leaks of unknown severity before we can get The Sullivans to drydock, it’s imperative we reestablish as much of her inherent watertight integrity as possible. With our group of skilled volunteers, we assigned 15 people to assisting us in removing the badly degraded door gaskets and replace it with new gasket material we’d been able to source from a marine supplier. We had 200 linear feet of gasket material available, and based on our own experience in this process, we were confident this would be plenty for a single day of work. It wasn’t. Once this crew figured out an effective system, they had the 200 feet installed - by 10:00 in the morning! While we’re far from done with that particular tasking, the leap forward we’ve now experienced will accelerate our timeline for watertight integrity leading up to the impending harsh winter conditions - very well done and a deeply sincere thank you to the gasket crew!

Above, the door gasket crew tearing out the badly degraded original material and replacing it with new.

Another important part of maintaining watertight integrity is keeping the water out from above, and with the number of compromised areas on the main deck, the welding crew had their hands full. In past storms, lifeline davits along the main deck had been torn away, leaving holes where they’d stood. One on the starboard side of the forecastle had deteriorated so badly that it had completely sheared, forcing the park to keep the forecastle chained off. In addition, uncapped stanchions allowed for water to collect and corrode the steel at their base. Lastly, as it pertains to watertight integrity, the ship’s original receptacles for lifeline stanchions employed during heavy seas had rotted through at the bottom, allowing rainwater to pour into the spaces below deck. The welding crew moved from one area to the next, repairing each item in its turn.
Another major objective was the steel repair of the support beams in the Memorial Wardroom. The load-bearing beams had completely rotted away at their base, leaving their structural integrity badly compromised. The welding crew went straight to work cutting away the bad and replacing it with robust structural steel, restoring the beams so they’ll last for decades to come.

Above, the base of the support beams rebuilt and their structural integrity restored.

Above, members of the welding team repairing holes in the deck left from torn away stanchions.

Above left, the stanchion of the starboard forecastle completely severed by the ravages of time and weather. As a result, the forecastle had to be chained off to the public. On the right, the restored and robust stanchion, allowing for a reopening of the forecastle to visiting guests.
THE SULLIVANS CONT’D

ELECTRICAL DISTRIBUTION

Another of the foundational tenets of the Survivability Program is electrical distribution using the ship’s inherent system to supply power throughout the ship. The power is needed for heat, dehumidification, lights, air movers, ventilation, and more. Without the restoration of this system, there isn’t sufficient power available from the temporary panels that were installed after her April, 2022 partial sinking.

Of all of the work objectives aboard ship, this area was by far the most technically challenging and ambitious.

Without going into too much technical detail in an effort to keep this newsletter from reading like War and Peace, we’ll keep this as concise, and hopefully as thorough as possible.

In the main engine room, volunteers were able to safely test main electrical cabling that’s intended to provide power for emergency pumps and more. Crews disassembled panels that hadn’t been touched since the 1960’s and suffered complete submergence in 2022. Banks of original breakers were removed, cleaned, tested and marked. Circuitry essential for interior lighting was checked, fuse boxes cleaned, and new appropriate fuses installed.

Below, main deck lighting restored and fully operational aboard The Sullivans, a sight that hasn’t been seen since before her April, 2022 partial sinking.

Above, Barry Witte, one of our friends from the Slater discusses some of the myriad challenges with our lead technical volunteer Mario and members of the National Grid volunteer team.
THE SULLIVANS CONT’D

Electrical testing and diagnosing continued in the 3 other main engineering spaces as well as in the ship’s superstructure. A number of ground faults were detected and rectified as work continued on testing lighting circuitry. The amount that was achieved through the course of the day is absolutely incredible, and will have a direct and major positive impact on the future of the ship.

Below, many of the ship’s original breakers which have been removed from their respective panels and about to undergo cleaning and testing.

While it’s in need of some organization, Radio II aboard The Sullivans is again lit with her inherent fixtures.

Lest we forget about Bob the Giant Creepy Spider, he made his presence known to many of the otherwise unsuspecting volunteers. Bob, as recent evidence would suggest, has difficulty making new friends, and based on the feedback from many who encountered him on 9/11, his social calendar is none the fuller today.
Below is a series of images of the Little Rock’s port side overhang. As the top image indicates, the structure was badly dilapidated and required a complete tear-out and rebuilding. The crew did a tremendous job!

A huge undertaking aboard ship was the cleaning, taping and painting of what we call, ‘Broadway’, which is the starboard passageway that runs much of the length of the ship below the main deck. Volunteers from National Grid, Highmark and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Corridor teamed up and tackled this project quickly and with an impressive attention to detail. They carefully taped objects and markings on the bulkheads, resulting in very professional looking results.

Above and below, volunteers paint 2nd Division berthing and the wardroom where the ship’s officers dined.

The handiwork of the National Grid carpentry crew. As with so much of what was accomplished yesterday, it was a marvel to see how much they could do in such a brief period of time.
Work continued throughout Little Rock including on the mess decks – the area where the enlisted ranks would consume their meals. The white tables had been showing their age and more wear and tear than we’d like, so one of the projects we had on the slate was to tape and repaint them. A group of volunteers went straight to work and did a fantastic job.

Speaking of dining aboard, National Grid, Highmark and Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus provided an abundance of food and drink for this veritable army of volunteers at lunch. Adding to the enjoyment of the meal, tables and chairs were set up on the flight deck of Little Rock, so all could enjoy a moment of respite under the ship’s awning and take in Buffalo’s finest waterfront view. As tempting as it might be to remain comfortable in the shade, the volunteers went right back to work after the meal and continued to make progress, not letting a single minute go to waste.

Above, freshly painted mess decks tables now look as though they’ve been freshly installed at the shipyard.

Above, volunteers finishing up their lunch in the shade of the Little Rock’s awning before diving back into the long list of projects.
Aboard Croaker, our primary objectives included updating the original 12” fluorescent light fixtures to direct-wire LED, preserving the original appearance while reducing the electrical load and improving the quality of light.

As qualified volunteers got to work, it was discovered that some of the original plastic components had become so fragile over the many decades that they would crumble to the touch. Unfortunately, we had to stop work on this project until a better solution could be devised.

Not to be deterred, the volunteer crews went straight to work installing 48” LED light fixtures beneath each of the torpedo tube stacks, one forward and one aft. The new underlighting allows for greater visibility of the working components of these weapon systems. The new lights also provide for a better sense of space. Previously, everything below the tubes were immersed in darkness.

Another major improvement is the addition of 48” LED light fixtures below the main deck in the forward engine room. Guests who traverse the tour route are unaware that there’s another large space beneath their feet. With the addition of the LED lighting, their understanding of the contents, size and working conditions of the space will be much enhanced.
**CURATOR’S CORNER**

**BY SHANE STEPHENSON**

During the 9/11 Day of Service, six volunteers helped me in the collections. As you can imagine there are collections just about everywhere on our ships, and to consolidate them requires making spaces for new collections to go.

This dedicated team helped move many boxes of collections into the reefer (cold storage freezer) spaces on board USS Little Rock. This opened up some valuable space so I can begin bringing in collections from other parts of the ships. This was a great first step to consolidation, and it couldn’t have been done without the help of these steadfast volunteers.

Dedicated volunteers cataloging some of the many hundreds of original ship’s plans for The Sullivans so they can then be entered into a digital database.
One abundantly clear takeaway from this unprecedented volunteer effort is that almost anything is possible when committed people come together to take on a task.

That said, we are actively inviting those who wish to contribute their time and expertise to join us in preserving these irreplaceable treasures of our American military heritage. We welcome individuals who’d like to volunteer on their own time and organizations alike.

**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! 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.

**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!

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Online volunteer form: https://www.buffalonavalpark.wufoo.com/forms/zljxfxjqiupqolw0/
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@buffalonavalpark