PROGRESS REPORT
DECEMBER 2023

Another busy month of progress and challenges has passed and we now find winter and all it brings slowly descending upon us.

We’ve got our winter project list in hand and the maintenance team is wasting no time in tackling these ambitious undertakings.

We’ve prepared the ships for the coming rigors of a Great Lakes winter and as opportunity presents itself, those efforts will be ongoing.

Each of our vessels afloat is slated for substantial work this winter, both in terms of ongoing maintenance and repair, and to enhance the experience of our guests when we open for the 2024 season. We intend to bring each of our vessels afloat closer to their original interior configuration and to open more spaces to provide a more complete understanding of life aboard an American warship.

With a major dose of luck, one, and possibly two of our vessels will be headed for drydock late in 2024 to receive much-needed long-term repairs. We’ve got a lot to report – read on.

PTF-17

PTF-17 is buttoned up for the winter, but we thought we’d add a bit of Christmas cheer to her appearance. The maintenance team boarded her armed with Christmas lights and an inflatable Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer to greet the steady flow of all-seasons passers by.

A new tradition here at the Buffalo Naval Park is to adorn our three ships afloat and one boat ashore in the spirit of the Holiday Season.

If you happen to stroll down the promenade this winter, you’ll see the Croaker with a festive string of lights running fore and aft along with a handsomely lit star positioned on the starboard side of her sail.

Little Rock has her brightly lit navigation bridge with bright green lights to port and red to starboard.

You’ll see Santa on the starboard bridge wing of Sullivans, and moving aft her railings are lit with green string lights.
THE SULLIVANS
SURVIVABILITY
PLAN PROGRESS

We've entered the season of greatest concern as it pertains to The Sullivans. Winter weather at the northeast end of Lake Erie tends to be severe, with lashing winds and heavier sea conditions all pushing toward the entrance to Buffalo Harbor where our three vessels afloat are moored.

A major component to enhance the security of our ships is the replacement of their mooring lines. The majority of lines now employed are far beyond their safe service life. Particularly after the Christmas storm of 2022, where the lines were frayed and chafed, their advanced age and exposure to harsh elements require us to retire them.

Bidco Marine Group was able to source over 6,000 feet of Samson braided 1 1/2” synthetic line to replace those holding Croaker and The Sullivans in place. As of this writing, the line is being transported from San Diego, California across country and will be an all-hands on deck effort. Bidco professionals will be splicing in the necessary loops at one end of the lines after they are cut to their correct lengths.

Once the lines are measured, cut and spliced, they’ll replace the current lines one-for-one. When they’re in place, all hands, with assistance from Bidco, will ‘tune’ the lines to make sure each is slacked or tightened in relation to all other lines so that one line or set of lines isn’t taking more undue strain than others.

There’s still much to be done in The Sullivans Survivability Program that will involve the work of contractors. We anticipate that portion of the project to begin before the end of December, including the installation of a state-of-the-art fire detection system, oil and oil residue clean-up in engineering space bilges, additional work to watertight doors that didn’t pass earlier chalk tests, among a host of other initiatives. The bottom line is we need the ship to be able to contain water from a flooding event within the space in which it occurs. It’s only when significant volumes of water have channels of movement through transverse bulkheads that the ship will be in danger of a potentially catastrophic flooding event.

We’re expending all available resources, human and financial, to give The Sullivans the best shot at surviving till drydocking and being around to tell her important stories for generations to come.
The Sullivans

Much of the work and resources allocated aboard The Sullivans have been related to her survivability, but we’re also keeping an eye to her future as an incredibly important part of American Naval history and sharing more fully the stories she has to tell.

In addition to the work below deck, we’re also paying close attention to her superstructures. As is the case throughout the ship, metal degradation has eaten through a concerning portion of her metal structures above the main deck. A combination of bimetallic corrosion (when two different types of metal are joined resulting in more rapid decay), unrectified ground faults (the electrolytic effect of a ground fault can result in the metal deteriorating 50 to 100 times faster than otherwise), and the ravages of 80 years of exposure to weather extremes.

As we select areas of the ship for restoration work, we first have to address the underlying steel structure - we’re committed to applying the right, longest lasting solution rather than a cosmetic one.

The Sullivans Memorial Wardroom is top on our list of interior spaces we’re looking forward to sharing with our guests. First, we’re exposing all the original steel on the deck, surrounding bulkheads and overhead. Once necessary repairs are completed to the steel, we’ll then replace the original insulation in the overhead and port and starboard bulkheads with a modern alternative that improves the ability to contain heat or cool air within the space but is virtually indistinguishable from the original. Once completed, our Director of Collections and curator Shane Stephenson will populate the space with precious artifacts from the Sullivan family and from the history of our ship.

Above, stained glass from the church the five young Sullivan brothers attended while in grade school, now in safe storage waiting to be placed in the renovated Memorial Wardroom space aboard ship. Far left, a piece of the pew upon which the boys sat and prayed while attending their Waterloo, Iowa church. Left, the tattered 48-star American flag which flew aboard The Sullivans in, we believe, May of 1945 in the South Pacific.
Aboard Little Rock a number of significant winter projects are underway that we’re very much looking forward to introducing to our guests when we open in the Spring of 2024.

Another important but largely unknown part of the ship’s habitability history and story is her onboard radio station, where sailors would act as DJs and spin records that would be available for the crew to hear when not on duty or watch.

The ship’s store (top image as she appears during our restoration, bottom image in active service in the late 1960’s or early 1970’s), where sailors could use their hard-earned Navy pay to buy cigarettes, alarm clocks, cameras, wrist watches and the like, is located on the main tour route. The maintenance team did a tremendous job bringing it back to its 1960’s appearance, and curator Shane is in the process of populating it with items a sailor would have found at the time of their service. This is an integral part of the quality-of-life story that can only be fully appreciated when you see it first-hand. And that’s just what you’ll be able to do in a just a few short months.

Above, young sailors DJing aboard Little Rock for the entertainment of their fellow crewmembers who apparently had a hankering for the Bossa Nova. Below, the Admiral’s quarters festively dressed with just the right touch of this Christmas and Holiday season.
Lots of solid work has been accomplished aboard Croaker over the past month and will continue through the winter season.

First, as with her sister ships of the Buffalo Naval Park fleet, her safety and security come first. The Croaker’s state-of-the-art flood detection system is now up and fully operational - a huge leap forward for the boat. There are small sensors distributed throughout the bilges in the boat, and once triggered a text message is generated to the selected group of recipients.

We’ve got 6 deicing bubbler units dedicated to the Croaker. One of the challenges is the lack of dedicated circuits for the units to supply power to their electric motors. As of this writing, we’ve got 3 of the 6 units prestaged and ready should the currently cooperative weather take a turn for the worse, but the other 3 units are waiting for our intrepid lead technical volunteers Mario and Karl to find the right supply source and route it as close to the units as necessary.

Another project we’re pretty excited about is the LED light upgrade we’ve started. Aboard the boat, there are dozens of 12” LED lights that have remained inoperable for a very long time. With the minor modifications to convert them to LED, they will appear just as they did while in active service, but will produce a higher quality light, draw considerably less power on the boats aged electrical distribution system, and require replacement at a far less frequent rate than the original fluorescent bulbs they’re replacing. When we open in the Spring and our guests come to tour the boat, there’ll be much more to see as a results of substantially more functional interior lighting. We’ll also add some under-deck lighting in the aft engine room to illuminate details that would otherwise never be seen.
I'm happy to announce that the Buffalo Naval Park is going to be the future home of the inactive records of the US Navy Cruiser Sailors Association!

It's a proud moment in the library and museum world when an organization is chosen to be the keeper of the records for another one. Unfortunately, after many years in good service to all those US navy sailors who served aboard cruisers of all classes, the US Navy Cruiser Sailors Association closed their doors for good in December, 2022.

After spending 2023 closing out their books, notifying members, and saying goodbye, I worked with Jim Chryst from the Association to secure the records here as their permanent home. These will include all administrative records relating to the organization and the newsletters that were sent out to members.

The next step is to discuss if there are any restrictions to access and use by the public. Former officers and members will be able to access these records, but I am also interested in opening up these records to researchers, especially the wealth of information that is contained in every edition of the Association's newsletter.

The organization and I will discuss these restrictions and I look forward to opening the unrestricted records to the public!
While our season has wound down for 2023, our need for dedicated volunteers certainly hasn’t. Cleaning, preservation, collections and restoration work continues through all seasons, and we take the time we’re closed during the winter months to work on new displays and areas of the ships, so that each year brings new experiences for our guests.

If you’d like to contribute your time and expertise to our small fleet of historic vessels, we’d love to speak with you. Whether it’s basic cleaning or more complex electrical work, we’ve got a need for you. Please consider joining us.

**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!

Online volunteer form: https://www.buffalonavalpark.wufoo.com/forms/zljxfsjq1uqolw0/
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@buffalonavalpark