SAVING OUR SHIPS

PROGRESS REPORT
FEBRUARY 2024

We’re only a matter of weeks away from our opening day for the 2024 season and we’ve got so much to share. We’ve got renovated spaces aboard our ships that will be open for the first time since they arrived nearly 50 years ago, we’ve got new programs for our guests, we’ve got a vast array of safety and security improvements that we’ve implemented, and designs for the future to make the Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park an exciting destination in a way that redefines our guests’ experience.

One of the very exciting developments for the beginning of our 2024 season is the addition of one of the few remaining Talos missiles aboard Little Rock. We’re working with Bidco Marine Group to bring the artifact down the Buffalo River from its storage place to the ship via crane barge, then lift it carefully up the port side where it’ll be placed inside the missile house. We expect this event to occur the last week in April or the first week in May, and should be quite a site along the waterfront – don’t miss it!

We’ve had our challenges as well: criminals breaking into our ships to steal precious artifacts, continued funding challenges and delays in getting important work done aboard our ships, particularly The Sullivans.

Despite the hurdles, we’ve forged ahead with our mission to improve our ships, expand the spaces and displays, invite more volunteers to join our ranks and engage with our guests in a way we’ve never been able to in the past. And, with a little luck, this is just the beginning.

We’ve got a lot to share, so please read on!

It’s rare indeed when we get to participate in an event that’s truly once in a lifetime, but we’ve been afforded that opportunity. Join us aboard the Little Rock for what we believe to be the best view in the city of the Great North American Eclipse fast approaching on Monday, April 8th. We’ll provide a boxed lunch, protective glasses, a goody bag and an historic location right on Buffalo Harbor. We expect tickets to sell out quickly, so don’t miss this rarest of opportunities. Order your tickets now by CLICKING HERE

GREAT NORTH AMERICAN ECLIPSE
OVER USS LITTLE ROCK
BUFFALO, NEW YORK
APRIL 8, 2024
THE SULLIVANS SURVIVABILITY PROGRAM UPDATE

WATERTIGHT INTEGRITY

With the advanced degradation and fragility of the hull, there's very few things we can do to prevent a flooding event until she returns safely home from drydock with all her repairs successfully executed.

What we can do, however, is minimize the effects of a flooding event by limiting the distance the water can travel within the ship. By keeping the water within the space in which it first enters the vessel, its weight and volume won't be allowed to expand to the point of creating a list, cracking the shell plating, and becoming catastrophic. The areas of greatest concern are the 4 large engineering spaces in the middle of the ship. When relatively new, according to the ship's Damage Control Manual, a breach in the hull in one of those spaces would not likely lead to sinking - if contained to that one space only. The difference for us now is the ship is over 80 years old and its structural integrity is a fraction of what it was when the designers wrote that manual. It's critically essential that we keep any flooding to an absolute minimum.

To do that, we've had to examine all elements of watertight integrity as it was designed and implemented when the ship was in active service. We inspected every watertight door, hatch and scuttle, replaced many hundreds of feet of gasket material and chalk tested each and every one of those accesses.

As of this writing in mid-February 2024, US Ecology, the hazardous material removal contractor we've brought in, has addressed the oily waste in the bilges at the intersection of the transverse bulkheads of the 4 engineering spaces which has now been removed and the surfaces scrubbed clean. Because the ship's shell plating is badly decayed, we needed to strengthen that critical juncture to ensure the pressure and weight of water introduced in a flooding event wouldn't force its way through the transverse and spread, potentially making a leak unrecoverable. In the course of the work, we've identified and sealed two significant holes in the transverse bulkheads which led to water moving through that barrier into another engineering space during the Christmas storm of 2022. The holes have since been plugged and sealed.

Bidco has come in behind US Ecology and applied industrial rust inhibitor along those seams, then applied a tough marine epoxy to ensure critical watertight integrity. We anticipate Bidco to complete that work within the next week.

US Ecology will next be moving to remediate areas of asbestos tiling and mastic in areas of the superstructure where bimetallic corrosion has led to holes allowing rain and melting snow...
to make its way inside the ship from deck to deck, from the bridge down, corroding all the steel and metal surfaces it comes in contact with. Once the asbestos materials have been removed, we can work with steel, epoxy, or a combination of those materials to repair and seal the interior of the ship from the weather outside.

regulation is needed for materials being used within given spaces.

Ventilation systems are next on our list of major projects aboard for two primary reasons: safety of personnel below the main deck level, and as part of the planned ship’s movement to drydock. A possibility we’re exploring related to the ship’s “dead-stick” move (The Sullivans has no propellers and no means of getting underway under her own power) is to take a page from the Navy Salvor’s book – pressurizing major interior spaces to prevent the ship from catastrophically flooding during her transit. This zone or series of zones will be sealed and contain minimally increased air pressure provided by air compressors to keep water from flooding in if we experience a hull breach. This is a common practice with ship salvage companies and might have value as we plan our ships trip to a drydock.

Key elements to the Survivability Program will continue to be worked on, including bringing the inherent power distribution system to its fullest safe operation. The electrical power circuits will continue to be individually tested and brought online to reenergize lighting and to be available for climate control in spaces where temperature

Above: a badly corroded structural support beam aboard ship that had been concealed for decades behind insulation and paneling.

Above: lead technical volunteer Mario reinstalls the entirely rebuilt aft berthing lighting circuit that had been immersed during the partial sinking in 2022.
As full as the maintenance team’s plate has been over the winter months, we’re driven to increase the number of spaces available for guests to visit aboard The Sullivans this coming season.

Last year, due to critical and largely unseen work needed below decks, we were unable to allow any interior spaces aside from the ship’s galley to be toured. This year, we’ll be opening the main deck of the superstructure, which houses some of the most important spaces aboard: the Memorial Wardroom, where guests will be able to view original artifacts from the Sullivan family – in our opinion the most emotionally impactful space aboard ship, the Combat Information Center (CIC), the captain’s in-port cabin, the officer’s pantry, and more. Each one of these spaces is being prepared as we speak – deck restoration, insulation replacement, LED lighting upgrades, cleaning, painting and general refurbishment, so that our guests can experience these areas in as close to active-duty condition as we can manage.

A concern that has been expressed to us at somewhat regular intervals is the lack of access to spaces below decks. We can appreciate that concern and will take this opportunity to explain more fully why that remains absolutely necessary.

The Sullivans hull, no matter what we do until she’s safely in drydock, remains fragile. We’ve taken every step we’re aware of to increase her ability to fight off and survive a flooding event, but there’s nothing we can do to change the condition of the steel plating – the barrier between the interior and the harbor. Our best defense is to keep all watertight doors, hatches and scuttles below the main deck shut and dogged to prevent the spread of water. If we were to allow guests or any unnecessary personnel below, they would need to open watertight access points to navigate their way from one point to the next, compromising that critical integrity. Next, if guests were below decks and needed to evacuate for whatever reason, their ability would be hampered by that same need to keep all doors and hatches closed. Lastly, the areas below decks will continue to be active work zones – we have no intention of slowing our progress toward long-term repair until it’s successfully executed and completed.

That said, we’ll be opening new displays and refurbished spaces above the main deck and look forward to sharing their related stories with all who come to visit.

Above: the view inside The Sullivans Combat Information Center (CIC) a space undergoing cleaning and restoration work that guests will be able to visit in 2024.
The Little Rock has been the focus of a good many of our winter projects by virtue of the heated interior and workable areas regardless of exterior weather conditions. Something we’re very excited about is the unveiling of a brand-new program - something not uncommon among other museum ships but a major first for us - the ability for private groups, families or individuals to stay for a unique sleepover experience aboard ship! We’ve got officer staterooms, crew berthing spaces - even the Admiral’s private quarters! We’ll go into greater detail in a planned special edition of this newsletter, but here’s some of what we’re working on, and for those who wish to enjoy this experience, what we’ll have to offer you.

First, the grandest space of all, the Admiral’s quarters. The main space with large conference table and audio/visual presentation capability is already available for rental for private/corporate events. Now, you can also be an admiral for a day and make the quarters your private overnight residence! You’ll sleep in the same space that the commander of all Naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea slept in, which includes a large bedroom, private bath and shower, private screen door with access to the main deck and the best views in the city of Buffalo Harbor.

For those who wish to stay overnight, we now offer two choices during specific dates of availability which we’ll be releasing soon: the full Admiral’s quarters which includes a large conference room with a private door to the main deck overlooking the harbor, separate bedroom and private bath with shower, and the second option is a private officer’s stateroom with one bed or a two-person bunk bed. Male and female bathrooms and showers are nearby and the large officer’s wardroom will be stocked with board games, playing cards, a selection of movies, fresh coffee and packaged morning snacks. There is no more unique and historic overnight accommodation in the country, and we’re excited to be able to offer it for the first time ever to our guests.

Below: the private sleeping quarters of the Admiral of the Sixth Fleet, the man in charge of all Naval forces in the Mediterranean.
It is with a very heavy heart we report the passing of Croaker Caretaker and member of the Buffalo Naval Park family Jim Marzullo. We will honor him more fully as he richly deserves, but now we’d like to share with you some photos of this extraordinary man. He will be sorely missed.
CURATOR’S CORNER

BY SHANE STEPHENSON

I’ve slowly begun preparing myself for getting into the collections of the US Navy Cruiser Sailors Association (USNCSA).

I was stunned to see the amount of photographs! By my count it appears as though there could be up to 24 large three ring binders filled with photos and correspondence about US Navy Cruisers. I also noticed that there is at least one binder filled with Officer portraits and correspondences.

While I haven’t gotten into the rest of the collection, I look forward to going through the newsletters of USNCSA. They will be a treasure trove of articles written by old sailors and their stories. Historians looking at naval battles from different perspectives, and loads of information about US Cruisers in general!

It will take a long time to process these collections, but once complete where they are rehoused, and the finding aids are complete, they will be opened to the public to come visit, and use the collections for their own research!

You’ll continue to be updated in this space.
JOIN US

We’re very excited about our opening day in just a few weeks, but there’s still lots of important work to do for us to be as ready as we’d like. Without our dedicated corps of volunteers, the positive experience our guests enjoy wouldn’t be possible.

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.

Our luxurious gardens that have become the premier outdoor space in all of Western New York owe their beauty and meticulous maintenance to our volunteers. If you enjoy working outdoors and wish to contribute to our historic waterfront, we’d love to have your participation. 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/z1jxfxjqluqolw0/
Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org
Phone: 716-847-1773
Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org
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