Wow! What a spectacular start to the Buffalo Naval Park 2024 season! We’re so grateful to have such large numbers of visitors coming aboard to see all our new exhibits and for allowing us to share with them the amazing stories the ships have to tell. It’s been particularly gratifying to have veteran crewmembers visit and, in talking with our crew, to learn of events and anecdotes from their active service we’d never heard before.

The eclipse event was amazing - even though the weather didn’t cooperate, the guests we had aboard - 300 in total, expressed to us how much they enjoyed it and how special it was to have this experience aboard our vessels. We, in turn, consider ourselves fortunate to have been able to share this once-in-a-lifetime event with the people who came to Buffalo from around the country and the globe.

Our very first overnight stateroom guests also expressed to us what a great time they had. Now that we’ve got positive feedback, we’ll soon be announcing new open dates for those who wish to have an individual, family or group overnight experience aboard Little Rock. We’ve got much to report, so please read on!

This season you’ll be able to take a tour of the exterior of PTF-17 with Buffalo Naval Park Curator Shane Stephenson! After the extraordinary restoration work completed by our volunteers, we want to provide as many opportunities to share the stories of this vessel with our guests. If you’re interested in the curator (which includes PTF-17) tour, check out our website for more details.

While the hull of The Sullivans is our most pressing concern, it’s far from our only one. As the ship continues to age in the harsh Buffalo weather, we’re finding significant areas of corrosion that have resulted in a cascading effect within the superstructure. One such area we’re working on a game plan to address is the aft MK 56 fire control director. At some point in the past, the glass panes on top of the director were smashed, allowing rain, ice and snow to penetrate inside the metal casing and into the space below. From there, it made its way to each succeeding deck, ultimately depositing in the bilges of the main engineering spaces. Once we have the director sealed from the weather, we’ll begin repairing each space below until we’re confident the problem has been resolved.
SURVIVABILITY PROGRAM UPDATE

We’ve gotten a great deal accomplished since the program started this past December, and there’s more to do. Now that we’ve reestablished watertight integrity below the main deck, completed the flood detection system installation, enhanced and repaired a large portion of the electrical distribution system and completed several phases of hazardous material mitigation, we’re now looking at an automated bilge pumping system tied into original piping for overboard discharge. While that sounds like a straight-forward project, it’s complicated by the fact that many of the overboard discharge openings have been welded over after the partial sinking in April 2022. We’re reviewing the damage control plans to identify the location of potentially appropriate discharge points, then examine the associated interior piping to inspect its condition and see where we might be able to tie into it, installing check valves along the way to prevent backflow. With each added measure of protection for the ship, we increase the likelihood she’ll endure long enough to see a complete hull repair in drydock.

Each of these measures provides protection in the short-term but is also a part of a long-term plan to remain vigilant and proactive in the care of our ships.

Another critical component we’ll be adding is a fire detection system. We’ve had discussions with the alarm company that completed work on the flood detection system and we may be able to tie the two in together so that a single smartphone app will provide immediate notification for all the installed systems. We’re conducting remediation as quickly as resources will allow but with a state-of-the-art fire detection system we’ll be alerted at the earliest possible moment. A rapid response to a developing problem could make all the difference in saving our ship.

We’ve written about it in previous editions of this newsletter, but the deterioration of the ship isn’t limited to the hull. We’ve got significant work to do to stabilize and weatherproof the superstructure. To do that we’re reaching out to our volunteers to see if anyone has the skills and interest in working with us on these key restoration efforts. As a not-for-profit our supply of usable funds is limited even if our passion and commitments to our ships is not. For projects directly related to The Sullivans Survivability Program, we have an ongoing need for volunteers who can weld, who can work on electrical systems, who can do plumbing and carpentry. The last page of this newsletter contains more information on how you can get involved and join us in saving these precious, irreplaceable artifacts.
In addition to our ongoing efforts to restore stability and safety aboard The Sullivans, we continue to work in the forward superstructure to refurbish important spaces within. Most notably is the Memorial Wardroom where artifacts from The Sullivans family are to be displayed.

We’re also working on an exceptionally exciting new program to include within the Memorial Wardroom that will remain unannounced till some key details are ironed out, but we’re confident that it’ll take your visit to The Sullivans to a whole new level!

Just behind the wardroom is the officer’s pantry which, after our volunteers spent some hours of dedicated hard work, looks fantastic. The pantry is an important part of the story of the ship, and highlights how officers lived, ate, socialized, and more interestingly, exemplifies the vast difference when compared to how the enlisted sailors aboard lived. The one sobering thing officers and enlisted shared in relation to the wardroom was the possibility of being laid out on the wardroom table if wounded and having the ship’s doctor work on you there. Just above the table was a surgical lamp just for that purpose. We have recently obtained a lamp and will be including that in the restoration.

The memorial wardroom as we continue to remove concrete floor leveler from the deck.

Above top, the restored officer’s pantry. Below, the also restored pass-through window from the pantry to the wardroom.
Like her sister ships in the Buffalo Naval Park fleet, there’s been a tremendous amount of work and exciting changes aboard Little Rock over the course of the last two months.

The addition of a rare Talos missile has been loaded aboard and now resides in the missile house. A picture is truly worth a thousand words, and the sequence of images below and to the right provides a glimpse of the complexity of this major undertaking:
The new Croaker caretaker and retired U.S. Navy submariner Ken is off to a running start. He’s been cleaning, organizing and made workable plans for the recently concluded and very successful Croaker working party in May.

Last year’s very first Croaker working party was an impressive success and this year’s saw a significantly increased number of participants who joined us. Lots of work was done, and planning for ways to improve the guest experience is continuing for ongoing projects.

The annual working party was comprised largely of, but not limited to submarine veterans. They worked on a long of projects ranging from painting topside to cleaning under the superstructure to enhancing the display spaces aboard.
I'm happy to report that I and a strong network of volunteers have been archiving most of the photographic collection on board the three ships.

There are as many as 4,000 photographs that have been located and added to these PH balanced preservation folders. Many were not indexed, or labelled, and therefore it has been a long process of indexing them together.

I first started by building a subject heading list using key words: Land, Sea, Air, People. Using this vocabulary, you can begin to build sub-headings such as Sea: US, Sea: England, Sea: Germany, Sea: Japan. Under these headings you can now group photos by type of ship. This subject heading process goes from the very general to the very specific. Once “Sea” is completed, I and the volunteers moved onto Land, Air, People using a very similar subject heading system.

I know that there are many more photographs just waiting to receive this treatment! Photos I haven’t located yet, or photographs that get sent to me, typically within a larger collection being donated. The photographic collection will be made available to users, researchers and visitors as the research library opens in the future.
JOIN US

For this edition, we’re going to change things up a little. First, we’re exceedingly fortunate to have our new Volunteer Engagement and Coordinator John Moffatt join our ranks. He’s recently started in this important position (also volunteer) and his dedication to this role has already been impactful. He’s reached out to veteran groups, schools, and local businesses to invite them to join us here at the park, and interest in our work here seems to be on an upward trajectory.

AMBASSADORS: A new and exciting addition to our volunteer team are the ambassadors. This friendly group engages with visitors, greets and welcomes guests, provides general information on the grounds and in the museum building.

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: 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