PROGRESS REPORT
JULY 2024

Activity aboard our ships continues to grow at an exciting pace, in large part due to the unprecedented support of an increasingly large corps of dedicated and passionate volunteers. Thus far, 2024 has been a record-setting year for volunteer support through corporate sponsors. In particular, their respective Veteran Resource Groups have provided willing and dedicated hands along with much-needed financial resources to help offset the costs of materials.

We’re also grateful to see the Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park becoming the epicenter for veteran-related activities. We’ve just had our first successful Veteran’s Movie Night sponsored by Veteran’s One-Stop, we’ve hosted veteran resource group-sponsored cornhole tournaments aboard the Little Rock on her flight deck, our local Veteran’s Administration provided seminars for our local veterans to inform them of benefits they may not be aware they qualify for, including the P.A.C.T. Act enhancements and much more. We’ve got a lot to report, so please read on.

REENACTORS ABOARD OUR SHIPS!

Ask any sailor and they’ll tell you a ship is a living thing. And her life blood is the sailors who live in, work on and care for her. We’re thrilled to have aboard members of the Military History Preservation Group in period costumes and uniforms to enhance the experience, education and all around fun for our guests – thank you!

HARBOR DREDGING

A critical part of The Sullivans and Croaker drydocking project will be dredging the areas around the ships to free them of their current encasement of harbor silt. In the month of July, the shipping channel was dredged to a minimum depth of 23 feet to ensure the safety of navigation for maritime traffic. We may need to use a similar ‘clamshell’ digger and barge system (image to the left) to create channels and clear the way for our ships to be repositioned prior to exiting the harbor for repair.
Among the most historically impactful events for the Buffalo Naval Park will be the drydocking of our vessels, and that’s exactly what we’re planning to do.

Active Navy warships typically cycle through a drydock repair or maintenance period every two or three years. The recommended cycle for museum ships ranges from every ten to twenty years. The ships of the Buffalo Naval Park fleet haven’t been to drydock, in the case of The Sullivans and Croaker, in almost sixty years.

A combination of age (The Sullivans was built to last about twenty years and she’s just passed her eightieth birthday), hard service, severe weather, bimetallic corrosion, undetected ground faults, and zebra mussels all have contributed to The Sullivans current fragile condition. The submarine Croaker is not far behind.

Immediately following the recovery of The Sullivans after her near-catastrophic partial sinking in April of 2022, we contracted with the leading museum ship marine surveyor in the country to provide a comprehensive assessment of the condition of all three vessels afloat. We asked for a review of all available repair options, their projected costs, and the long-term outcomes they could produce: in situ repairs, temporary cofferdams and permanent cofferdams were all examined and the conclusions were clear. Repairs in a drydock represent the most viable, affordable long-term solution, and with her extremely fragile condition is critical and necessary at the earliest possible opportunity.

Above and right, The Sullivans as she appeared at the time of her partial sinking in April of 2022.
Factors affecting where we can take The Sullivans and Croaker for drydocking are proximity, cost, capacity and availability.

The Buffalo Naval Park rests at the eastern-most point of Lake Erie. There are multiple drydocks located in the region with whom we’ve been conferring for the repair of both vessels. Proximity is among the most critical factors – every mile of distance The Sullivans has to travel is a proportionate percentage of risk in getting her to her destination safely. Total cost, currently projected at $21 million dollars for both vessels, is a high hurdle to get over with only $8 million currently pledged for the project.

Capacity of the designated drydock is a major consideration. The cost of dredging and moving the ships within the harbor is $3.7 million dollars. If we can send both The Sullivans and Croaker to drydock at the same time, that’ll be $3.7 million dollars we won’t have to potentially spend twice.

The next factor which weighs heavily on the drydocking location is availability. Shipyards and their drydocks are commercial enterprises that rely on keeping a steady flow of hulls in their repair facilities to remain profitable. As such, they book commercial vessels well in advance and make commitments to the ship owners that their necessary repairs and maintenance will be conducted on the agreed-to timeline. With our current funding deficit, it’s not possible to make a commitment to a drydock until more of the funding is pledged. For instance, if we provide a down-payment to reserve our spot(s) in drydock, then fail to have sufficient funds to pay for dredging, mandatory pre-drydocking hazardous material mitigation aboard the respective vessels, tugboats, transit insurance, etc. the project would grind to a halt and our initial investment could be lost. Then, we’d need to fill the financial hole left by our lost down-payment and add that to the project total.

Due to the complexity of conditions unique to the Buffalo Naval Park, getting our ships successfully to drydock is very fairly comparable to the precision of a Swiss watch. Each segment of the project must move precisely in its time and in perfect synch with all the other component parts.

We’re absolutely committed to not only saving our ships, but restoring and opening them to the public in ways we’ve never done before.
Progress aboard The Sullivans continues at an aggressive pace, with developments in the Survivability Program, electrical distribution restoration, and conditions in spaces above the main deck.

First, this month will see the successful completion of the installation of a state-of-the-art fire detection system in key spaces aboard ship. Engineering spaces and others will have sensors that will transmit indications of a fire developing aboard to a smartphone app via Bluetooth antennas to improve response time in the event of an emergency. This system will work alongside our new flood detection system to considerably enhance our ability to save our ship.

A project that we’ve been talking about for quite some time – one thought by pretty smart people to be outside the realms of possibility, is the restoration of the ship’s electrical distribution system. The ship receives all its electrical power via a cable from shore, referred to as a shore tie. That cable runs through the hull into the ship’s original electrical distribution panel in the aft engine room, pictured below.

The panel then distributes that power to individual circuit breakers for lighting, equipment, ventilation and all systems requiring electricity through the aft panel. This aft panel is connected to another, nearly identical distribution system in the forward part of the ship via a bus tie, or thick cable comprised of 3 copper conductors.

When The Sullivans suffered a serious flooding event, the main bus tie was partially submerged for an extended period resulting in extensive, and in the opinion of some, irreversible damage.

A temporary-to-permanent electrical distribution system was devised and installed to meet an acceptable, though not optimal portion of the ship’s power needs. The system was comprised of two panels, one midships and another on the starboard side just aft of the forward superstructure. Each panel had a network of breakers on one side and outlets on the other. All power for lighting, dehumidification or any other need had to be supplied by one of the two panels. Extension cords were run from the outlets in the panels throughout the ship to supply these needs and, as one could imagine, was a less-than-optimal solution. These cords would provide power to long strings of lighting that had to be routed through otherwise watertight doors and scuttles to make the interior spaces of the ship safe to conduct ship’s work by staff and contractors. Because of the need for these cords, watertight integrity - needed to save the ship in the event of another major flooding event, was not entirely possible since power
and light cords had to run through otherwise sealed accesses. Our lead technical volunteer Mario, working under the guidance of retired Navy Commander and nuclear-trained electrical engineer Barry Witte of the museum ship Slater, has nearly completed the careful restoration and repair of the main bus tie. Once completed and repeatedly tested, we will be able to remove all the temporary power cords and light strings and revive original systems. This will also improve the amount of available power throughout the ship.

Caretakers Andrew and Joe have been working hard cleaning and clearing spaces throughout the areas above the main deck. We've started a major push to scrub clean and paint all the spaces that have been off the public tour route for too long. Once the electrical restoration is complete, we'll be able to test and safely reenergize the original lighting circuits in the main and aft superstructures.

We're excited about getting as many of these spaces restored to a near-pristine condition and sharing them with our guests. And with a lot of luck, by the time she returns from drydock, it'll look as though the crew just left on liberty.
Above and right, Navy sailor reenactors preparing a very real, and very delicious breakfast with coffee.

Also this month, we had a new exterior air conditioning unit to the port side forward platform installed to replace the one that had burned out early last year. This unit provides cool air to the Admiral’s quarters and forward main deck state rooms.

Karl, one of our lead technical volunteers has been hard at work reviving the exterior lighting on the aft superstructure, with the possibility (fingers crossed!) that the original underway replenishment lights will once again light up for the first time since the 1970’s!

LITTLE ROCK

The Navy sailor and Marine reenactors have been aboard our ships this month, and on Little Rock they’ve done a tremendous job creating the look, feel, and sounds of an active warship.

A delicious part of the experience was in the three square meals they prepared in the galley. Imagine walking through the ship early in the morning to the smell of sizzling bacon, eggs, French toast and piping hot, freshly brewed coffee.
This month, the great people of M&T once again joined us, this time to converge on the forward torpedo room of the Croaker. Their focus was to clean the overhead areas, bulkheads and deck in a way that we’ve not been able to do in a long time. They shined brass and bronze on the torpedo tubes, cover plates and associated equipment. Other members of the volunteer team carefully painted areas of the bulkheads - well done!
CURATOR’S CORNER
BY SHANE STEPHENSON

The Buffalo Naval Park’s YouTube Channel is proud to present a six-part series on the archaeological changes to USS Little Rock over the duration of her 20 years of service to the nation.

The most noticeable and obvious changes were the modernizations that took place from 1957 – 1960 at the New York Shipbuilding Corp. as she went from CL92 to CLG4 to become a warship to carry the Talos missile system. This change necessitated thousands of modifications to the interior of the ship.

Shane partnered with Lucas Weinman, a museum professional with a background in archaeology to film just a small sampling of the spaces that went through modernizations, specifically to the gun platforms aboard.

When USS Little Rock first commissioned, she carried four 6”\47 turrets and six 5”\38 twin mounts. She then lost all but one each gun post - 1960 refit.

Shane and Lucas share their knowledge and show views and subscribers to our YouTube channel some interesting evidence. These six videos premier every Sunday night at 8pm at the Buffalo Naval Park’s YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@BuffaloNavalPark

We hope you’ll join us and that you find the episodes interesting and thought provoking.
VOLUNTEERING

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!

AMBASSADORS: The first people our guests meet most often are our Ambassadors, a dedicated and friendly part of our team that helps guide people along the promenade/sidewalk to more easily find their way around the park.

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!