

1/5/24

PHMC Volunteer Meeting

Chuck Johnson opens the meeting by recognizing the new and life members of the Forster Society.

Jim Hall takes the floor.

- Organizational changes to Erie Maritime Museum (EMM) and US Brig *Niagara* (USBN)
  - Jim stated that the TV piece the night of 1/4/24 was inaccurate, and further stressed that *Niagara* is not going on blocks, or being sold, or being turned into a restaurant.
  - Ties with the Flagship Niagara League (FNL) are not severed, merely the contract to sail the ship expired and was not renewed. Communication with FNL regarding working together is ongoing.
  - The Commonwealth is returning to the model used to run the ship from 1992-2009. This model was originally abandoned as a cost saving measure due to economic downturn.
  - PHMC historic sites use associates groups to coordinate volunteer efforts, education programming, and marketing. FNL ended the associates agreement and switched to a contractor role.
  - Shipboard operations will be shifting away from sail training towards unification with museum curriculum, and sailing will be predominately in Lake Erie.
  - Jim Hall states that *Niagara* is away for 40-60% of the time during the summer months, eliciting complaints from museum patrons.
  
- Shipyard period
  - *Niagara* will not sail in 2024, due to extensive repairs needed in shipyard.
  - A commitment of millions of dollars (NB: no exact figure given) has been earmarked in the treasury for the repairs.
  - Repair of the stem likely to take 4-5 months and cost ~\$2 million.
  - PHMC is also looking at a systems and power replacement (electrical, navigation, engines, plumbing).
  - Bill Benz (sp?), a mariner surveyor, will be arriving on 1/9/24 to conduct an out of water survey of the ship with Jim Hall and Adam Stanisiz. An out of the water survey will be conducted in the spring at shipyard.
  - Benz will craft a maintenance plan for *Niagara* in an effort to minimize emergency repairs and allow PHMC to maintain a stock pile of spare parts.
  
- Crew
  - *Niagara* will have four permanent crew, who will be PHMC employees.
  - Funding has been secured for a Captain, a Mate, a Shipwright, and a fourth crew member (likely an Engineer or Bosun).
  - Crew budget is in the realm of \$750,000 (NB: This figure may include seasonal crew and maintenance, but I am unsure).
  - Jim Hall will work with *Niagara's* captain to formulate programming making the ship an educational point of the museum.
  
- Long Term Plans for the Museum
  - As a government entity, EMM can't receive grants like a 501(c)3 can. Hence, EMM needs an associate group for fundraising and local marketing support.
  - As an aside, it was mentioned that FNL is currently undergoing strategic planning to determine their focus going forward. As two organizations concerned with what is effectively waterfront education, collaboration between EMM and FNL is likely, but not as it was in the past.

- Brig checks are currently being conducted by Jim Hall, Chuck Johnson, and Jeff Seymour. Volunteer support is needed to monitor the ship through the winter.
- A number of building and security changes have been made, including:
  - Increasing the number of cameras from 4 to 16. Cameras now cover the galleries, plaza (these one can record in infrared as well), gift shop, and lobby, and are recording 24 hours a day.
  - Installing flood doors to minimize damage from seiches.
  - Raising the plaza power towers off of the flood plain.
  - Curtailing keyfob access (reason given was for liability reasons, and volunteers working on site should check in with Jim or Chuck upstairs).
- The *Michigan* bell and wheel are being recalled to the maritime museum in Newport News, VA. Temporary exhibits to be set up including US Coast Guard artwork, and Treasures of NOAA's Ark.

Introduction of Jeff Seymour, Museum Curator.

Jim Hall opens the floor for questions. (NB: These are paraphrased from notes, and not direct quotations)

Q: How will the ship be crewed if PHMC is hiring four crew and *Niagara* needs around 20?

A: Four crew will be full time salaried employees. The rest of the crew will be hired on a seasonal basis.

Q: How certain is the funding for the needed repairs?

A: PHMC has a commitment for multiple millions of dollars (not as a lump sum, but a capital investment earmarked in the treasury). The true cost of repairs won't be known until the scope of work is determined. Should the money earmarked be exceeded, a rebuild would be considered.

Q: Who will be leading ongoing maintenance projects (painting, sanding, rig repair, etc)?

A: Jim is working on the details of contracting experienced persons to lead up the work parties. An option being considered is to contract with displaced FNL employees.

Q: What is the timeline for hiring crew?

A: The shipboard job postings from 2009, while inactive, are still in the Commonwealth systems, and were developed with the aid of professionals who know what certifications are required for the roles. Jim is looking to have a captain hired within 90 days, with remaining crew to follow shortly. He also expressed hope to see former FNL staff in the applications.

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Respectfully submitted by Hank Wiest – Commonwealth Citizen