

Erie Maritime Museum Update – 1/16/24

EMERGENCY DECLARATION

Between January 9 & 14, the Erie region suffered an extreme winter weather event, resulting in damage to large portions of the bayfront, including property damage, power outages, flooding, and countless instances of wind damage.

The US BRIG NIAGARA and the Erie Maritime Museum experienced winds greater than 60mph, rising water levels, rain & snow, and threats of seiche. The storm, and accompanying wind, low temperatures, and snow was sustained for five days.

As a result, the wind created a structural failure of the ship's "winter-cover" that could not have been planned for, or otherwise prevented. At the time of the storm, site staff completed all necessary measures to secure the facility, and infrastructure. Prior to the storm, it was believed that the winter cover could sustain high winds, and weather conditions typical of the region. Of interest is the care of which the cover was installed, and the timeline for installation; supplies for shrink-wrapping were onsite 10/10/2023, and was not completed until after January 1st, 2024.

Due to sustained high winds, staff were unable to make any kind of repairs to prevent further damage to the ship's winter cover. Instead, site staff and volunteers tarped the deck and gunports to prevent water incursion during the remainder of the storm. This is not a permanent solution but will provide temporary protection while we work to quickly replace the cover.

The current issues being addressed:

- Irreparable winter cover, and subsequent debris created by storm(s).
- Insufficient electrical power at the dock for the Niagara to maintain safe electrical connection, powering the bubblers, onboard heat, onboard electrical systems, and related infrastructure.
- Onboard plumbing systems were not pumped or winterized prior to winter weather beginning.
- Winterization of onboard engines.

Plan of Action:

- Winter Cover Debris – the site is aware of, and in the process of removing the remaining loose portions of the damaged winter cover. To complete this task, the site is working with a local marine salvage company to ensure all debris is cleaned up, thereby mitigating any type of environmental risk/impact. This is our current top priority as we can't install a new cover until the old debris is removed.
- PHMC staff are sourcing the necessary industrial tarping material and hardware to provide a winter cover for 2024. A long-term plan is being reviewed that includes utilization of a sectional hard-cover that is capable of sustaining high winds, is more cost effective, and provides a greater deal of protection to the Niagara and her crew during the winter months.
- The electrical contractor will be on site January 17 with the necessary equipment to upgrade and/or stabilize the system. Currently, a stop gap measure is being utilized for the bubblers to remain active, thereby preventing the water around the ship from freezing.
- Plumbing and onboard tanks are being inspected and pumped as needed. Measurements are being taken on current levels, and freeze/liquid status. Of interest is that this was to be part of ongoing preventative maintenance, but was not completed by the former contractor due to "not having enough time."
- Files are being reviewed for cyclical engine maintenance, and thus, winterization.

Projected Timeline:

- Electricity – close of business 1/19/2024.
- Cover – 7-10 days to identify and install temporary cover.
- Plumbing – 7-15 days to resolve issues. New contractor selected, and ongoing monitoring scheduled.
- Engine – Cleveland Brothers are coming to the site 1/18/24 to perform PM Work and winterization.

HIRING CONSULTANTS AND CREW

- PHMC will hire qualified consultants in the Captain and Shipwright positions to provide necessary services during the hiring period. Scopes of work have been drafted and offers will be made to Niagara's immediate past Shipwright and Chief Mate within the week. We will also hire former Captain Walter Rybka to consult on staff and crew education and to review plans for daily and monthly cyclical maintenance.
- Captain
 - Paperwork to adjust METs has been submitted to HR.
 - Job posting form has been drafted and will be submitted to HR once the classification is updated.
 - Anticipate the permanent Captain will be in place by the end of March. Several qualified FNL crew have expressed interest in applying for this position as well.
- Chief Mate
 - PHMC staff is currently drafting the job specification for this position.
 - PHMC does not have a vacancy to accommodate this position at present.
- Shipwright
 - Job posting form has been submitted to HR.
 - Niagara's Shipwright for the past several years (via FNL) has indicated that he plans to apply for the position. He has the required qualifications as well as an abundance of experience and he also meets the criteria for veterans preference. The position is AFSCME-covered so is required to be posted for 15 days. We should have a permanent Shipwright in place by the end of February.

VOLUNTEERS

- No new concerns with volunteers over the weekend. Nearly a dozen volunteers answered a call to assist with storm damage mitigation aboard Niagara over the weekend. Sivak, Zawrotniak and a few other volunteers continue to push for a public forum.