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Steel Hull for Rhode Island's Tall Ship on its Way to Newport

The Oliver Hazard Perry to Sail as Symbol of State's Maritime Heritage

NEWPORT, R.I. (Sept. 23, 2008) -- After announcing in July its intention to build a Tall Ship for Rhode Island, the non-profit organization Tall Ships Rhode Island (TSRI), Inc., closed September 2 on the purchase of a steel hull that gives it a substantial leg up on its mission. It will see through to completion the building of the *Oliver Hazard Perry*, a 207 ft., three-masted, square-rigged 19th Century warship replica with ties to Rhode Island's famous naval war hero of the same name. TSRI, a non-profit organization that has brought several magnificent Tall Ships events to Rhode Island over the past decade and a half, will then operate the *Oliver Hazard Perry* as a working sail training vessel out of historic Newport.

According to Bart Dunbar, TSRI's Chairman who is also president of Bowen's Wharf Company in Newport, a Toronto-based tugboat has begun towing the hull across Lake Erie and Lake Ontario where it will enter the New York State Barge Canal System at Oswego, N.Y. The hull is expected to arrive in Newport in late September and berth at Bowen's Wharf, in the historic waterfront shopping district.

Dunbar emphasized that several generous private donors helped cover the \$339,000 needed to buy the hull from a Canadian group that was creating a museum ship for historic Amherstburg, Ontario. "The ship was to replicate and be named the *HMS Detroit*, after the royal naval vessel built there in 1812 to defend Lake Erie." Unfortunately, the project lost political and community support but not before \$1.5 million had been invested in making the hull a reality. "The project was far enough along that it behooved representatives from both Amherstburg and Newport to work together to make the new incarnation of the ship--the *Oliver Hazard Perry*--a success story," said Dunbar.

Commodore Perry, who was born in Rhode Island and is buried in Newport, having lived in the city most of his life, led a small U.S. fleet on Lake Erie to victory during the War of 1812, capturing the original *HMS Detroit* and declaring "We have met the enemy and they are ours." Commodore Perry's younger brother, Matthew Calbraith Perry, is credited with opening Japan to trade with the West in the 1850s, which Newport and Shimoda, Japan, celebrate as Sister Cities. TSRI hopes that a similar relationship with Amherstburg, Ontario, Canada, will be established.

After design work is completed, the hull will be shifted from Bowen's Wharf to Blount Boats Shipyard in Warren, R.I., where a new deck will be added and interior work will be completed. After this, the ship will return to Newport where its spars, rigging and hardware will be configured and installed.

"For perspective on the magnitude of the project," said TSRI Vice-Chairman Perry Lewis, "there are six to seven miles of rigging needed for the ship, which when completed will stand more than 13 stories tall. It will be a work in

progress on the waterfront for the public, including school children, to enjoy, and the marine industry to rally behind."

During the 1800s, the cost to build the *HMS Detroit* is estimated to have been about \$2,800. Tall Ships Rhode Island projects it will have spent closer to \$4 million by the time the *Oliver Hazard Perry* is ready to sail in 2010. Securing the hull has put the organization a good two years and well over \$1 million ahead of the game compared to if it had to start from scratch to build a Tall Ship.

When the vessel is completed, the plans are not to simply tie it up at the dock for show. "That kind of vessel doesn't pay its way," said Lewis. Instead, the *Oliver Hazard Perry* will be a working vessel, supporting itself with educational and sail training programs, with an office, staff and crew that has a budget of \$1 million each year. While it will ply New England waters and travel to Canada and the Great Lakes during the summer, it also will venture to the Caribbean in winter, and hopes are that it will play a significant role in the country's planned Bicentennial Celebration of the War of 1812.

"From colonial times to the present, Rhode Island has been a leader in our nation's naval and maritime affairs," said Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri. "Tall Ships Rhode Island is focusing its expertise in our maritime heritage by acquiring and reconfiguring a vessel to be known as the *Oliver Hazard Perry* -- the new Ocean State-based Sail Training Ship." Carcieri added that all Rhode Islanders will take pride in the acquisition and completion of the ship. "She is truly worthy of our endorsement. I applaud the efforts of the members of Tall Ships Rhode Island in embarking on a new initiative that offers sail training and a unique educational opportunity...."

"From the Governor's office to the Newport County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (NCCVB) to the Newport City Council to the International Yacht Restoration School, there is great interest and unity in making this happen," said Bart Dunbar. "The historic ties this ship has to Newport and the state are what gets the adrenalin flowing, but it's the focus it will provide for Rhode Island's maritime future that is the most important. The ship's business plan includes giving opportunities to young people who otherwise might never get on the water, much less experience an ocean voyage or the benefit gained from a managed onboard educational program. It also includes engaging our community's waterfront-related organizations in every step of the ship's development, showcasing and supporting the marine trades that have become so vital to our state's economy."

Serving as director of the *Oliver Hazard Perry* project is Captain Richard Bailey, former captain and director of the 179 ft. *HMS Rose* when it was the largest active wooden Tall Ship in the world. TSRI's appointment of Bailey is especially pertinent since the *Oliver Hazard Perry*, when completed, will replace the *HMS Rose* as the largest working Tall Ship with U.S. Coast Guard certification under the Sailing School Vessel Regulations for ocean voyages. There are about 75 Class A vessels engaged in sail training worldwide and this number is growing as state and private organizations realize the benefits as well as the financial viability of operating a Tall Ship. The only larger Class A sail training ship in America is the Coast Guard's German-built barque *Eagle*.

Another key player on the TSRI Board is Vice Admiral Tom Weschler (USN Ret), the driving force behind the Tall Ships organization since 1992. "For the people of Rhode Island, this is about rescuing a reminder of our heritage and turning it into a symbol of strength for the community while at the same time developing and teaching sea-oriented educational programs," he said, noting successful sail training programs on Tall Ships representing such other states as South Carolina (the 140-foot *Spirit of South Carolina*), Virginia (the 122-foot *Virginia*) and Maryland (the 157-foot *Pride of Baltimore*).

"The *Oliver Hazard Perry*'s presence in Newport will significantly enhance the view along the historic waterfront-- her tall mast and seemingly endless rigging a symbol of Newport's rich maritime history," said NCCVB President and CEO Evan Smith. "In addition to its maritime training focus, the ship will serve as a floating ambassador, promoting tourism for our city and state in every port she visits."

For more information on the *Oliver Hazard Perry*, contact Perry Lewis at the TSRI office, 49B Bowen's Wharf, Newport, R.I., 02840, tel. 401-841-0080.

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