



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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GREAT LAKES SHIPWRECK EXHIBITION OFFERS TALES OF TALL SEAS, TRAGEDY & THE SCIENCE BEHIND SHIPWRECK EXPLORATION

Public exhibit opens November 18
Tom Ridge Environmental Center, Erie PA

(ERIE, PA) – Pennsylvania Sea Grant and partners proudly unveil “The Great Lakes Shipwreck Exhibition,” a public exhibit opening November 18 at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) in Erie, PA. Hosted by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), this exhibit is free and open to the public from 10:00 AM until 6:00 PM, through April 13, 2018.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck exhibition features stories from throughout the Great Lakes, with a focus on Lake Erie’s treacherous and unpredictable waters. Marine archaeologists and historical researchers have identified as many as 132 sunken ships off the shores of Pennsylvania’s 76-mile Lake Erie coastline, with estimates suggesting the number could equal that of a naval fleet. All told, as many as 25,000 sunken ships may lie at the bottom of the five Great Lakes – each with a story to tell.

“We need to fully survey, record and understand what we have below our waters to properly tell the story, protect and conserve these maritime treasures, and honor the sailors who lost their lives to the unpredictably treacherous waters of the Great Lakes,” said David Boughton, Maritime Educator for Pennsylvania Sea Grant and Exhibit Lead. “Our team of volunteer divers are certified in survey techniques by leading maritime archaeologist, Dr. Ben Ford, to measure and photograph the debris fields and characterize the location, so that each site can be cataloged into the state historic office inventory and be shared with future generations.”

One of the many stories is that of the tugboat Admiral. On December 2, 1942, her crew of fourteen set out from Cleveland, Ohio on the wintery waters of Lake Erie, towing the tanker barge Cleveco, which was transporting an estimated one million gallons of wartime fuel oil. A fierce winter gale took hold of the Admiral and Cleveco, sinking both ships just off the coast of Ohio. The Admiral’s crew of fourteen and the Cleveco’s crew of 18 all lost their lives that night. Along with the crews, nearly one million gallons of fuel oil went down with the ship. The disaster of the Admiral and Cleveco and the resulting spill have necessitated the development of emergency cleanup procedures for state and federal environmental agencies.

Just a few years later, in 1946, while walking along the shores of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania at Presque Isle State Park, James Coursey, of Erie, discovered a life ring on the shores of Presque Isle beach from the sunken Admiral. The story of the sinking and the life ring will be a feature of the exhibit.

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The initial shipwreck exhibit was first unveiled at TREC in January 2017. During that time, over 21,000 visitors attended the exhibit. This year, the exhibit will be open for six months and feature new displays including artifacts from the US Brig Lawrance, the Wolverine, Graveyard pond, and a simulated debris field of the 1840 ship, the St Louis. Specialized diving equipment, survey tools, Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs), ship models, and a gallery of underwater videography by the survey team's underwater videographer, drawings by a gifted technical artist, and a diorama of Fort Presque Isle will all be on display.

Newspaper accounts, historical photos and underwater surveys will help tell the story of our maritime history. Legendary tales like the Griffon, the first ship to set sail in the Great Lakes, the sinking of the Daniel Morrell, the Bessemer and Marquette, and the mystery of an 1852 submarine sunk in Lake Erie will all be featured, as well as other tales of adventure and intrigue.

Visitors can learn about the underwater process of researching, conserving and surveying these submerged cultural resources, by the volunteers of the Pennsylvania Archaeological and Shipwreck Survey Team (PASST), and see the underwater realm via underwater videos of dive operations and living history interviews. Visitors can also get a first-hand look at the "Cutter" and a nine-pound carronade from the US Brig Niagara, on-loan from the Erie Maritime Museum.

In addition to the self-guided tours, the public is invited to sign-up for guided small-group tours, interactive sessions, a lecture series, living history interviews, and an "artifact show & tell" session, which are all being scheduled through April 2018. Marine archeology classes for students and teachers will also be offered.

The "Great Lakes Shipwreck Exhibition" is the result of collaborative efforts by many stakeholders, funding through the PA DEP's PA Coastal Resources Management Program and by Penn State University, and hundreds of volunteer hours by the maritime divers and researchers of the PASST team. The exhibit was developed by Pennsylvania Sea Grant, the Regional Science Consortium, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Erie Maritime Museum, and the Erie County Historical Society.

In addition to the above, PA Sea Grant would like to recognize and thank the following partners and volunteers: Divers World, SONS of Lake Erie, Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission (PHMC), Dr. Ben Ford Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Erie Community Foundation, Erie Yacht Club, Erie Insurance, and Mercyhurst University.

For more information, or to schedule a living history interview, contact David Boughton at dbb11@psu.edu or (814) 720-0746. For class trips and other educational opportunities, contact Beth McLaughlin at beth@regsciconsort.com or (814) 833-6050.

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[Pennsylvania Sea Grant](#) is one of 33 National Sea Grant programs, dedicated to promoting the ecological and economic sustainability of coastal and Great Lakes resources through the development of science-based research, education, and extension programs. In Pennsylvania, the program is supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Penn State University, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.