



NWSeaport

Maritime Heritage Center

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For Immediate Release

“Swiftsure” to Undergo Major Rehabilitation



Northwest Seaport is in the midst of a major project to put an entirely new and historically accurate upper deck on its National Historic Landmark vessel, Lightship No. 83 “Swiftsure” to ensure its continued preservation.

Over the last two weeks, nautical archeologists, such as Archeologist-in-Residence Saxon Bisbee, have generated blueprints by documenting existing structures on the lightship’s upper deck. They have also spent hours extracting artifacts, such as the ship’s wheel, deckhouse windows, ship’s bell and more.

During one afternoon’s pull-a-part session, Shipwright Brian Johnson found a brass plate once lost under the chart table. It is stamped with the bell-pull signals. Johnson said, “If the engine telegraph was not functioning, orders could be sent to the engine room using bell signals, for example, “Ahead,” “Stop,” “Back,” and “Faster.”

Most recently, Northwest Seaport contracted with Lake Union Drydock Company to complete a ship survey, remove the rotted wooden deck and deckhouses and more. Northwest Seaport Board President, Shannon Fitzgerald, said, “The shipyard will conduct hazardous materials abatement and cleaning of the steel deck framing.”

On May 21st Northwest Seaport staff and volunteers escorted the lightship from the Historic Ships Wharf at Lake Union Park to the Lake Union-based shipyard. A Western Towboat Company tug “Flyer” provided propulsion and steerage.



Historic Ships Wharf – At Lake Union Park

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Hobie Stebbins, Lake Union Drydock Company Vice President, said, “Our company is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the efforts to restore the Lightship No. 83. In continuous operation on the shores of Lake Union since 1919, we have witnessed the evolution of the maritime industry and embrace efforts to preserve history for future generations.”

Stebbins said, “The restoration of the Lightship No. 83 provides a bridge between past and present marine construction technology. Skills which were common at an earlier time but are no longer commercially relevant will be used in the restoration of the vessel.”

Lightship No. 83 is hard to miss at the south end of Lake Union. Its tall smoke stack, bright red hull, and brilliant beacon light grab the eye and spark the imagination. It is a quintessential steamship bearing the signature lights, foghorns, and six-foot white lettering of America’s steadfast lightships.



At 109 years old, Lightship No. 83 needs significant restoration. Northwest Seaport Vessel Manager and Nautical Archeologist, Nathaniel Howe, said, “When the ship returns to Historic Ships Wharf, the deck rebuild project will be on display for the public to observe as shipwrights and their apprentices lay, fasten, and calk the new wooden deck.”

Howe said, “Northwest Seaport envisions a vibrant working waterfront at the Historic Ships Wharf. Today, our employment training programs provide participants with the ingredients with which to begin a career.”

Northwest Seaport’s Executive Director, Otto Loggers, said, “This project is Northwest Seaport’s top priority as it is the keystone for all other stabilization and preservation projects on the ship.”

Loggers said, “We are creating a shared community vision for the lightship’s future. We’re asking the public to help us answer questions, such as: “What’s relevance of this lightship tomorrow?” and “What business or organization could you imagine working out of it?”

Colleen Browne, Northwest Seaport Treasurer, said, “The Seaport has raised over one million dollars to complete this lightship rehabilitation work. Raising another million will enable us to create a museum ship for families to board and discover the region’s maritime heritage.

About Lightship No. 83 “Swiftsure”

Seattle’s Lightship No. 83 is among the oldest of its kind still in existence, and it is the only lightship still equipped with a steam engine. It was built in Camden, New Jersey in 1904—eight years before Titanic. Lightship No. 83 steamed around South America to enter West Coast service in 1905. During the next 55 years, the lightship served on all five West Coast lightship stations (San Francisco,

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Blunts Reef, Columbia River, Umatilla Reef, and Swiftsure Bank). The Swiftsure Bank, marking the approaches to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Seattle, is the station name painted on its side today.

While in its years of active service, Lightship No. 83 rescued shipwreck victims, narrowly survived collisions, served as an armed training ship in WWII, and made the transition from oil lanterns to electric lighting, radio, and radar. These systems are as significant as any valorous act of its crew. The advancements in shipboard electrification during the ship's working life—most are still in the ship—brought sweeping changes to navigation and safety at sea. In 1960 Lightship No. 83 was replaced by automated offshore buoys and decommissioned. The ship joined the Northwest Seaport museum ship fleet in 1966 and became a National Historic Landmark in 1989.

Acting as floating lighthouses, lightships operated by the US Lighthouse Service and US Coast Guard guided thousands of ships around reefs and shoals into safe harbor channels from 1819 to 1983.

About Northwest Seaport

Northwest Seaport, founded in 1964, preserves and interprets the maritime heritage of Puget Sound and the Pacific Northwest. At Seattle's Lake Union Park Northwest Seaport museum ships, the tugboat *Arthur Foss* (1889) and the Lightship No. 83 *Swiftsure* (1904), provide a hands-on venues for family education, employment training programs and heritage restoration. Recent Northwest Seaport public events include Gold Rush Tugboats, Stories of the Sea, tugboat story time for toddlers, maritime music, public museum ship tours, and overnight sleepover programs.

Northwest Seaport, www.nwseaport.org

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