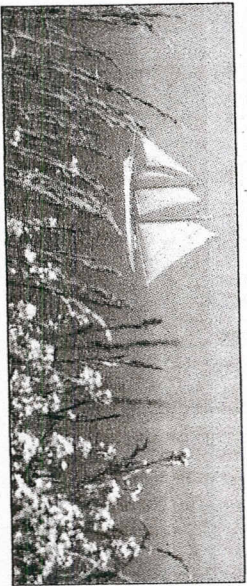


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**A SHIP OF OUR OWN**  
Tall Ships Rhode Island is raising money to build its own vessel.  
**LOCAL NEWS**

# The Providence Sunday Journal

## Setting sail for Ocean State

Tall Ships Rhode Island hopes to turn a steel hull from Canada into the state's own seagoing vessel.

**BY RICHARD SALLIT**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

**NEWPORT** — When a tug-boat tows it from Canada into Narragansett Bay this fall, the squat, unfinished steel hull will be overshadowed in size and beauty by the luxury and racing yachts found in local waters.

But in just a few years, say its prospective owners, the vessel will be transformed into the Ocean State's very own Tall Ship, a three-masted, square-rigged behemoth that will tower over Newport Harbor and lay claim to being one of the largest classic sailing vessels in the country.

"It will be the largest privately owned sailing vessel on the East Coast of the United States. The only larger active sailing vessel is the Coast Guard's Eagle," says Perry Lewis, vice chairman of Tall Ships Rhode Island, the organization that has overseen the last several Tall Ships festivals

in Newport.

The group's leaders have for many years wanted to bring a Tall Ship to Newport permanently, not just to represent the City by the Sea, but all of Rhode Island. Past efforts never succeeded, no thanks to Hollywood (but more on that later).

"We always wanted to do it," says Lewis. "Now we have the opportunity. It's the culmination of a longstanding dream."

The \$4-million ship will be

SEE SHIP, B3

named the Oliver Hazard Perry after the Newport-born Navy commodore who played a key role in defeating Britain in the War of 1812. Fittingly, the hull was intended to become a replica of the Detroit, one of the British ships that Perry defeated in earning the nickname the "Hero of Lake Erie."

The 207-foot Oliver Hazard Perry won't be a replica. Instead, it will be designed to resemble ships of the 1812 period and is expected to be completed for bicentennial celebrations of the war beginning in four years.

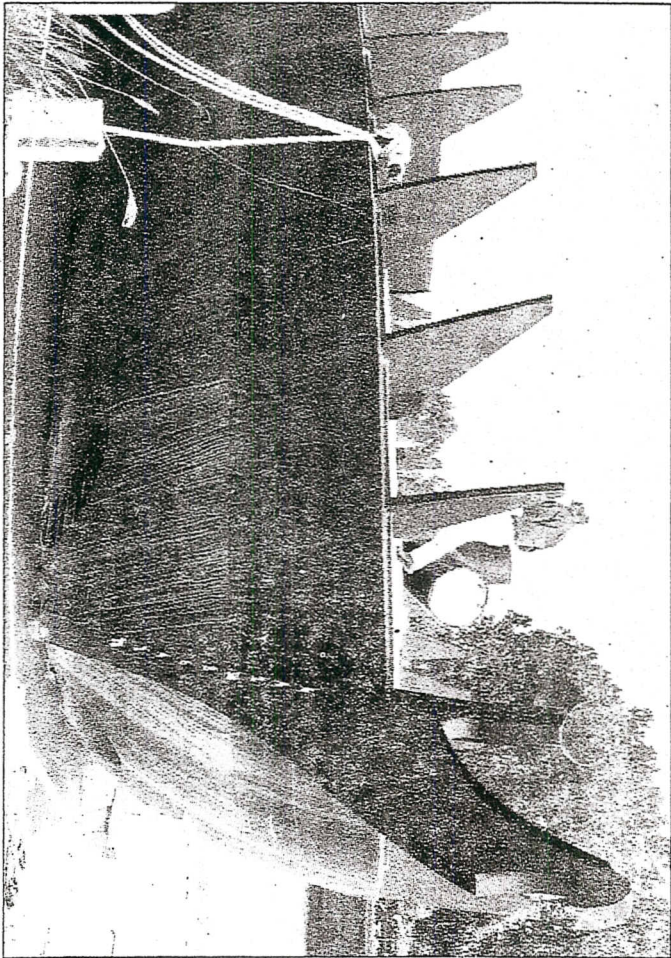
Its primary mission, however, will be training youths in the long tradition of sailing.

"We feel very strongly, as the world does — there are more training ships being built every year — that not only is a ship an ambassador for the state, but it creates a platform for character building, for education, for team building. It's unequaled by anything I've seen ashore," Lewis says.

**NEWPORT AND Tall Ships** have been virtually synonymous since the first, and most spectacular, gathering of the majestic sailing vessels in 1976, in celebration of the nation's bicentennial. Every few years since, the city has hosted similar festivals, attracting large crowds to Newport to tour vessels that hail from around the world and to watch them parade up the Bay.

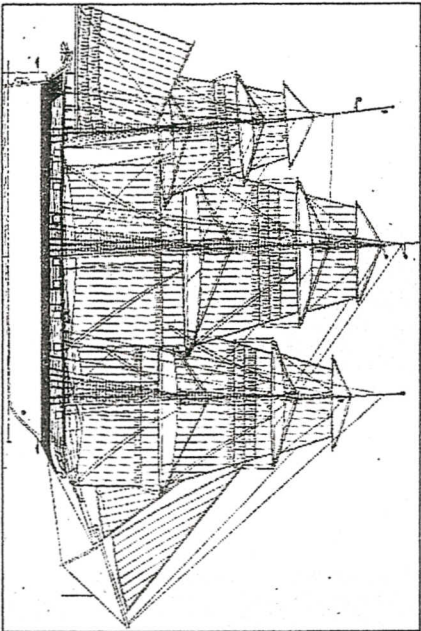
Many of the festival organizers began thinking that Rhode Island should have its own Tall Ship. Among them was Lewis, Retired Navy Adm. Thomas Wescher and Bartlett Dunbar, the president and co-owner of Bowen's Wharf and vice chairman of Tall Ships Rhode Island.

For a while they set their sights on the 175-foot Rose, a three-masted, square-sailed ship that was once a dockside attraction in Newport and later was acquired by a nonprofit sailing group in Bridgeport, Conn. Richard Bailey, a Rhode Island native who now lives on Cape Cod, was the captain of the Rose at the time. He was interested in having the ship sold and



The steel hull of the Oliver Hazard Perry is to be towed from Canada to Newport via the Great Lakes and Hudson River after a closing on the purchase takes place next month.

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An artist's rendering shows how the Oliver Hazard Perry is expected to look upon its completion.

moved to Newport. But then Hollywood entered the picture.

The makers of *Master and Commander*, starring Russell Crowe, bought the Rose to star in the movie as the *Surprise* and paid Bailey to bring the ship to the West Coast for the filming. It was hoped that after the movie's release, Newport might be able

to buy Rose, but the movie studio decided to keep the ship for a possible sequel, Bailey says.

That led to discussions about building a ship, one with a lower-maintenance steel hull, or buying the schooner *Spirit of Massachusetts* to Newport, which Bailey operated after Rose. But none of the ideas went far.

Then Bailey learned about a steel hull for sale in Amherstburg, Ontario, Canada. Since the mid-1980s, the community had been planning to build a replica of the Detroit, which served as Canada's flagship on Lake Erie. Construction began in 2000, but stalled after the hull was completed.

"I had heard of it over the years," says Bailey. "I always dreamed of a steel ship. It was a miracle this came along."

He and Dunbar flew to Canada and liked what they saw.

"Absolutely beautifully done," says Dunbar.

The price was right, too: \$319,000.

The group hired Barrington naval architect David Bonney, who estimated it would cost close to \$1.5 million for the Newporters to design and build a similar hull today. He determined that the hull could be adapted — given a deeper draft and a deck that sits higher out of the water — to be certified as an ocean-going sail-training vessel.

It will be wheelchair-accessible. "It will look somewhat like the HMS *Surprise*," says Lewis.

With a main mast 130 feet high, "It would make it the tallest thing on the water almost anywhere she goes."

The Oliver Hazard Perry would carry about 30 to 40 sail trainees and a crew of 10 to 15.

"We are in better shape financially than a lot of the smaller schooners that can't carry enough people to justify operations," Lewis says.

His group is confident it can secure financing for the project. It is working with the state Economic Development Corporation and has garnered the support of the Newport City Council and Governor Carcieri, who has written a letter describing the Oliver Hazard Perry "as truly worthy of our endorsement."

Operating costs are estimated at about \$1 million a year.

Lewis says fundraising would be aimed at the entire state since the ship is intended to represent more than just Newport. Numerous organizations have expressed interest in using the ship for a maritime program, including Sail Newport, the Seaman's Church Institute and the International Yacht Restoration School.

Lewis said the organization Tall Ships has credibility because of its experience organizing festivals and tapping corporate sponsors and because of Bailey's long experience managing Rose and other vessels.

"It's a tough job to raise the money," says Lewis, "but we are convinced it can be done."

A closing on the purchase of

the hull is slated for next month. A barge will tow the hull through the Great Lakes to the Erie Canal and down the Hudson River.

Lewis says a first phase of work — steel construction on the hull — is tentatively slated to take place at Blount Boats in Warren. A second phase — including the installation of the masts and the rigging — is proposed to take place at Newport Shipyard, with some of the work to be undertaken by contractors hired by the ship's owner.

"We want people to come see it as we build it and to sail it when it is done," says Lewis.

Once all the work is done, the ship will be up at Bowen's Wharf and begin its mission — sail training.

"It will be in and out of Newport regularly," says Lewis. "In the winter, we are anticipating, the Caribbean, doing programming down there with schools and colleges."

The Oliver Hazard Perry would probably participate in commemorations of the War of 1812, including the battle on Lake Erie in 1813.

"Rhode Island needs a reminder of our maritime past and our existing maritime heritage," says Lewis. "With the bicentennial of the War of 1812 coming, we have no way of reminding the country that an awful lot of Rhode Islanders were involved in that war, and we were key to our eventual victory."