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Monday, March 15, 2004

Putnam man seeks to enhance river, save its history

By Dan Shapley
Poughkeepsie Journal

It's fitting that a tug and barge -- the workhorse and cart of the Hudson River -- figure prominently in Vincent Tamagna's life these days.



Spencer Ainsley/Journal

Tamagna, himself a workhorse, was named Hudson River navigator in October. He is charged with navigating government bureaucracies that too often can stand, daunting, in people's way when they want to undertake projects that will enhance the Hudson River.

Tamagna helps in deal-ing with river issues.

That was the case for Steve Trueman and Jack Schatzel, who have been trying to take a historic collection of five restored tug boats, a barge and a dry dock -- and make them into the North River Tugboat Museum and Center for Historic Marine Technology, on Kingston's Rondout Creek waterfront.

Trueman, a former commercial diver, restored his first boat -- the Tug K. Whittelsey, built for the Oil Transfer Corporation in 1930 -- after pulling it from an underwater grave in Newtown Creek in Brooklyn in 1992.

Mystic would have rival

It has since become his goal, with Schatzel as a partner, to build a historic ship restoration dock and museum akin to Mystic Seaport in Connecticut.

But, as Trueman put it, "We're just a couple of garage mechanics, Jack

and I. We swear too much and we pick our noses. Trying to talk to politicians -- we don't know how to do that."

That's where Tamagna comes in.

"If it happens, it will be in large part because of him," Trueman said. "We need him so bad."

Tamagna saw the potential immediately.

"It's a collection of historic vessels that tell the story of America's first superhighway," Tamagna said. "We're taking a look at what we need to do to tell that story."

Tamagna met Trueman when searching for a historic tug and barge last summer for the inaugural run of his "Fresh Off the Barge" floating farm market, which transported farm produce to Yonkers.

It was a project he started with the group he founded, the Lower Hudson-Long Island Resource Conservation & Development Council.

The barges represent only two of the projects on Tamagna's agenda. Restoring and promoting the Hudson's lighthouses, and preparing for the upcoming 225th anniversary of the American Revolution, also figure prominently.

A lifelong Hudson Valley resident, Tamagna said his work representing Putnam County's waterfront in the county Legislature helped spur his interest in the river.

"It became more of a hobby and a life passion, taking a look at the opportunities to bring people to the water's edge and to allow for enhancing and enjoying the river," he said.

NEIGHBOR

VINCENT TAMAGNA

Age: 45.

Home: Nelsonville, Putnam County.

Family: Wife, Debbie; a son.

Occupation: Hudson River navigator, Putnam County legislator.

Volunteer: President and founder of the Lower Hudson-Long Island Resource Conservation & Development Council; state secretary of the New York State Association of Conservation Districts.