

SOCIETY OF SPONSORS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY
President's Report
July 20, 2007

During the period May 1, 2006 to May 31, 2007 the Society of Sponsors was represented at eleven ship christenings and six ship commissionings. During the membership year there was an increase in activity in the Navy shipbuilding industry. As we entered the winter months, ceremonies that had been delayed because of the hurricanes appeared on the schedule and travel began again in earnest.

On May 25, 2006 our 1st Vice President, Claudia Natter, represented the Society at the Return to Service of USS FLORIDA (SSGN 728) in Mayport, FL. The original ship's sponsor, Marcia Carlucci (Mrs. Frank Carlucci) was also in attendance.

May 25th was also Awards Day at the US Naval Academy. I presented our traditional black leather attaché case to MIDN 1/c Jeffrey Milota, the Small Shiphandler Award recipient.

June 8th I represented the Society at the retirement ceremony of CAPT Kevin Wensing, former PAO to then SECNAV Gordon England. It was there I met Dotty England, sponsor for NEW YORK (LPD 21).

There were two christenings and one commissioning in June. On the 17th Linda Lingle, Governor of Hawaii christened HAWAII (SSN 776) in Groton, CT. An Hawaiian War Priest chanted the blessing for the ship in Hawaiian and English.

On June 10th Susan Collins, US Senator of Maine, gave the order to man her ship, USS FARRAGUT (DDG 99) and bring her to life in Jacksonville, FL.

USNS SACAGAWEA (T-AKE 2) was christened and launched into San Diego Bay during a breath-taking twilight ceremony on June 24, 2006. Co-sponsors Lucy Diaz and Rachel Ariwite were accompanied by a Native American Warrior Priest who blessed the "launching" in native tongue.

Rose Mary Magnus, the newly elected 2nd Vice President of the Society of Sponsors and wife of the Assistant Commandant of the US Marine Corps, christened her ship, GREEN BAY (LPD 20), at the shipyard in New Orleans on July 15th. This was an important milestone marker for Northrop Grumman Gulf Coast shipbuilding yards as they recovered from delays caused by Hurricane Katrina.

Likewise, on August 19th, the christening of MAKIN ISLAND (LHD 8) was the first ceremony to be held at Northrop Grumman Ship Systems Pascagoula, MS since the hurricanes. Ship sponsor is Silke Hagee, wife of the former Marine Corps Commandant.

September was an extremely busy month. First Lady Laura Bush participated in the commissioning of her submarine USS TEXAS (SSN 775) in Galveston, TX before a

crowd of 10,221 people on September 9th. We were fortunate the festivities ended just as the torrential rains began, making for a horrendous drive to the airport. At the pre-dinner photo op the evening before the commissioning, Paul and I were honored to be among those chosen to be photographed alone with the First Lady.

On September 16th retired US Navy CDR “Clare” Parsons, great-granddaughter of RADM William T. Sampson christened SAMPSON (DDG 102) in Bath, Maine. The ship was in the land level launch facility, but immediately following the christening we were able to see the ship begin to move slightly as it inched its way to the drydock.

September 22nd found me in Marinette, Wisconsin for the side-ways launch of FREEDOM (LCS-1). Ship sponsor Birgit Smith is the widow of Army Sgt Paul Smith who died during the current war. During the Mast-Stepping Ceremony Birgit placed her husband’s St. Christopher’s Medal and their wedding bands under the mast of her ship so their spirits and love would sail with the ship always.

GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) was christened by Doro Bush Koch, daughter of the ship’s namesake, at Northrup Grumman Newport News on October 6th. Suzanne Prueher represented the Society at this huge event.

On October 16, 2006 many Society members attended Worship Services at the US Naval Academy Chapel in honor of the Navy’s Birthday. This was mentioned as we and the Navy were honored. Following the service all attending sponsors were invited to a delicious brunch at the lovely Annapolis home of Mary-lin and Bill Ryan. It was a special treat to meet her most engaging, charming, handsome freshman grandson from Notre Dame.

October continued to be busy with the funeral of Ann Hughey’s husband George, the US Navy Memorial’s Annual Lone Sailor Awards Dinner, the Washington, DC Chapter Luncheon (so graciously planned and executed by Connie Jeremiah) and the USNA Foundation Fall Meeting.

The Year 2006 ended on a festive note with the PEO Ship’s Holiday Gala at the Washington Navy Yard. The Society was represented at the launch ceremony for USNS ALAN B. SHEPARD (T-AKE 3) by Betty LeMoyne, our 3rd Vice President. Ship sponsor Laura Shepard Churchley, one of RADM Shepard’s daughters, was in San Diego for this December 6th ceremony and was delighted to re-acquaint herself with Betty.

The weekend after Super Bowl XLI found me in Miami, FL for the commissioning of USS GRIDLEY (DDG 101). Cathy Forst, ship sponsor, was most impressed as she participated in the traditional ceremony on February 10, 2007.

February 12th and 15th were devoted to a Farewell Dinner and Change of Office Ceremony for RADM Charlie Hamilton, PEO Ships. He was very good to the Society and passed his eagerness to support us to his relief RDML “Chuck” Goddard.

February and March were filled with adjunct meetings: finance advisor, finance committee/budget, etc. On March 8th many SOS members attended the funeral service for VADM Joe Metcalf, husband of our dear Ruth. This very beautiful tribute to Joe was held at the US Naval Academy on a brisk, wintry but sunny day. We concluded the day at Buchanan House for a lovely repast.

The following day I traveled to New Orleans to attend the commissioning of USS NEW ORLEANS (LPD 18) on March 10th. This also was one of the ships delayed by the hurricanes so her sponsor, Carolyn Shelton (spouse of the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) was very proud and happy to finally be able to help commission her ship.

More sadness in March. One of our sitting Trustees, Dornell Kilcline, passed away quite suddenly. On March 15th I offered Society condolences at the wake and attended the funeral the following day at Arlington. After the Mass for Christian Burial in the Old Post Chapel at Fort Myer, the Navy Honor Guard formed an honor cordon at Dornell's grave site. We must remember she was one of the founders of the Arlington Ladies who attend all funerals there with the honor guard and Commandant Military District Washington.

The remainder of March and all of April were on a happier note: meetings at the WestWood in preparation for the Annual Meeting and Luncheon; at N-MCRS to discuss plans for a scholarship specifically for education and re-training of our war medically retired personnel; discussions with newly named sponsor of NEW HAMPSHIRE (SSN 778), Cheryl McGuinness, who was eagerly awaiting the keel laying of her ship. Cheryl's husband was a pilot of one of the planes flown into the World Trade Center Towers on 9-11.

I ended the month by attending the christening of NORTH CAROLINA (SSN 777) at Northrup Grumman Newport News. Our very own Linda Bowman broke the champagne bottle with a MIGHTY swing on April 21st after giving her ship's crew a challenge: make a difference to a fellow crew member everyday by reaching out, touching, listening, etc.--for only then will you become a true "team" that will work well together.

The Annual Meeting and Luncheon proved to be very special events with former First Lady Rosalynn Carter joining us as a very participative member for the day. An informative discussion on how various sponsors "relate" to their ships and a memorable luncheon (beautiful setting, delicious meal as planned by the co-chairs Janet Gehman and Suzanne Prueher) with a very meaningful message from RDML "Willie" Hilarides, PEO Subs, was enjoyed by well over one hundred people. It was a superb ending to one membership year and the beginning of a new season.

The very next day I traveled to Groton, CT for the commissioning of USS HAWAII (SSN 776) on May 5th. The submarine's sponsor, The Honorable Linda Lingle, Governor of Hawaii participated in a beautiful ceremony accented with touches from the Hawaiian Islands provided by a young girls hula troupes graceful dancing and blessings chanted by

the Hawaiian War Priest. The solo performance of the “Hawaiian National (State) Song” complemented the dancing and ambiance on this very warm beautiful day.

Also on May 5th, 1st Vice President Claudia Natter attended the Spring Meeting of the US Naval Academy Foundation (Athletic and Scholarship Programs) and presented the Society’s check in the amount of \$12,000 for preparatory school scholarships.

May 14th and 15th found me in San Diego, CA for the christening and launch of USNS ROBERT S. BYRD (T-AKE 4). Many representatives of the Byrd family gathered to witness Bolling Byrd Clarke, eldest daughter of RADM Byrd, give a powerful swing of the bottle and christen her ship at this beautiful twilight ceremony hosted by NASSCO. Patriotic “tears of joy” were triggered by the music and splendid night-time setting.

The following weekend I traveled to Bath, Maine to witness Michelle Sterett Bernson christen STERETT (DDG 104). Michelle was supported by delightful family members whose enthusiasm was not dampened by the cool, rainy weather. As mentioned in my attached letter, this was the final ship event on my schedule and was therefore a very special visit.

The Color P-rade and Prizes and Awards Assembly at the US Naval Academy on Thursday, May 24th marked the end of my tour/term. (Janet and I met a couple of days before that so she was ready to take the helm.) MIDN1/c Devin Ted Smith was the proud recipient of the Society’s traditional award for the winner of the proficiency in the art of ship handling competition. His parents and grandparents were so proud and happy they joined soon to be Ensign Devin Smith and me for the commemorative photo. It was a glorious way to end a fantastic journey.

Attending the Dinner Cruise hosted by Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter in June was the crowning touch for a wonderful experience. Janet and I were honored to be aboard the barge with the SECNAV and other guests for a glorious evening that highlighted the Society of Sponsors and our devotion to ships and the Navy.

Submitted by: Dianne F. Reason