

Ernestina will be Rebuilt to Sail Again!



Private donors add \$2.8 million to Ernestina restoration. Historic vessel could become a training ship for Mass. Maritime Academy



NEW BEDFORD — Two philanthropists have stepped forward with \$2.8 million to put the Schooner Ernestina past its fund-raising goal for a full restoration of the historic vessel, Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Jack Murray told The Standard-Times today.

Murray said a formal announcement at dockside will come in a few weeks, but he confirmed that two individuals have more than matched the state's \$2.5 million contribution to the project.

The Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey Association is currently raising its \$1 million share, and has already raised more than \$100,000, said Chairman Julius Britto.

The restoration will take two or three years and will make the Ernestina seaworthy once again. That will enable it to resume its port visits, sail training and education programs, said Britto.

He said the association and the state are in the process of deciding how to maintain the schooner in the coming years.

Bids on the restoration work, which will be extensive, should be sought within a few weeks, Murray said.

The donations are coming from Gerry Lenfest, the owner of the Philadelphia Inquirer, who has offered \$1.8 million, and Robert J. Hildreth, a Boston philanthropist who is contributing \$1 million.

Murray said he spoke with both men today to confirm their commitments.

Hildreth, who is vice chairman of the Schooner Ernestina-Morrissey Association, told The Standard-Times that the state is in discussions with the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in Buzzards Bay to be the off-season home of the Ernestina, keep it maintained, and use it as a teaching tool, even a dormitory.

The Ernestina, launched in Essex in 1894, drew much attention during the recent visit to New Bedford of the restored whaleship Charles W. Morgan.

Some 1,600 people who came to see the Morgan also toured the Ernestina, which has languished at its waterfront pier for several years. "It was a big bounce for us," Britto said.

He said he believes that Gov. Deval Patrick's commitment to a \$2.5 million capital outlay for the schooner "was the catalyst" for bringing in private donations, without which the project would not be possible.

The Ernestina is the official vessel of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She has served as a Grand Banks fishing boat, an Arctic explorer, and a packet carrying immigrants from Cape Verde to the United States.

For more information visit: <http://www.ernestina.org/>

By Steve Urbon

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