

# The Metro Section

N 37

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2004

**The New York Times**

## This Boat Is Your Boat, This Boat Is My Boat, and a River Beckons

BEACON, N.Y.

IN most ways, it's not much—a modest after-stained Hudson River ferry sloop, hundreds of which once plied the waters of the river. The deck needs major repairs, a square has taken a bite out of the jib, the hull's been rebuilt and it has already outlived its expected life span. It will never win a big-name sailing competition.

"This thing does not go quickly dead into the sea," Mr. Touraine, the captain of the boat, said in respectful understatement as the Woody Guthrie set sail one still, humid evening last week.

Still, when Mr. Touraine set out at 6 on the Woody's nighty sail, with 12 members of the Pubert Creek Waterflood Committee on board, it felt like a small miracle.

The Woody got its start in 1925, paid for from the pocket of the folk singer Pete Seeger. Luck when the Hudson was still just beginning to climb back from being written off as a dead industrial cesspool of a river. Since then the Hudson's made a remarkable recovery, as has dozens of Hudson Valley towns like this one, once a postindustrial relic, now—unbelievable—a hip artistic enclave.

E-mail: seung@nytimes.com

But one rare constant has been the Woody, which, weather permitting, has set sail every weekday from early spring to late fall, taking up to 14 visitors on a two-hour sail along the river, just below the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge. Everyone who signs up in time sails for free. If you find a better bargain, please let us know.

As has been the case in recent years, keeping it going has been no small feat. The Woody needs about \$30,000 in repairs to keep it seaworthy, and the money's not yet there. Keeping tight air-conditioner operation that coaxes the boat, arranges for its nightly visitors, and supplies a four- or five-man crew every night for almost three decades has taken the sort of commitment that comes first as a mission, more than a job or an association.

But as the Woody sailed along in a lullid brood, past oxcarts and kayaks, with the grandchild of Beanelement Castle on its way to the south, the water/river development in Newburgh to the west, the dark green blankets of the Highlands rising along the banks, you could feel the old ghosts of the river and understand how the Woody has found a way to keep going.

Continued on Page 41



The Woody Guthrie, at right, sailed the Hudson River near Beacon, N.Y., on Thursday. The ferry sloop takes passengers for a two-hour sail each weekday.

## This Boat Is Your Boat, This Boat Is My Boat, and the Hudson River Is Beckoning

Continued From Page 37

Thirty-one-and-a-half-foot long, 47 feet high, as sturdy and unpretentious as its namesake, the Woody began as part of a dream that is still evolving. After the success of the first Clearwater, launched in the 1960's to raise environmental awareness about the Hudson, Mr. Seeger and others had a vision of sloop clubs along the river serving as loyal adjuncts to its educational mission. Several sprang up and some have prospered, but none have done what the Woody, about a third the size of the Clearwater, has in terms of taking so many people for sails, so regularly, for so long.

In the beginning, the idea was to show how badly the river had been despoiled, at least as much as was to glory in its tarnished majesty. Now, an outing can be a thing of quiet bliss, but the 200 members of the Beacon Sloop Club, who keep the enterprise going, say better times on the river have not dulled the mission.

"We can't turn our backs now; we have to be forever watchful," said Tom Baldino, a volunteer captain. He noted rising temperatures in the river, the uncertain status of G.E.'s court-ordered PCB cleanup and oth-

er issues. He said, "It's a thrill for a lot of people to go out on a boat like the Woody, but I also think it's a public service." Still, public service or not, it's something of a grind that brings to mind the adage that a boat owner's two greatest days are the days he buys his boat and the day he sells it. The Woody has a small 70-volt electric motor that augments the sails on windless days, and allows the boat to dock and take on handicapped passengers. It was out of the water the last two years, as its hull and screws were replaced at substantial cost. The deck is the next job, part of the endless bad marriage of wooden boat and fresh water.

"They say a boat is a hole in the water you throw money into," said Sam Rotensky, president of the Beacon Sloop Club, which operates out of what used to be the diner at the old ferry landing in Beacon. "And in the case of the Woody, you have the case where fresh water is trying to turn wood into pest mous."

Still, on this night, the Woody seemed more a co-conspirator than an adversary for the river. The boat creaked and groaned. The mainsail rippled in the soft breeze. Bass jumped out of the water. A hazy sun sank behind the horizon, and the Woody headed for home.



Tom LaBarr, one of the captains of the Woody Guthrie, preparing on Thursday to take passengers on the ferry sloop's nightly cruise.