



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

MYSTIC
SEAPORT
MUSEUM



“We look forward to connecting people to the sea in meaningful new ways. We hope you’ll return often, find your sea story, and perhaps begin a new one that will inspire generations to come.”

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

As the nation’s leading maritime museum, we believe the sea connects us all—through stories of immigration and family, sailing adventures, or transformative moments on and near the water. In 2024, we launched the Find Your Sea Story campaign to highlight the rich human experiences embedded in our collections, exhibitions, and vessels. This initiative invites visitors to look beyond the objects on display and engage with the deeper narratives they represent. The campaign has sparked curiosity, joy, exploration, and nostalgia—nurturing a sense of belonging and illustrating the many ways the sea connects us all. Find Your Sea Story encourages everyone to connect with the maritime world through our world-class exhibitions, historic vessels, family activities, seaport village, shipyard projects, and on-the-water experiences. In doing so, we’ve reached new audiences and uncovered remarkable stories:

- A story of immigration, refuge, and family reflections
- A local businesswoman’s grandfather escaping Cuba to begin a new life
- A forgotten photograph revealing a multi-generational maritime legacy
- A children’s entertainer inspired by the ocean’s emotional power
- An award-winning chef weaving sustainability and ocean stewardship into his cuisine

- A professional sailor tracing his journey from childhood dinghy to high-performance racing

This year, we also developed a new strategic plan, Charting Our Course, centered around a guiding question: Why does the American maritime experience matter? Through conversations with stakeholders and visitors, we found this phrase evokes many meanings. For some, it reflects the freedom and adventure of life on the water. For others, it signifies resilience, community, or a deep respect for nature’s power. Many spoke of memories and skills passed down through generations, and the profound joy of time spent at sea. These responses affirm that the maritime experience continues to shape who we are—connecting past, present, and future—and will guide how we engage visitors in the years ahead.

My own sea story began before I was born. At 16, my father joined the British Merchant Navy, following in his brother’s footsteps. He served for six years before settling down with my mother. Though his time at sea was brief, its influence endured. Decades later, nearly blind and in his 80s, I would drive him to the mouth of the River Tyne on England’s northeast coast so he could watch the boats and relive those memories. His stories—crossing the equator and meeting “Neptune,” mistakenly painting the mast from the bottom up and sliding back down through wet

paint, getting tattoos in New Orleans—remained vivid and full of wonder. That brief chapter shaped his entire life.

We’re deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to this campaign—through writing, video, conversation, and support. To our members, donors, volunteers, staff, visitors, and followers: thank you. Your engagement fuels our mission.

As we welcome the opening of the Delamar Mystic hotel next door—with its rich nautical heritage and contemporary sophistication that evoke stories of New England’s past—and prepare to open the American Watercraft Collection exhibition—through which we will share even more untold stories from our archives—we look forward to connecting people to the sea in meaningful new ways. We hope you’ll return often, find your sea story, and perhaps begin a new one that will inspire generations to come.

Peter Armstrong





“Mystic Seaport Museum has a certain magic that can inspire you to see yourself differently in the world and to write your own lifelong sea story.”

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It is time now, in my final Chairman’s report, to tell you my “sea story.” It started at age ten when a friend’s grandmother, Aunt Mary to us kids, taught us how to row her small skiff. That was the opening chapter in my still growing sea story, which came with me in 2004 when I joined the Mystic Seaport Museum Board of Trustees.

Mystic Seaport Museum has a certain magic that can inspire you to see yourself differently in the world and to write your own lifelong sea story. Our sea stories are not written for us; we need inspiration and a bit of a dream to write them for ourselves. I fervently believe this, and if you don’t, please think about it and become open to it.

More of my sea story. At age twelve, just when I was learning how to jump a horse, I went sailing for the first time in a small, 16 ½ foot Town Class Sloop built by Percy Lowell in Newbury, Massachusetts. So great was the impact of being in a boat on the water that I have only ridden a horse three times since then. We lived on Mount Hope Bay, where I would often look down the Bay, either from land or our small boat, to

wonder what it might be like to sail over the horizon past Newport. My “wondering,” more a calling than a dream, became part of me. As I became fascinated with the marine world, my sense of personal agency grew stronger. So, for two college summers, I worked on boats and sailed my first Newport to Bermuda Race as a paid hand.

Over time, my sea story has had many more chapters, all flowing from the same core inspiration. Proper preparation for ocean passages, respect for the forces of nature, environmental awareness, living cooperatively in tight spaces on ocean passages, and self-reliance all became part of my growing sea story—such a gift! The sea has opened me to greater possibilities in my life. Twelve years as a trustee of Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, ten years as a trustee of Sail Education School (SEA), and twenty-one years as a Mystic Seaport Museum Trustee have increased my awareness of the impact that a sea experience can have on you. Meanwhile, I decided to go all out, full monty, into the world of ocean shipping. Most of my friends in the finance world thought I was crazy but were kind enough not to tell me or test my

pluck. Over the decades, my business has owned over 140 globally-trading ships, mostly tankers and dry bulk cargo. What an experience!

It is not an exaggeration to say my very own sea story first stirred when I rowed that 12-foot skiff with Aunt Mary. In 2004, when I was invited onto the Mystic Seaport Museum Board, I jumped at it. I sensed that the Museum would be a great venue for inspiring sea stories in others, and that has proved to be true. I am blessed to have found mine. Everyone should have their own, writing as many of their chapters as they can and sharing them with the world!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael S. Hudner".

Michael S. Hudner



2024 BY THE NUMBERS

MEMBERS, VISITORS, AND ACTIVITIES

10,970 households have Museum membership.

212,494 visitors attended the Museum.

3,864 people were admitted free of charge through the Museum's EBT/SNAP free ticket program.

14,324 visitors attended shows in the Treworgy Planetarium.

5,288 toy boats were made.

4,118 people toured the waterfront on *Mystic Seaport Express*.

4,209 people attended Wintertide.

3,194 people attended Pirate Days.

10,039 people attended the WoodenBoat Show.

7,589 people attended the International Sea Glass Festival.

2,266 people attended What Lurks Beneath: A Halloween Experience.

1,238 people, including **582** children, attended the Community Trick or Treat.

6,073 visitors attended Lantern Light Village.

1,237 visitors attended the Annual Community Carol Sing.

1,300 lbs of canned goods and **\$450** were collected at the Community Carol Sing and donated to the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center.



EDUCATION

36,397 students and adults participated in education programs: summer camps, sailing programs, school field trips, and after-school, in-school, homeschool, virtual, overnight, and Planetarium programs.

VOLUNTEERS

405 active volunteers supported the Museum with their time.

38,593 volunteer hours included greeting visitors, helping to maintain our fleet of watercraft, transcribing historic documents, interpreting our formal galleries, crafting exhibit components, planting seedlings in our gardens, and much more.

COLLECTIONS

Nearly **600** watercraft are in the collection.

Approximately **615** objects as part of 88 collections were newly acquired for the Museum's art and objects collection.

MARINA AND CHARTERS

1,348 vessels visited the Museum's marina for a total of **3,006** nights.

7 Museum boats were chartered a total of **114** times.

SHIPYARD

Shipwrights performed work on **11** major vessels, including the Museum's own *Charles W. Morgan*, in the Henry B. du Pont Preservation Shipyard.



2024 LOOKING BACK

JANUARY-MARCH

EVENTS

- Adventure Series: Charlie Enright’s Thrilling Journey as the Skipper of the First American Team to Win the Ocean Race
- Adventure Series: Sara Hastreiter—Sailing the Extraordinary Seas
- Adventure Series: Sam Greenfield—Along for the Ride with the World’s Best Sailors
- Annual Wintertide 3-day public event over Presidents’ Day weekend
- Blue Technology Panel Discussion

EXHIBITIONS

- *Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea* opened in Stillman Building.

LAUNCHES

- Sunday Boat Stories weekly video series began sharing weekly stories about a boat from our American Watercraft Collection.

AWARDS

- Museum voted as one of the top museums in the nation in the 2024 USA TODAY 10Best Readers’ Choice awards; ranked #2 in the Best Open Air Museum category.
- Museum named Business of the Year in the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut’s Annual ECTy Awards.

APRIL-JUNE

EVENTS

- Annual Pirate Days 2-day public event
- Juneteenth recognition event
- Riverfest 2-day public event with visiting fishing vessels, demonstrations, local seafood, live music, and vendor booths
- 32nd Annual WoodenBoat Show
- Adventure Series: Cole Brauer—A Journey Across Oceans and the Making of Maritime History
- Naturalization Ceremony
- Members Night

EXHIBITIONS

- *Voyage to the Deep—Underwater Adventures* opened in Collins Gallery.

SHIPYARD

- Jamestown Settlement’s *Susan Constant* arrived at the Museum on June 21 for a 2-year restoration in the Shipyard.

LAUNCHES

- *Find Your Sea Story* Campaign launched to encourage visitors to find their connection to the sea through the Museum’s exhibitions, historic village, collections, working shipyard, and opportunities to get out on the water.
- *Find Your Sea Story* mini-documentary series launched on the Museum’s YouTube channel—each episode taking viewers on a voyage, revealing the profound and enduring connections between individuals and the sea.
- Inaugural writer-in-residence series: writer Osman Can Yerebakan spent a week at the Museum to discover and write his sea story.
- Mystic Seaport Museum at the Drawbridge opened in downtown Mystic to provide information about the Museum, sell admission tickets and tickets for *Sabino* and *Mystic Seaport Express* cruises, and offer specially curated Museum merchandise.

- Plans for the new Wells Boat Hall launched at open house and kick-off event.
- Began selling Mystic SeaPass, a partnership with Mystic Aquarium offering joint admission to both organizations.

PUBLICATIONS

- Published *Mystic Seaport Museum Magazine*, the Find Your Sea Story issue, sharing sea stories from individuals and the Museum’s collections.
- Launched *Mainsheet*, a biannual peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal.

GRANTS

- Museum awarded two federal grants totaling \$821,000 to support the Center for Experiential Education and the historic watercraft collection.

PRESS

- Mentioned in *Forbes* magazine as a must-see destination for maritime history.
- *WindCheck* interview about the Wells Boat Hall
- *Forbes* article “There’s A New England Museum for Everyone”
- *New Haven Register* article covering *Voyage to the Deep—Underwater Adventures*
- *The Day* article covering Riverfest
- *Boston Globe* article: “Art Created Below Decks Slick with Blubber and Blood”
- *Yankee Magazine* article “25 Best New England Historic Sites and Museums”
- NBC CT covered Naturalization ceremony at the Museum.
- Museum included in Boston.com article “Two of the best road trips are in New England—and they include Mystic Seaport Museum.”





JULY-SEPTEMBER

EVENTS

- 18th International Sea Glass Festival
- Cole Brauer honored at the *America and the Sea Award* Gala.
- By Land and By Sea Antique Vehicle Show
- World Maritime Day virtual experience: behind-the-scenes videos
- World Space Week: series of Planetarium events
- Member Appreciation Month
- Member Night

EXHIBITIONS

- *DEEPSEA CHALLENGER*, a submersible science platform built for explorer and filmmaker James Cameron to journey to the Challenger Deep, on loan from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, exhibited on the Museum’s Village Green.
- James Cameron, National Geographic Explorer-at-Large records a special message encouraging people to visit the Museum to see *DEEPSEA CHALLENGER*.

SHIPYARD

- Tall Ship of Delaware, *Kalmar Nyckel*, arrived at the Museum on August 19 for maintenance in the Shipyard

LAUNCHES

- SeaClass is launched, branding our hands-on classes in open-hearth cooking, blacksmithing, woodcarving, printing, sail making, and more.
- Mystic Seaport Museum becomes founding partner of the Connecticut Blue Economy Coalition.
- Partnership launch of limited collection of apparel and accessories for summer 2024 with local brand Just Mystic.
- New this year! *Sabino* downriver evening cruise offers dinner option from Harings in Noank.

GRANTS

- Museum receives nearly \$400k from a National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Public Programs’ Implementation Grant for *Stoked!* Exhibition.

AWARDS

- Museum wins *Connecticut Magazine*’s Best of Connecticut 2024 in Arts & Culture–Historical Attraction category

PRESS

- *Boston Globe* article about Wells Boat Hall: “Mystic Seaport Museum set for Major Expansion”
- *The Day* article about Wells Boat Hall: “Seaport announces details of \$15 million boat hall”
- *Patch.com* article about Wells Boat Hall: “Mystic Seaport Museum Charts Massive Renovation Project”
- *Forbes* article: “‘Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea’ at Mystic Seaport Museum”
- *New Haven Register* article: “The Summer, ‘Find Your Sea Story’ at Mystic Seaport Museum”
- *The Westerly Sun* article: “Bright Blue Future: Connecticut Coalition Focused on Developing Strong Maritime Economy”
- FOX61 coverage: “Their ship has arrived...A boat restoration project is underway at the Mystic Seaport Museum” (about Jamestown Settlement’s re-created merchant ship *Susan Constant*)
- Connecticut Public Radio coverage of *Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea*: “A CT Museum Exhibit Aims to Tell Stories of the Sea Through Indigenous and Black Perspectives”
- *Art New England* coverage of *Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea*
- WSHU coverage of NOAA visit to the Museum: “NOAA Teaches CT Kids about Careers in the Ocean”
- NPR coverage of *Entwined: Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Sea*: “Indigenous and Black People Tell Their Seafaring Stories at the Mystic Seaport Museum”
- *Stars and Stripes* article: “Dive into Mystic Seaport for a glimpse into America’s Maritime Past”





OCTOBER-DECEMBER

EVENTS

- What Lurks Beneath multi-day public event
- Free admission given to Tribal members in November as part of the Reimagining New England Histories project.
- Reciprocal admission with Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo
- Reciprocal admission with Florence Griswold Museum
- Community Trick-or-Treat
- Indigenous Art Fair
- Lantern Light Village multi-day public event
- Kids Countdown to the New Year event
- Holiday Magic multi-day event for families

LAUNCHES

- Fall Lecture Series: Maritime Makers launched with monthly lectures over three months.
- New Audible Tour Guide made available through partnership with CRIS Radio.
- Delamar Mystic, the new luxury hotel adjacent to the Museum, under construction for most of the year, launched a soft opening at the end of the year.

PUBLICATIONS

- Published *Mystic Seaport Museum Magazine*, the Education Issue, spotlighting the Museum’s varied education programs.

AWARDS

- *Mainsheet* selected for a 2024 Award of Merit from Connecticut League of Museums.
- *Boston Magazine* gives Museum an honorable mention in their New England Travel Awards, museum category

PRESS

- *CT Mirror* article: “Murphy Seeks Support for L.I. Sound Conservation, ‘Blue Economy’”
- *wealthofgeeks.com* article: “The Most Visited Attraction in Every US State”
- *National Geographic* mention in article: “How to Plan the Ultimate Road Trip through New England”
- *The Day* article covering Community Trick-or-Treat
- *Vogue* mention in article: “This Charming Coastal Connecticut Town Just Keeps Getting Buzzier”
- *Miami Herald* coverage of Lantern Light Village in “Where to See the Best Christmas Lights Displays in the Northeast USA”
- *The Guardian* coverage of the *Moby-Dick* Marathon in “People are rooting for the Whale: The Strange American Tradition of *Moby-Dick* Reading Marathons”
- *The Middletown Press* article: “Ring in 2025 at these New Year’s Eve events across Connecticut”

“For David, the sea is more than inspiration or resource. It’s a place of reflection.”



A SEA STORY

JAMES BEARD AWARD WINNER CHEF DAVID STANDRIDGE: SHAPING THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE WITH LOCAL SEAFOOD

For David Standridge, the sea holds a quiet, humbling power—its vastness reminding him of his own smallness in the world. Now Executive Chef of *The Shipwright’s Daughter* in Mystic, Connecticut, David’s life and career have been shaped by saltwater—both literally and metaphorically.

David’s connection to the sea began early. His father grew up on City Island, and young David spent his childhood aboard his grandfather’s boat. Though he learned to sail on a lake, it was saltwater sailing, especially long nights out of sight of land, that left a lasting impression—a sense of wonder and clarity that still grounds him. Later, while living on a boat, he discovered the freedom of minimalism, learning that happiness didn’t depend on material things. That insight would carry into his culinary career and life philosophy.

David’s path to becoming a chef wasn’t direct. He worked everywhere from snack bars to publishing houses, ran marine operations, made coffee, and even tried accounting. But it was while bartending in a West Village restaurant that he discovered his true calling. The creativity and craft he admired in bartending were magnified in the kitchen. Culinary school followed—and the rest, as he says, is history.

New England, with its rich maritime legacy, always spoke to David. He moved to Mystic in 2019 and opened *The Shipwright’s Daughter* in a centuries-old hotel. The building needed significant restoration, but David and his team saw potential. Their vision: a modern, sustainable restaurant that paid homage to Mystic’s nautical roots. The name itself reflects a new chapter in coastal dining—one that looks forward while honoring the past.

At the heart of David’s cooking is a commitment to sustainability. When he first arrived in Mystic, he was surprised to learn that the local fishing industry was structured for export, with fishermen

focusing on just a few species. That didn’t align with his values. Determined to support local harvesters, he began sourcing directly from small-scale fishermen, asking them to bring in whatever the sea offered. This approach demands flexibility and creativity—the menu changes constantly depending on the day’s catch—but that challenge is what excites him most.

To David, using local seafood isn’t just about flavor or freshness. It’s about community. The pandemic highlighted how fragile global supply chains are, while local systems—when supported—remain strong. He believes deeply in backing the people who fish, farm, and grow food in the region. Small-scale fishermen, in particular, face steep challenges, from strict regulations to economic uncertainty and they need community support.

Recognition, such as the James Beard Award, is validation for doing something bigger than food. Serving underutilized fish, supporting local fisheries, and reshaping expectations around seafood all come with risks. Awards and media attention help ensure this mission stays afloat and the work becomes sustainable.

For David, the sea is more than inspiration or resource. It’s a place of reflection. When life becomes uncertain, he returns to the water. Out there, he finds peace, clarity, and the steady rhythm that continues to guide his journey.



Look for the Find Your Sea Story Mini Documentary Series on YouTube to learn more about Chef David Standridge and how he is shaping the culinary landscape with local seafood, and watch other inspiring sea stories.



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As of December 31, 2024

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THE SEA SOCIETY
2024 ANNUAL FUND

Gifts at the *America and the Sea Society* level have a tremendous philanthropic impact on every program Museum-wide. Support to this leadership gift society reflects deep commitment to the vitality of Mystic Seaport Museum and is an affirmation of our goal to preserve our maritime heritage for the benefit of future generations. (Gifts received from January 1–December 31, 2024)

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In 1938, Mystic Seaport Museum (then the Marine Historical Association) received a generous bequest from the Estate of Charles K. Stillman, one of the Museum's three founders. As the first bequest to the Museum, this significant gesture helped establish an endowment for the Museum's programs and future operations. It also began what has become a tradition of planned giving at Mystic Seaport Museum. Since then, a great many individuals have made generous gifts to the Museum in their wills or estate plans. In order to recognize their generosity, Mystic Seaport Museum has established the Charles K. Stillman Legacy Society, named in honor of the Museum's early benefactor. Mystic Seaport Museum is pleased to recognize these special donors during their lifetimes, not only to acknowledge their generosity personally, but to celebrate the role the Stillman Society plays in the growth and development of the Museum. If you believe that you qualify for membership and would like to add your name to the list, please contact the Advancement Department at 860-572-5365 or advancement@mysticseaport.org. (List as of December 31, 2024)

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