On Sundays, July 21 and August 4, Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual Bay House Tours in the Town of Hempstead. Departure times are 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. Don’t miss this opportunity to visit the last reminders of Long Island’s nautical past that are still used today by the area’s baymen. Many bay houses were destroyed by Superstorm Sandy but many have been rebuilt.

Participants must be able to climb ladders and feel comfortable in a work environment. The July 21 tour will leave from Freeport, and the August 4 tour will depart from Long Beach. Due to safety concerns, space is limited to 12 people per trip, ages 10 and up. Long Island Traditions members can register beginning May 13. To join Long Island Traditions visit our web site. All others can register starting June 3. The ticket limit is 2/per person. For reservations, call LI Traditions at (516) 767-8803 to confirm availability. No children under 10 permitted. Rain and construction problems may cancel the event.

Tickets for the Bay House Tours are $50 for adults, $90/couple, with a $5 discount for LI Traditions members.

The tour will be led by LI Traditions Director Nancy Solomon. Those on board will be treated to a brief history of the bay houses, the first of which were built in the 1700s. Bay houses were traditionally used by fishermen who harvested clams, oysters, crabs, and other species from local waters. The surviving houses date from the period between 1870 and 1950. Each tour will visit two bay houses.

Grants News

LI Traditions has been recognized for several new projects and other ongoing projects. The National Endowment for the Arts awarded LI Traditions a multi-year grant from the Folk and Traditional Arts program to support a maritime film festival in conjunction with City Lore, one of our folk arts partners. The programs will begin this summer at the Waterfront Barge in Red Hook, Brooklyn, with a screening of the “Waterfront Heroes” videos that accompany our exhibit at the site. In Winter 2019-20 we’ll be showcasing several maritime films here on Long Island, including the release of “A World Within A World: The Bay Houses of Long Island” by Barbara Weber and Greg Blank. Stay tuned for details.

Bay House Tours 2019
July 21 and August 4

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Waterfront Heroes at City Lore and Brooklyn

Our new traveling exhibit “Waterfront Heroes” is currently on view at City Lore, located at 56 E. 1st Street in New York City’s lower east side neighborhood. The exhibit profiles individuals and organizations who have helped preserve New York’s maritime culture. The exhibit is on view at City Lore through June 21st. The exhibit will move to the Waterfront Barge Museum in Red Hook, Brooklyn, located at 290 Conover Street, where it will be on view from June 27th - September 5th. As part of the exhibit there will be a special program on August 24 featuring the film tributes to the waterfront heroes, followed by discussions. For more information contact City Lore at (212) 529-1955, or the Waterfront Barge Museum at (718) 624-4719.

Recent Interviews

As many of you know, the core of our work is based on personal interviews with those carrying on the traditions of their culture, defined as occupational, regional, ethnic, community or other ways of identifying yourself. Over the last year we’ve conducted interviews relating to Rockville Centre’s history and architecture, and those celebrated in our new traveling exhibit “Waterfront Heroes.”

They include:

Donald Berg
Steve and Gloria Bryan
Mary & Richard Clark
Kevin McDermott
Bill Fetzer
Curt Matzinger and George Rigby
Jason and Bill McNeece
Fred Menges
Bill Painter
Joe Santiago

If you have a story to share, let us know!
Of Life and Blowfish
by Charles F. Tekula Jr.

Editor’s Note: Chuck Tekula is a full time fisherman and participant in many Long Island Traditions’ programs.

I pull up the first pot on a twenty pot run. Tails wriggling, bellies extending, teeth grinding. Perhaps three dozen small brown, yellow and black blowfish magically become air-and-water-filled baseballs inside the one-by-two inch galvanized turkey wire trap I built during the winter months.

I pull back the bungee-corded hook, open the pot and shake them into a fish tote on the floor of my skiff, rebait the pot (crushed spider crabs freshly caught), and flip it back in right-side up, tossing the buoyed line over the stern cleat. As I steam slowly to the next pot in line, I’m bent over literally popping with my knife the little white balloons so the rest will fit -- after they are popped as well. When I’m done the black plastic fish tote -- made to hold one hundred pounds of fish with forty pounds of flake ice -- is three quarters full of the deflated “blow toads”.

That’s the easy part. They have to be skinned right away or the bodies stiffen and the skin tightens making it much more difficult to do. Many will be skinned alive. It will take more than an hour to do.

At the boat show along the bay marina when I participate in the Maritime Program there -- with several other career baymen, fishermen, boat builders, etc. -- families with children will be scandalized at my making a show of how these little sea creatures blow up tighter than a tennis ball as I squeeze them above the aerated sea water filled cooler in front of my display table. The children didn’t flinch from their morning banter and their smart phone texting as the parents served them mass produced bacon and eggs with a glass of milk that morning -- even though we’ve all seen how the farm animals are poisoned and coerced into becoming tortured mega-producers.

But the “Finding Nemo Effect” has taken hold. The poor cute and innocent fish needs to be left to its peaceful nonviolent existence. How cruel I am to usurp that little being for my money making show (we get paid well for the day). I sometimes -- but rarely -- will summarize the above gory details for the offended audience and ask them if they eat hamburgers. “How can you kill all those poor cows?”

When I see a knife cut through the backbone of a little blowfish still grinding its teeth I have not one qualm about not making it happy by throwing it back. During the fall migration they are eating everything in sight. They cannot be kept in an aquarium with other species; they attack them enmasse no matter how big like bucktoothed piranha and will leave nothing but bones. They themselves are eaten in the millions by fish with teeth sharp enough to pop them and/or stomachs big enough not to have to spit them up when they distend their sandpaper sharp belly skin. So we fishermen are just a small “strand” in the web of life -- to take the metaphor from Chief Seattle’s statement to Congress in the 1850’s. (Google it -- it’s wonderful!)

I look at the beautiful, pristine, spine free “chicken of the sea” tails and I see Bay-gold. And I see the smiling family that will enjoy this local seasonal delicacy. I didn’t change anything of the life of the Bay. It is beautiful and bloody all season long without me. But I did pay my bills and raise a family by being a part of it -- while at the same time being the very living connection between the life in and on the water and the lives of the human families on dry ground.

Blowfish
EVENTS OF INTEREST

PLEASE NOTE: If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we’ll put it in our “Events of Interest” column.

Don’t forget to visit our web site and our Facebook page for timely information.

May 28: In Harm’s Way lecture by Nancy Solomon. 7 pm. Smithtown Library, 3 Indian Head Road, Commack. Free admission. Call (631) 360-2480 for information.


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