

GETTING SHIPSHAPE - Kitsap Sun

GETTING SHIPSHAPE

Bremerton gem Turner Joy gets belly scrubbed in Seattle

JOSHFARLEY | JOSH.FARLEY@KITSAPSUN.COM

SEATTLE — Dry docking a vintage naval destroyer is like a trip to the dentist. You hope for a quick trip — a relatively painless one — and, when it's over, "that it didn't cost too much," said G.H. "Hobie" Stebbins III, president of Lake Union Drydock Co. Right now, Stebbins' nearly century-old company has the USS Turner Joy museum ship. It's a rare maintenance period for the 1959-commissioned Forrest Sherman Class destroyer, now a floating attraction for more than 40,000 people each year to Bremerton's waterfront. At 418 feet long, it's a tight fit. "This is as big a boat that fits in this dry dock," Stebbins said as he stood underneath the ship, examining its steel structure.

See TURNER JOY, Page 3A

Above: A Lake Union Drydock Co. worker sandblasts the under side of the USS Turner Joy, which is in Seattle for a deep cleaning. Top: USS Turner Joy volunteers and tour guides Bill Moore and John Kieft take photos of a propeller on the Vietnam-era destroyer Monday at the Lake Union Drydock Co. in Seattle.

PHOTOS BY LARRY STEAGALL / KITSAP SUN



Turner Joy

Continued from Page 1A

They aren't likely to keep it long, either. The Bremerton Historic Ships Association raised \$800,000, including state and local government grants, to give the Turner Joy the second dry docking maintenance period in its museum era. Its first time in 2001, paid for by a federal earmark, was the last time its underbelly saw the light of day.

John Hanson, president of the historic ships association, worked to ensure a

spot on Lake Union for the vessel and felt fortunate the company could accommodate it quickly.

“If we didn’t go now, we might not have gone this year,” Hanson said.

All told, the vessel might only be gone from Bremerton about a month. Double shifts keep crew members working on the vessel from 6:30 a.m. to midnight each day.

With delicate precision, crews positioned the 2,500-ton ship inside a floating dry dock not far from the shadow of the Space Needle. While pressure washers eventually scrubbed away the budding sea life underneath the ship, divers first had to scrape off spaces where the vessel could rest atop blocks. Slowly, the water in the dry dock was drained, revealing a stilted vessel with a giant ring of aquatic life clinging to its hull.

The messy — and smelly — process of washing it away went quickly. A little more than 15 years of sea growth, amounting to 25 tons, melted away under the power of pressurized water.

As part of the maintenance, crews at the dock use ultrasonics to ensure the hull still is strong. Though thin to begin with — the hull measures only $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch thick — the belly of the ship must be checked carefully to prevent leaks. Where holes are found, crews will weld new steel to cover them.

The port side of the Turner Joy, which faces toward Manette, receives less sunexposure and thus doesn’t need as much refurbishment. Its starboard side and underbelly are being sandblasted with a hose that delivers 116 pounds-per-square-inch this week.

Following that, the vessel will be primed and painted to finish the overhaul.

Hanson and the dry dock hope work can be completed by the end of this month. There’s hope for a celebration during the cross-sound voyage to bring the Vietnam-era destroyer back to Bremerton. For one, the vessel

likely is the largest to traverse the Ballard Locks, which turn a century old this year.

Another reason to celebrate is just getting Turner Joy back to its home on the waterfront, Hanson said. Aside from tours, the vessel hosts science education for students from districts around Kitsap and beyond.

G.H. "Hobie" Stebbins III, president of Lake Union Drydock Co., center, gives Bremerton dignitaries a tour of the USS Turner Joy.

LARRY STEAGALL / KITSAP SUN

