

## Huge project is officially launched

By Mary Ford/ [mford@cnc.com](mailto:mford@cnc.com) Thursday, August 10, 2006

To quote Winston Churchill, the World War II years in Hingham were the town's "finest hour."

Churchill's name was mentioned Tuesday, as were US presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

The event was the official "launching" of the Hingham Shipyard project on some 150 acres that once housed an industrial operation that was literally second to none.

During the war years, the Shipyard that employed 25,000 workers produced some 227 ships, including destroyer escorts and landing ship tanks, dubbed LSTs.

In fact, Joe Sugar, vice president of Sea Chain - the company that bought the site about 10 years ago - noted Hingham built 90 destroyer escorts in 1943 alone, 50 percent more than the Navy thought possible.

"That August, the Navy recognized the shipyard's hard work by awarding Hingham with an 'E' for Excellence - an honor usually reserved for sailors in action," Sugar said. "On the day of the ceremony, work halted for one of the only times in the life of the shipyard."

All the speakers at Monday's ceremony including representatives from the various developers, town, state and federal officials, and LST veteran, Frank Earley, spoke about the past while talking about the future with excitement. The Shipyard -- which has been dormant for decades, apart from myriad businesses housed in a hodgepodge of old buildings - is about to embark on a transformation that will turn the waterfront location into a combination of housing, shops, restaurants and improved marina facilities.

"It is important that we mark and remember the history of this land, but it is also important that we welcome its future," said Selectman Melissa Tully, who praised Sea Chain's determination to see the project through.

She said as the buildings come down, the beauty of the site becomes more apparent.

"It is a diamond in the rough and we are just beginning to see what potentially lies ahead of us," Tully said. "It is hard to imagine a piece of property with more potential. It is 100 acres of waterfront, within a suburban setting with a direct commuter boat to Boston."

State Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, who grew up in Hingham noted the event with mixed emotions.

"As kids we would ride our bikes through here," he recalled. "We would stop by the old Sahara bread plant and ask for free samples and get pitas right out of the oven."

"Years later, I also had a business here. It was a great spot for entrepreneurs and the rent was low."

Hedlund talked about the bureaucratic hurdles that had to be cleared over the past 10 years before the shipyard vision could come to fruition. He noted one meeting at which no less than 35 bureaucrats were present.

"This is a great piece of real estate, which will mean a lot to the (Hingham) tax base," he said.

Keynote speaker Ann Collins of North Street remembers the Shipyard in its heyday. Collins' father-in-law oversaw the construction of the Hingham Shipyard. She attended many of the ship launches and her husband served on the USS Bates, which was built at the shipyard.

"The Hingham Shipyard was conceived in 1941," she said. "Britain was at war with Germany and we knew we too were 'on the brink' but were unprepared. We needed ships and all of our yards were busy and filled to capacity."

"Congress authorized the building of three new shipyards and the US Navy contracted with Bethlehem's Shipbuilding Division to provide a 'lead yard' for designing a new class

of military vessels to be known as destroyer escorts."

She said Hingham with its protected harbor and easy access to the ocean and Europe was deemed the perfect site.

Collins explained through the "lend-lease" agreement with England, some Hingham ships were turned over to the Royal Navy, bringing some handsome young British sailors and officers to the town's shores.

One such officer was Ian Menzies, who now lives at Linden Ponds. Menzies met his wife Barbara in Hingham.

Menzies, who attended Tuesday's event, said the morning brought back a lot of memories.

"I was glad to hear the developers care about the history and seem prepared to do something to memorialize the shipyard and the people who worked here," he said.

Collins described the shipyard during the war as a "model little industrial city. She said workers came from miles away but were all part of "one, big family working for a common cause."

Collins, who is a great grandmother, said launchings and births are both very special.

"Today we are here to say farewell to an old landmark and to celebrate the birth and launching of a brand-new venture," she said. "Another model city, but perhaps more aesthetically beautiful than the last and to be enjoyed by many more happy families.

"May the developers and those who come here always enjoy smooth sailing."



Frank Earley, president of the Mass. Chapter of the LST Association, holds up a Japanese flag that he used as a journal during WWII. (Staff photo by Elsa Allen)

## Hingham Shipyard plan at a glance

- \* Size of entire property: 130 acres
- \* Project overview: A mix of residential, retail, and public open space, including a waterfront park and walking paths; 500 residential units; and improved commuter boat and marina facilities. The Shipyard's rich history will be reflected in the project.

### Key players:

- \* Samuels & Associates, Inc. envisions creating a mixed-use "village" on 27.5 acres, including an eight-screen, 1,200-seat movie theater framed by a courtyard, ice cream shop, cafes, and park. The development would also feature retail stores, restaurants, some residential units, offices, courtyard, green space, health club, day care center, and other amenities.

A conceptual modification to the original Shipyard redevelopment plan was presented recently. Besides the theater, changes include more restaurants (ranging from ice cream shops and cafes to sit-down restaurants); moving some of the retail space from its prior location adjacent to a parking lot to a more prime location; relocating some of the residential units away from the street and to the site of the former Bay Club; and moving some of the office space away from Rte. 3A and closer to the village center.

- \* Avalon Bay plans to build 250 rental units adjacent to the commuter lot and retail portion of the project.
- \* Roseland Property Company will build about 150 manor houses and townhouses on the eastern portion of the site.

- \* SeaChain, LLC, which previously owned the entire property and obtained the master permits needed to move forward with the development, recently finalized agreements with these three other real estate developers who now own separate parcels within the redevelopment area.

SeaChain will continue to operate, making minor improvements to its marina, which will be moved to another location across the harbor.