

# The Patriot Ledger

## LOCAL NEWS

### **OUT WITH THE OLD: HINGHAM YARD TO GO FROM SEAWORTHY TO SEE-WORTHY - S. Shore shipbuilding mecca about to set sail for sparkling new waters**

By JOE MCGEE, *The Patriot Ledger*



HINGHAM - With the smash of a champagne bottle against a dilapidated steel building, developers said bon voyage to the Hingham shipyard and officially marked the site's rebirth.

A key industrial area during World War II, the shipyard is undergoing a complete transformation, as its old steel structures are replaced with a new village of townhouses, parks, restaurants and offices.

**Rows of champagne wait to be uncorked at a ceremony yesterday marking the start of redevelopment at the Hingham shipyard. (GARY HIGGINS/The Patriot Ledger)**

“Bring on the wrecking ball,” said Melissa Tully, a Hingham selectman who spoke during yesterday's ceremony.

The sendoff, which is how ships are traditionally christened, came at the hands of Ann Collins, an 88-year-old Hingham resident whose father-in-law supervised production at the site.

Collins remembered the war era with pride as a time when men and women worked together to help America and its allies win the fight.

Hingham shipyard was considered a model of efficiency, she said, because of the speed at which it turned out ships.

“It was like a big family,” she said. “We worked for a common cause, for our country.”

Everyone lent a hand for the cause and Hingham was no exception.

President Roosevelt declared a state of emergency and assigned Bethlehem Steel the duty of building destroyer escorts, a new class of ships.

Because of its proximity to deep water, railroads and manpower, Hingham was seen as a perfect place to produce destroyers.

Ground was broken in February 1942 and Hingham was transformed from “sleepy town to arsenal,” according to newspaper accounts.

The first keel was laid six months later. Soon, massive steel sections were dragged out to launch ramps on the Weymouth Back River, where the ships were assembled before heading off to Europe and the Pacific.

At the height of production, 26,000 men and women were working in Hingham. They built destroyers, amphibious ships and fast transports at an amazing rate. Production was so speedy that by 1944 a destroyer was built in a world-record 24 1/2 days.

The previous record was 45 days.

Collins broke the ceremonial bottle yesterday against the side of the general services administration building, which was where the steel for the ships was forged.

The steel building, nearly a 1/3 mile long, is considered the largest single-story building in New England.

Demolition has been going on for weeks and the general services building is the last major structure still standing.

It should be completely demolished by the end of the month, opening up a clear view to the waterfront for the first time in 64 years.

Four partners - Sea Chain, Samuels and Associates, Avalon Bay and Roseland Properties - have a stake in the project.

Plans for the redevelopment were authorized by the town three years ago. But Samuels, the commercial partner, wants to alter them, shifting the location of certain buildings and adding a movie theater.

Hearings are planned this fall on the proposed changes.

The development team also used yesterday's ceremony to launch [thehinghamshipyard.com](http://thehinghamshipyard.com), a Web site to keep the public informed on shipyard news.

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