

Questions Linger After Lifting Of 2 Boats Sunk in Marina Fire

By Lew Diuguid

The post-midnight boat fire that sank two craft at Belts' and Hendersons' marinas and heavily damaged two more on Nov. 3 has been investigated by the Coast Guard, the city's foot and maritime police, its Fire Department arson squad and endless affected insurance companies—with the outcome still almost as murky as the Patapsco waters in which the yachts foundered.

Divers and cranes raised the sunken boats promptly and the Coast Guard skimmed off gallons of spilled oil, but no cause of the initial fire was found. Fire Dept. Capt. Michael Friedman of the Arson Squad said, "We were able to determine that it began at midship, above deck, but we are not able to proceed with a finding of arson. It remains a suspicious fire." There is no doubt that the fire began on a 36-foot aft-cabin cruiser that was docked at the Belts Yacht Club marina behind the condo building at 960 Fell St. Boat owner Nino Sylva, 28, leased a slip there and is said to have rented his boat to weekend partiers—thus raising concerns of traditional slip owners, who tend to refer to boats in that category as "roaches."

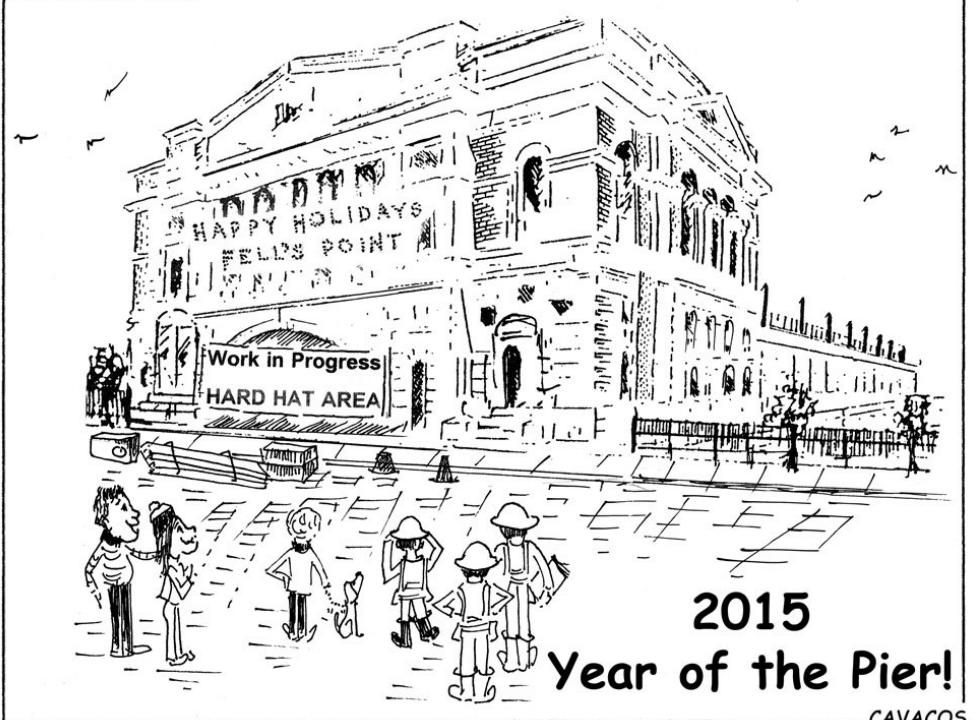
Just before midnight on the calamitous night, the Ravens had lost to Pittsburgh on *(Continued)*



Phil Collyer Photography

Lifting of charred yacht, with straps placed by a diver, drew a crowd of workers and onlookers along the Promenade.

BRICK BANTER



CAVACOS

Pier Revival a Reality at Last

Adding to the bells and carols of this season was a sound that many Pointers have awaited for at least a decade—the clamor of construction workers undertaking restoration of historic, largely abandoned Rec Pier. Its angel, Kevin Plank of Under Armour, coming on the scene last February with his Sagamore Development Co., even lit up the grand arched facade on Thames St. with Christmas lights. This main building's renovation will come later, after the pier portion of the century-old structure is torn down and its deteriorated pilings below are replaced. At the pier's end, looking across the river to UA's Tide Point headquarters, will be a courtyard and swimming pool.

The upper deck that was the playing surface of the municipal pier's original recreation center will give way to the upper floor of a 128-room hotel. Its lobby and restaurant will be in the head building that already contains the 3d-floor ballroom—restored by the filmmakers of "Homicide" who were based on the pier in the 1980s. The hotel opening is projected for late 2016 after outlays put as high as the \$60-70 million range. This prospective happy awakening follows a nightmare that began in 2006 when the city, declaring it could not afford to repair the sagging pier, offered it for sale in a call for proposals. The community was encouraged to help choose a developer in a lively and sometimes raspy contest. The city rejected the people's choice, saying a team headed by developer J.J. Clarke was more likely to finish his proposal, for a boutique hotel, quickly.

Clarke initially included Pointers' wish for Moran Tugs to continue dockage on the pier as a vestige of the port's commercial maritime past. Clarke obtained state historic restoration credits but, after multiple changes of financiers and a lengthy Recession, he never started the job. The city failed to renew the Moran lease and the tugs floated off to Canton. Even a seeming lifeline from the Fell's Point financial powerhouse, H&S Properties, came to naught.

Then, last February, Sagamore showed up, vowing to buy the pier and redeem it. Plank asked community support for a change involving improvement of the harbor-side *(Continued)*

Happenings

Editor Jackie Watts Dies at 61

Jacque Watts, who edited the east Baltimore Guide weekly for 22 years and led ultimately unavailing efforts to keep the Fell's Point Pratt Library open at 606 S. Ann St., died of cancer on Dec. 30 at Gilchrist Hospice in Towson. She was a stalwart of Birds of a Feather on Fleet St. and of the Community Organization that met there. When the Enoch Pratt announced intention 15 years ago to shut the classic branch, saying it was little used, particularly by children, Jackie recruited readers. Still, it closed, replaced by the city's Education-Based Latino Outreach. Jackie then became a diligent advocate for a major regional library, now at Eastern Ave. and Conkling St. in Highlandtown. Her other passion was Patterson Park, where she helped launch the Friends group that has guided its renaissance.

FPCO's '14 Thank You List

Community Organization President Joanne Masapust offered an evening of gratitude on Dec. 9, honoring Jan Jandasek of Broadway Liquors for running "the closest thing to a model business;" Dels. Pete Hammen and Luke Clippinger for their dedication to this community; State Sen. Bill Ferguson for his role in Liquor Board reform; FPCO Secretary Marta Kumer for a party she hosted at Ding How Restaurant when Masapust received the 9/11 Selfless Community Service Award; Teavolve Cafe owners Sunny Gilliam and Del Powell for accommodating FPCO sessions; Victor Corbin and Marek Tarasiewicz for their efforts to right FP wrongs; Jim Maslousky and Christy Wolfe for service dating back to the time of Citizens on Patrol night walks 15 years ago; and police Officer Larry Fasano for, most recently, clamping down on trailer trucks illegally passing through the Point.



Maryland Transit Administration

The light-rail Red Line seemed to creep closer at a fall meeting in Whitman-Requard Engineers offering this depiction of the station entry proposed for Broadway at Fleet St. The long-awaited renovation of the Market continues in delay on the basis that the tunneling and station should proceed first, and help pay for it—including removal of its current ersatz colonnade.

Marina Fire - cont. from front

Sunday Night Football, and such games often draw watchers to on-board parties. But Police Arson Detective Michael Reno quoted Sylva as saying that no one had been on his boat “for several weeks,” and no witness has been found to testify that the boat had been occupied at the time of the fire. Reno said his investigation convinced him that the flaming boat was cast off to drift down the harbor, but he couldn’t prove it. In any case, a brisk westerly wind pushed the burning boat eastward to Henderson’s adjacent floating pier. According to a spokesman for the Harbor Magic Marina at Henderson’s Wharf, the drifting boat struck a 42-foot Chris-Craft Sport Fish of Earl Lanz, 85, who has lived on the boat for about 20 years. It caught fire and he scrambled onto the floating dock. Soon fire trucks were thick on Fell St., and firemen on the Promenade, but separated by the historic ex-B&O tobacco warehouse that is now Henderson’s Inn-condos, as well as by Belts Landing.

A resident of Henderson’s who extensively interviewed witnesses of the fire, David Ehlers, said: “Other residents on boats in the marina awoke and those able left the dock. Those on the west side of the marina dock were unable to get past the fire and had to retreat to the far south end of the pier while fighting thick black smoke and heat. Those residents stayed marooned there until rescued as the smoke and flames were brought under control.”

One of the hose truck crews tried to run a line through the garage of the Belts Landing condo building to the Promenade, where distraught neighbors gathered. The effort failed. A woman on the sixth floor of Belts called the desk to ask if she should evacuate, according to the building’s night notes. No evacuation occurred, but by then, a city fireboat was on the scene, attempting to contain the fire. As the first flaming boat and Lanz’s burned to their waterlines, two other boats were struck, cracking the hull of a sailboat and damaging another yacht. The floating pier, too, was damaged. Fireman Friedman estimated that the two boat insurance claims were in the \$100,000 range. He said the boat of Lanz was fully insured and should be recompensed accordingly. Floating in the detritus after the fire was an expended canister designed to extinguish an engine-room fire when activated by excess heat. It fired, but failed to do the job.

Lanz is a popular figure at Henderson’s Wharf, said David Brown, who operates its marina. “Lanz

Pier Revival - cont. from front

Promenade in front of the pier but not extending the walkway around its perimeter. The support was forthcoming and the sale consummated. Initial work has even extended to addressing the Thames St. shops facing the pier. Sagamore Construction Manager Greg Hermandorfer introduced himself in a letter and said,

“... We would like to do a photographic survey of your basements, as is standard procedure for new construction in a historic neighborhood, to document any existing cracks. Our marine and structural engineers feel very confident that the marine work and new construction will not impact the adjacent buildings. Additionally, as a precaution, we will be installing seismic and crack monitors in the pier and across the street, to closely monitor the work. However, in the highly unlikely scenario that any new cracks appear during construction, the photographic survey helps to eliminate any fights regarding the extent of the damage. We have completed our detailed pre-construction photos of the exteriors of adjacent buildings, sidewalks, and streets . . . My contact info is listed if you have any concerns or questions. I will be onsite a few hours almost every day during construction. We will also have a superintendent from Whiting-Turner [engineers] named Greg “Poo” Sibol onsite every day.”

The sounds to come from the pier will be practice poundings of pilings.

often helps less experienced boaters.” But with his floating home of two decades now sunk and no other residence, he resorted to refuge with his ex-wife ashore.

The fire came 30 years after an all-alarm blaze almost destroyed Henderson’s, then being converted from warehouse to residences. A large factor in its survival was the performance of city fireboats. Looking back to that time, The Preservation Society this season was offering an early Christmas tree ornament in its series for sale at Henderson’s. It commemorates the building and the fireboats.

As for the outcome of the latest fire, say the police, it in the hands of the contending insurance companies. This recalls the last major fire in Fell’s Point, on June 12, 2012, which heavily damaged the historic ex-Hecht Co. store building at 519 S. Broadway, also raising speculation of arson. The site is now cleared but no cause of the fire has been announced.

‘Interlock’ at the Vagabond

The Vagabond continues its 99th season with the Baltimore premiere of Ira Levin’s “Interlock,” weekends through Feb. 8. Levin, author of “Rosemary’s Baby” and “Veronica’s Room,” mentored Director Roy Hammond. At 806 S. Broadway, Friday \$15, Saturday \$20, 8PM and Sunday \$20 at 2, with a \$10 Thursday on Broadway performance Feb. 5 at 8PM.

Robert Long House Gala Jan. 22

The Preservation Society is hosting a fund-raiser reception on Thursday, Jan. 22, 6-8PM, to launch a year-long series of free lectures and tours commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Robert Long House at 812 S. Ann St. The reception will be at the Visitor Center, 1724 Thames St. Tickets are \$100, through RLH250eventbrite.com or preservationsociety.com.

Schedules

Trash and Recycling

Current days for trash pickup are Tuesdays and for recycling are Thursdays. Residents are limited to setting out three 32-gallon cans of waste between 6PM on Mondays and 6AM on Tuesdays.

Neighborhood Meetings

Douglass Place: Third Tuesday of each month at Bertha’s, dlh411@gmail.com.

Antique Dealers’ Association: Call 410.675.4776.

Community Organization: Second Tuesdays at 606 South Ann St., 443.791.1717.

Main Street: info@fellspointmainstreet.org or 410.675.8900.

Preservation Society: 410.675.6750 ext.16 or preservationsociety.com.

Residents’ Association: First Wednesdays, 7PM, Bertha’s.

thanks!

The all-voluntary Fell’s Pointer thanks its four sustaining sponsors, One-Eyed Mike’s Tavern, 708 S. Bond St., 410.327.0445; Duda’s Tavern, Thames and Bond Sts., 410.276.9719; Howie B Properties, commercial and residential real estate in Fell’s Point and throughout Baltimore, 410.375.4200; and Jimmy’s Restaurant, 801 S. Broadway, 410.327.3273.

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