

New Action Plan Proposed by Founders & Volunteers of the (South Street) Seaport Museum:

A Return to the Basics in a Restructured Museum

Concerned New Yorkers and friends have followed the spiraling decline of their museum with consternation, as recent events have revealed the near shipwreck of the (South Street) Seaport Museum. It is vain to rehearse the failures; what is needed is positive action to cure them and move forward with and for the people of New York. City authorities are working to save the Seaport Museum, and to them we now propose a restructuring of museum policies and operations on these basic principles:

Responsibility-The Museum has a responsibility to maintain and preserve its collections, including its ships.

Engagement - The Museum must engage the diverse communities it exists to serve.

Participation- It must be open to an active membership, as a part of the museum's functioning. This includes a corps of volunteers able to contribute skills and knowledge as well as time and effort to the success of the Museum.

Presence - It can immediately reactivate its living emblems of New York's history: its working vessels and the Bowne Print Shop.

Governance-The Museum can only go forward with a new and open administrative structure, new trustees, and new management.

Starting now-An interim management is needed now, with an advisory board from other like institutions.

1. Preserve the Museum's Assets. Sending ships to other organizations with no clear plan effectively removes these assets from the museum permanently. It also appears to violate the museum's mission (see below) to preserve the [maritime] history of New York. This especially applies to the three working vessels, Pioneer, Lettie G Howard and WO Decker – these can be maintained and operated largely by volunteers in the interim in New York City. In addition to the Ships, the museum also has extensive collections of scrimshaw, model ships, paintings, shipwrights' tools, etc. – these are rarely displayed – why not? Bowne Stationers also has an extensive collection of antique printing presses, type setting fonts and other artifacts – what are the plans to preserve and utilize these?

2. Rededication to Public Engagement through an active program of meetings, newsletters and public events centered on the story of New York, a city of the sea, which brought us our people, diversity, wealth and freedoms, largely by ship.

3. Redevelop an Active Membership to whom a reconstituted board of trustees should be accountable through elections, and who must be informed of trustee decisions. Of this body, an active volunteer corps should be developed for both routine and skilled services as achieved in the museum's successful years during the 1970 – 90's and is common in successful museums today.

4. Focus on Public Demonstrations of Ship Operations. Successful museums built around historic ships, as the South Street Seaport Museum was, thrive again today. We must bring our working and dockside ships to life with a recommitment to education programs, teaching sail-handling and sailor's arts, with visitors helping to handle lines, crew and docents telling their own stories, and advancing a cultural heritage vital to the preservation of the city's story. New York City was created by the maritime industry after all.

5. Reopen Bowne. Bowne Stationers can be operated and be viable as its own business. It should be reopened as a separate business unit to have more control over its operations and future. In the interim, it can be reopened and partially operated by volunteers.

However, in order to achieve the above, we strongly believe that two important steps must be made first:

A. Reconstitute the Board of Trustees. Why have the Trustees allowed this situation to develop? Why is there no public accountability, such as open meetings with Trustees, elections of Trustees by the membership, and comprehensive reports to the membership and public? Why the secrecy? Other maritime museums have survived the recession and many even thrive today. A reconstituted Board of Trustees is immediately needed with a changed culture providing more openness, more public accountability, and a willingness to accept new ideas, so making raising new funds feasible.

B. New Management. We immediately need new management whose goal is to revitalize the museum. The new management should be under trustee direction, guided by an Advisory Committee of respected ship museum leaders. Several leaders in this field have already offered their help. New museum management is also needed to restore openness, with a new willingness to accept new ideas and opinions, to work with volunteers for the museum's benefit, and to make raising new funds possible. The immediate appointment of an Interim CEO is proposed so that recovery can commence.

We appeal to all interested New Yorkers to support these principles by recommending them to city authorities, private businesses and foundations and the press that might provide help in reconstituting the worthy purposes and stalled operations of the once-famous South Street Seaport Museum. Your suggestions, criticisms and questions regarding this effort are welcome.

A more detailed visionary plan for the Ships with estimated financials is available on request. This shows that the Ships can be cash positive if properly managed.

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The Mission of the (South Street) Seaport Museum is currently (two versions):

(Source www.seany.org April 19, 2011). "The South Street Seaport Museum preserves and interprets the history of New York City as a world port, a place where goods, labor and cultures are exchanged through work, commerce, and the interaction of diverse communities".

(Source 2009 Financial Statement, April 26, 2010): "The Museum tells the story of how New York's harbor became the gateway to America. The Museum utilizes its assets: the historic district's Schermerhorn Row, the tall ship Wavertree and other vessels, and its collection of art and artifacts, to capture the unique story of the port's role in the development of the City, State and Nation as economic, cultural and political powers. The rich history of the Port of New York is shared through dynamic exhibitions and programs, the Museum's vessels and its research center".