

A MAGICAL EVENING ON THE HUDSON RIVER

by **Claudia McNulty**

Thanks to a friend's birthday and John Vargo, publisher of *Boating On The Hudson & Beyond Magazine*, I recently had a beautiful, magical and unexpected boating experience!

An environmental artist and friend of mine envisioned celebrating her 70th birthday sailing on the Hudson River. She described her dream with a small, (20-ish) group of environmentally concerned friends. Her intent was that all her friends could be together in one boat and that the party and transportation be as low impact to the environment as possible.

After much sleuthing and dead-ends we found the person to ask about all things Hudson River would be John Vargo.

We rang him up and found him to be very helpful, with numerous suggestions. It seems that Coast Guard regulations are such that a group of twenty does not exactly fit into the kind of boat trip that would be both economical and comfortable for such a group. (You either have to hire a big boat, or a smaller boat that would not legally carry the exact amount the birthday party needed.) After a good half hour of discussion on the phone, John had an inspiration.

John suggested contacting the Maritime Museum in Kingston, NY and chartering a brand new class of Coast Guard boat — the *Solaris*! This totally solar electric boat is docked in Kingston, on Rondout Creek.

Another obstacle was that guests would be able to embark in Saugerties. After further discussion, John suggested that the group be picked up by a small van in Saugerties, driven to the dock on Rondout Creek, at the Maritime Museum in Kingston, (only twelve miles away), and start their trip from there.

As it turned out, the van was not necessary as after all the arrangements were made, the *Solaris* was able to travel the twelve miles from its home port in Kingston to Saugerties. July thirtieth soon arrived and we all gathered at the Saugerties Steamboat Company in a steamy 94° heat at Esopus Creek.

There sat the unpretentious *Solaris* ready for us with two captains as well as a guitarist friend of the birthday girl. We left at early sunset with boxed wine, (glass is discouraged) and finger food dinners, packaged in paper boxes.

The group was completely awed as the *Solaris* left the dock silently and effortlessly! It was startling to abruptly be actually moving in open water without a sound! Noiselessly, we were passing the waterfront homes and quickly came up side by side with the beautiful, Saugerties lighthouse!

While the sun dropped lower in the sweltering hot summer sky, the engine idled silently as we enjoyed a reluctant breeze and the sight of this handsome proud structure. Then again, without a sound, we made a left turn from the lighthouse and continued an hour or so north until making an about face, and heading back to land.

I have not had a lot of boating experience, but my experiences have always involved a lot of fuss and noise and nasty fumes, or





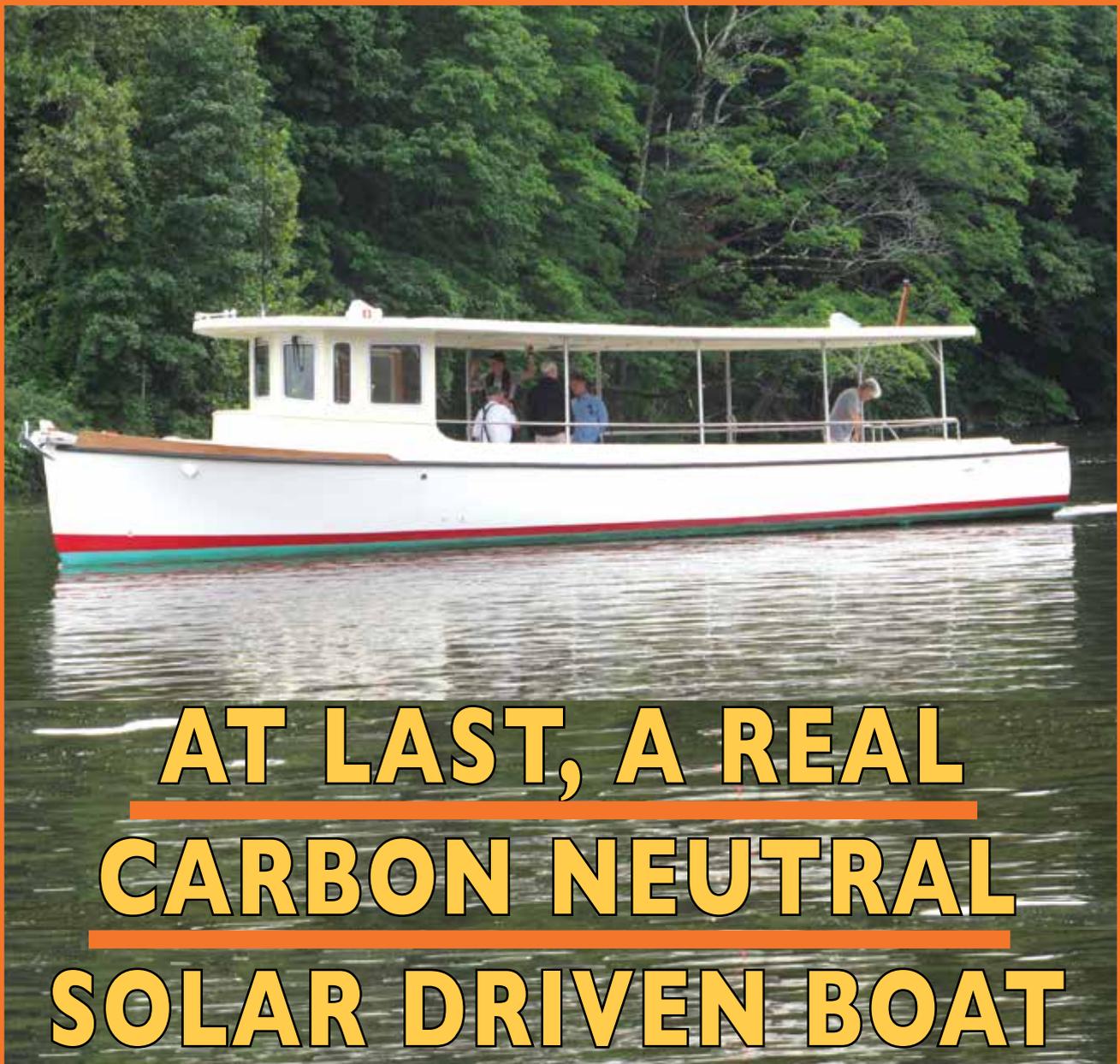
A wonderful time was had by all on the *Solaris*.

a fair amount of physical exertion! Neither were engaged here. Throughout the trip we glided seemingly effortlessly, as if on a perfect wind... as if by magic! A more beautiful and less disruptive encounter with the natural surroundings and the Hudson itself would be hard to imagine.

The *Solaris* appears a deceptively simple classic vintage wood hull boat. The top of the canopy is a patchwork of unseen solar panels and down below are the batteries and whatever machinery is needed. John said that this was the first all electric boat of its class, licensed by the US Coast Guard as a passenger vessel, unique to the Maritime Museum.

The captains were absolutely delightful and happy to answer with enthusiasm any and all dumb or informed questions concerning the boat and its history. I want to thank John Vargo for his inspired suggestion and making possible a truly delightful experience. I hope that others will discover and enjoy this wonderful new alternative, and magical boating experience on the water as well!





AT LAST, A REAL CARBON NEUTRAL SOLAR DRIVEN BOAT

Imagine an all-electric boat so clean, quiet and efficient that at times there is more electricity available at the end of the trip than when the boat started out.

The concept, devised by David Borton, is that a solar boat with an exceptionally efficient hull and with a solar roof of high efficiency solar panels can propel the hull if modern electronics are also used. The controller between the solar

panels and the battery storage makes the most of available sunlight. The motor controller makes the most of the available sunlight by running a 3 phase underwater electric motor. To make this a reality and to meet Coast Guard regulations for passenger boats, Dave Gerr, a New York City Marine Architect, engineered David Borton's recently patented designs into a Coast Guard approved detailed design. The result is Solaris, built at the Hudson River Maritime Museum's Wooden Boat School in Kingston, NY. She is perhaps the most environmentally friendly vessel on the water and the first continuously and exclusively solar-powered commercial tour boat inspected and certified by the US Coast Guard.

Solaris has 5.8 kW of solar panels on the roof that provide unlimited range when the sun is shining, and 90 kWh of battery power for when it's not. The motor is a Torqeedo 10 kW. (Electric motors deliver more practical power than gasoline, so a "smaller" electric motor can push a boat more effectively than a similar sized gasoline outboard.) Optimal cruising speed is about 6 knots, ideal for a tour boat, and the ride is very quiet: there is no shouting over engine noise to have a conversation, and a speaker talking at normal volume can be heard by the group. With no vibration, pollution, exhaust or odors, marine wildlife is not disturbed and the water is not sullied. The very efficient hull results in less wake under power. There is no engine oil or fuel, and maintenance and operating costs are minimal.

Owned and operated by the Hudson River Maritime Museum, Solaris began taking passengers in May 2019, demonstrating what can be done without fossil fuels. Solaris accommodates 2 crew and up to 24 passengers and runs entirely on her onboard solar panels - no shore power or generator needed. She has traveled the Hudson River north to the Erie Canal and south to New York City. Just riding in Solaris is an educational experience. "I didn't know you could do this" is a typical comment to a Solaris Captain. With her classic design, Solaris is beautiful to look at and beneficial for water quality and marine life, as well as for human health and enjoyment.

Solaris will be taking reservations, for any and all who are interested in a one of a kind, carbon-neutral boat ride. Many cruise possibilities exist, from a variety of 1 to 2 hour tours (price range

\$20-\$35) to private charters. Capacity will be adjusted according to current Covid guidelines. The required safety talk to passengers at the start of a commercial trip makes explicit the benefits of the design and construction, and every excursion on Solaris includes a preamble that outlines the environmental benefit of the vessel including references to climate change and other specific examples. For details and online reservations, see <https://www.hrmm.org/all-boat-tours.html> or call the Hudson River Maritime Museum at 845 338-0071.

The designed efficiencies allows Borton's "Solar Sal" line of boats to be practical using solar-only electricity. The previous versions, 25 and 40 foot wooden boats, proved the design concepts, culminating in the 44-foot Solaris. All Solar Sal Boats have sufficient electricity stored in batteries to travel 50 miles at night and no requirement to plug-in to the electrical grid to recharge. The goal now is to make 100% solar-electric boats more widely available, which means making them more affordable.



"A new addition to the Solar Sal line of boats, the 24' fiberglass model (design details by JF Bedard), is expected by late summer"

The Solar Sal Boats division of Sustainable Energy Systems, Inc. is now actively taking steps to build future boats with fiberglass instead of wood. Once molds are made, fiberglass boats can be made more quickly and less expensively. Solar Sal Boats will soon be introducing a new model: the 24-foot, mass-producible, fiberglass version is now beginning construction and is expected to be ready by late summer.

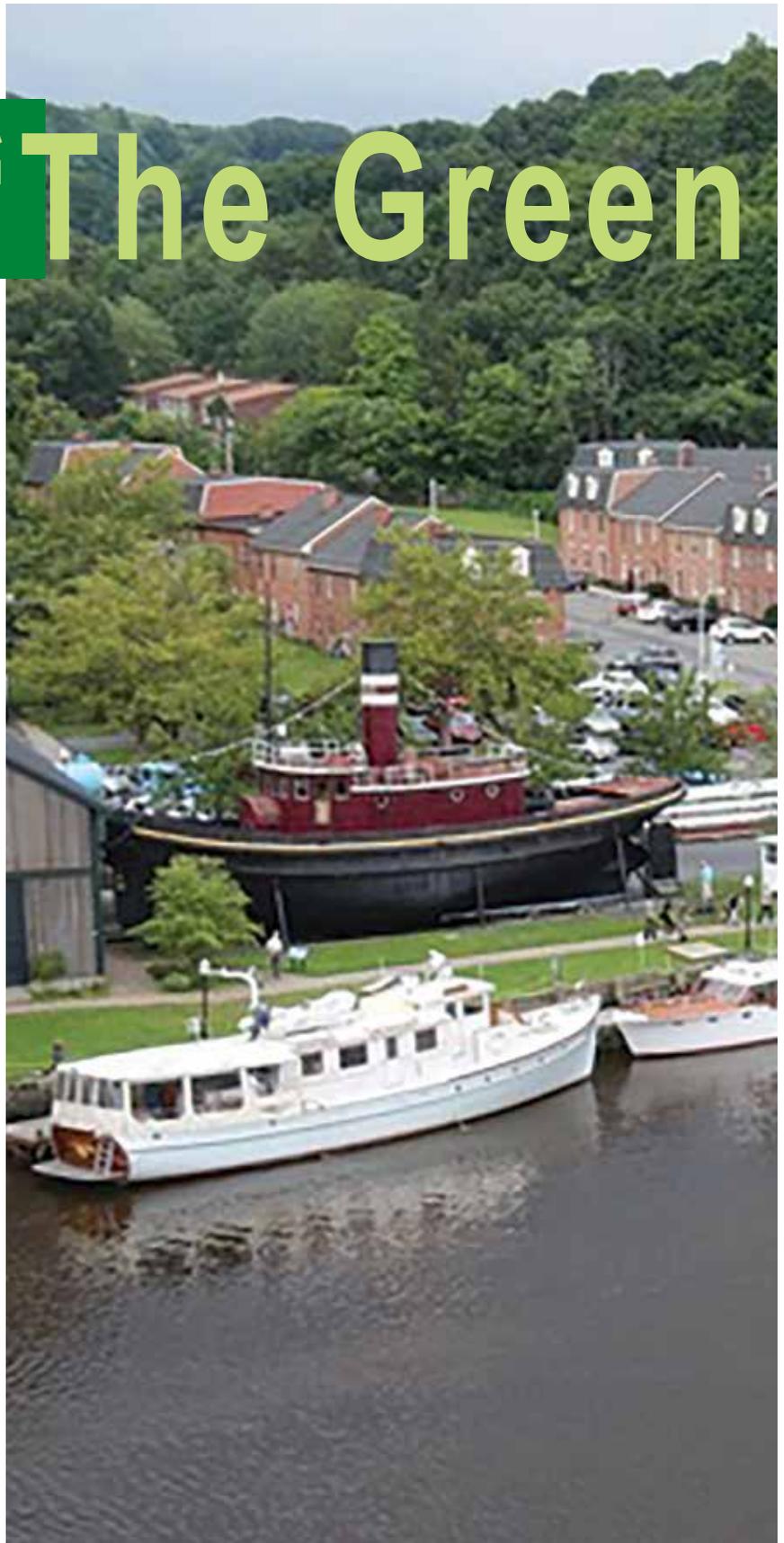
“The Green

by Sarah Wassberg Johnson
and Jack Weeks

Founded in 1979, the Hudson River Maritime Museum in Kingston has been a fixture of the Rondout waterfront for over 40 years. Interpreting the history of the navigable length of the Hudson River and its tributaries, the Hudson River Maritime Museum has long realized the historical impact of the valley's industrial past on the natural landscape. As a waterfront museum that has endured numerous floods, especially during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, we are also cognizant of the threats of climate change. Because of this, the museum has developed the concept of “The Green Museum,” a long-term goal to move the museum toward carbon neutrality. Work towards this goal has already included the installation of solar panels, heat pumps, and an HVAC system in the museum's primary building.

In addition to green facilities upgrades, the museum is incorporating climate change information into its exhibits and interpretation. Funded by a Hudson River Estuary grant from the NYS DEC, a new exhibit on climate change is currently under construction at the museum. A semi-permanent, hands-on display inside the building will be accompanied by outdoor interpretation. The exhibits will connect the industrial activities of the past with today's climate issues, as well as provide information on possible solutions.

In the last fifteen years, the museum has transformed from a small, local museum to a regional maritime heritage center. With its deep water bulkhead and no height restrictions, the museum's transient docking has been a cornerstone of the museum's growth. HRMM has become a destination for boaters from around the world. Our new Boater's Welcome Center, part of the Wooden Boat School, features showers, toilet facilities, and other services for our overnight guests.



Museum”



Home Port for the *Clearwater*

In 2012 the museum partnered with the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater* to construct the Kingston Home Port & Education Center. Constructed to withstand the effects of flooding, this post-and-beam barn-like building is built on 80 foot pilings, with a three-foot concrete knee wall and elevated outlets. Built using historic techniques with post-and-beam joints and over 1,000 wooden pegs, the Home Port can easily withstand flooding without

serious structural damage. *Clearwater* docks at the museum during the winter and uses the space for sloop maintenance. In the summer, the museum uses the Home Port as a multi-use event space for educational programs, community events, and event rentals, including weddings.

In 2015, thanks to generous individual support as well as a grant from Scenic Hudson, the museum purchased the former Rosita' restaurant and transformed it into a Wooden Boat School. The

boatbuilding, as well as opportunities for boat restoration. Flexible program space in the classroom portion of the school is used for everything from instruction to lectures to special events.

In 2018, the museum opened the Sailing & Rowing School, purchasing a fleet of small sailboats and keelboats to teach youth and adults the joys of sailing and rowing on the Hudson River. The goal with these schools is to keep the traditional knowledge of maritime skills alive. Wooden boatbuilding was a huge industry in the port of Rondout and other Hudson River port cities throughout the 19th century. From the earliest Dutch sloops crewed by Dutch colonists and enslaved Africans, sailing has been an integral part of the Hudson River's history, aided by its tidal nature. The Hudson River Maritime Museum is committed to providing education and access to everyone to ensure these important skills are not lost to history.

In 2016 the museum was approached by David Borton to build a solar-powered tour boat. Built by the Hudson River Maritime Museum's boat restoration arm, the construction took two years. The end result was a 44' 100% solar-powered passenger vessel that the Hudson River Maritime Museum realized would be perfect to use as a floating classroom and provide regular and reliable access to the Rondout Lighthouse. With financial support from Sustainable Energy Systems, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Scenic Hudson, and individual donors, the museum was able to purchase the vessel. Thanks to input from a public naming contest, we decided "Solaris" was perfect.

But the work wasn't over yet. A completely new vessel design, Solaris underwent rigorous testing by the U.S. Coast Guard to ensure that she met the safety requirements for commercial passenger-carrying vessels. In the fall of 2018,

Solaris passed her speed/range endurance test using only reserve battery power. She can travel up to 50 miles at night on battery power alone. In the spring of 2019, Solaris passed her final inspection and started carrying paying passengers that summer.

Solaris provides a unique experience for passengers. Nearly silent, throwing almost no wake, and without the vibration, noise, and exhaust, Solaris is ideal for educational programs, conversations, and getting up-close and personal with wildlife and historic landmarks. Captain John Phelan remarks, "We have to be careful about sneaking up on kayakers. They often don't hear us approaching."

Solaris is also an ideal tour boat for other reasons. Her electric motor requires no fuel or oil changes. The solar panels are always "on," and even on cloudy days can collect enough energy that operation does not use battery power. So efficient are her systems, that Solaris never has to plug into the electrical grid. In fact, the opposite is true – in 2020 adapters were installed to allow the charging of phones and laptops from her solar panels.

Since the summer of 2019, Solaris has been providing the public with educational tours of the Rondout Lighthouse, Esopus Meadows Lighthouse, Rondout's industrial waterfront, the ecology of the Hudson River, and more. With new programs added each year, historical education programs aboard Solaris extend the informal "classroom" of museum exhibits. To find out more about all the options available on Solaris, visit the museum's website hrmm.org.

As the museum plans its 2021 season, we invite you to visit us and the river - online or in person - to learn more about the Hudson River, its history, and its green future. By planning for the future, the museum can help ensure that access to the Hudson River and its history can be enjoyed by everyone for generations to come.

Sarah Wassberg Johnson is the Director of Exhibits and Outreach.
Jack Weeks is HRMM Board President and a *Solaris* Captain.

