A MAGICAL EVENING ON THE HUDSON RIVER

by *Claudia McNulty*

*T*hanks to a friends 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 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!

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