

A FITTING TRIBUTE TO MARINE ONE

by John H. Vargo

On a beautiful blue sky Friday, November 1, 2019, the retired fireboat John D. McKean was lowered back into the Hudson River at the North River Shipyard, in Upper Nyack, NY.

Saved by the Fireboat McKean Preservation Project and the gracious support of the owner of the North River Shipyard, Ken Graefe and his two sons own the North River Shipyard.

The North River Shipyard had the expertise, and personnel to completely restore the hull to excellent condition in a matter of weeks. The upper deck has been restored by volunteers, who have worked tirelessly over the past four years. There is an ongoing crew of new volunteers including marine engineers and SUNY Maritime alumni helping to maintain the boat.

Overseeing the restoration and relaunch was Tracy L. Conte, newly installed President of the Fireboat McKean Preservation Project, and Miguel Valle, Board Member.

It is a fitting tribute to the New York City Fire Department and Mrs. Conte herself as her maiden name is Wanamaker.

The name is synonymous with the FDNY as her father was one of the Lieutenants who worked on the McKean during its 58 years of operations.

If it was a waterfront fire, explosion, aircraft crash, or any significant event the "McKean" was on the scene, and helping in whatever capacity it could. It responded to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal Fire which was a big NY event, it helped the USS Intrepid into its mooring, it welcomed ships during Fleet Week and runners to the NYC marathon every year with water displays from its water canons, and it supervised the Macy's Fourth of July fireworks spectacular every year. After 9/11 President George Bush took a ride around lower Manhattan on the McKean. The boat is a rich part of New York history. The ultimate disaster was the World Trade Center collapse. Tracy Conte's father, Lt. Harry Wanamaker was one of the fireboat Lt.s on scene with the McKean pumping water for fire dispersal! Sadly Lt. Wanamaker died because of illness from this disaster.

As Mrs. Conte (Wanamaker) said to me as she, her mother, cousins and brother all witnessed the refurbished Marine One by the North River Shipyard being lowered into the Hudson River, 'The plan is to moor the McKean at North River Shipyard all winter and move to one of the locations now being considered in the spring of 2020.'

The "McKean" is, and will be a floating museum, as well as used for events in the local area on the Hudson River and New York City.

Anyone interested in contributing to the Fireboat McKean Preservation Project or who may want to have the "McKean" in an event in 2020 should contact them at: Fireboat McKean Preservation Project, 311, Manida St., Bronx, NY 10474-6819. Donations support continuing restoration of the engines and mechanical systems.

www.fireboatmckean.org or
info@fireboatmckean.org

Your check contributions are tax deductible as the Fireboat McKean Preservation Project is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

