

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE ■ MONDAY, JULY 29, 1996

# THE ISLAND



Diver Gene Ritter shows off his findings from local ocean waters to fellow diver Anthony Ortolando at the Nautical Festival at the Alice Austen House.

# Going down to the sea for songs, surf and ships

By DON GROSS  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

The Friends of Alice Austen House yesterday hailed the sea during their annual Nautical Festival, where life on and near the water was celebrated in exhibit, song and painting.

The oldest nautical recollections were provided by Stout, folk singers who specialize in sea chanteys, music based on the work cadence of the men who climbed the masts of the sailing ships of the 19th century.

Bob Conroy, a member of the group who comes from landlocked Westerleigh, said many of their songs were transcribed by former Staten Islander William Doerflinger, a musicologist who taped songs sung by former sailors at Snug Harbor Cultural Center when it was a retirement home for seamen.

"These were work songs," he said. "And the words carried the traditions and woes of life on the sea."

Thomas Ruggiero, a member of the Northern New Jersey Model Ship Builders, exhibited another method of recalling the days when ships were powered by the wind.

Among the models with him was one of the original Wasp, a U.S. Navy ship of the line built in 1806.

Ruggiero said he began building model ships as a child using plastic kits.

"But I became a fuss-budget about detail and moved to wood kits and then to making ships from scratch," he said.

In another section of the grounds once owned by the famed photographer, the Snug Harbor education department taught the basic skills of model shipbuilding to children.

Dominic Bencivage displayed the art of making rope bumpers for the tugboats that guide ships in and out of their berths.

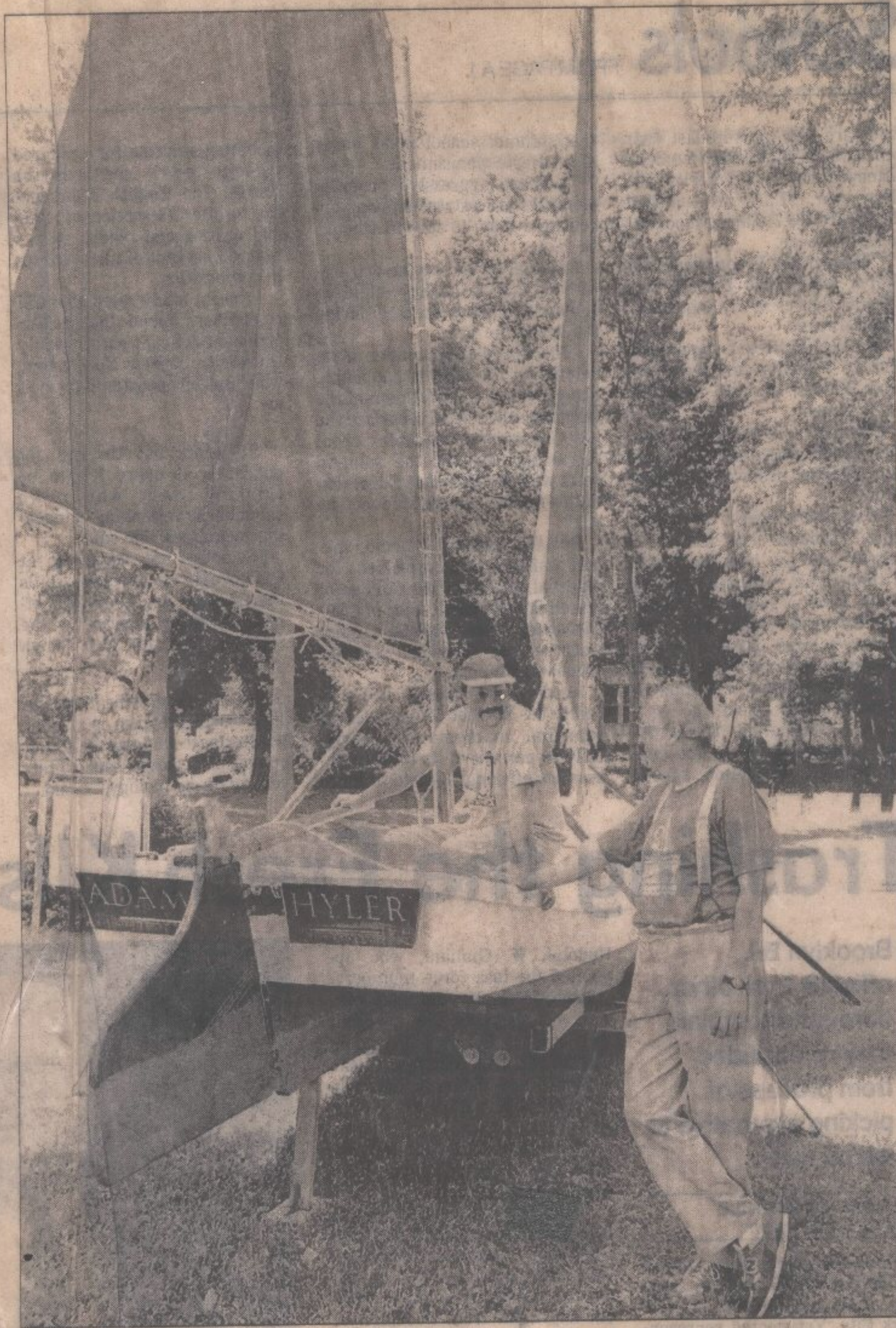
The one-time employee of Turecamo Maritime showed how he wove the bumpers out of old rope and then draped them over the low sides of the tugs to protect the hulls as they nudged ocean liners, freighters and tankers through narrow shipping channels.

Another element of life on the sea is rescue. The Coast Guard gave a demonstration of air-sea rescue skills with a helicopter that lowered a life-saving basket into the water just yards off the Rosebank shore.

On the land, members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary explained their role in patrolling New York Harbor in private boats to help sailors in trouble and teaching them how to prevent disasters through boating courses and inspections.



From left, Melissa and Jessica Wu of Westerleigh show off their fish fossil paintings with the help of New York Aquarium volunteer Jacalyn Choy.



ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ JAN SOMMA

John Franchi, left, and Tom Gibson stand by their sailing ship, named after Revolutionary War hero Adam Hyler.