



Olympus



This Depression-era motor yacht played an intriguing role in WWII, survived political scandal and thrives in Northwest waters

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Seattle, WA Built in 1929 for George Heck, the President of the New York Stock Exchange at the time, *Olympus* was originally christened *Junaluska* and launched into the Hudson River. At 97 feet (29.6m) overall, she was built fairly beamy for her day at 19 feet (5.8m) by New York Yacht

Launch and Engine Company in Morris Heights, New York.

When his stock exchanged suffered its darkest day, *Junaluska* was among Heck's first assets disposed of in late 1929. Thought to have lived out her usefulness in that short time, few



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could have predicted the full life the yacht would live on the opposite coast of the United States.

In the 1930s she was purchased by silent movie star Mary Stewart and her Husband George Converse, then Commodore of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club. Capable mariners in their own right, they delivered *Junaluska* through the Panama Canal on her own bottom en route to southern California. *Junaluska* became a private L.A.-to-Catalina Island taxi for her movie star owners and their friends.

In wartime her lot in life changed dramatically. Like many large vessels of the day, the yacht was conscripted by the U.S. Navy, painted flat grey and armed for patrol duty from Seattle to Alaska during World War II. She still managed to serve as a comfortable retreat for military brass, however. President Harry Truman is known to have been aboard *Junaluska* for the week prior to – and immediately after – making his decision to unleash nuclear weapons on Japan, decisively winning World War II.

After the war she was acquired by the State of Washington Department of Fisheries for the stated purpose of serving as a fisheries patrol vessel. Washington Governor Mon Wallgren had other designs on her, though. Friends with Truman, Wallgren envied the presidential yacht *Williamsburg* and wanted a floating testament to his own executive power. Therefore, rather than serve as a fisheries patrol





vessel (an impractical idea for such a large and slow vessel anyway) she was renamed *Olympus* after Mount Olympus in the Olympic National Forest and used as the Governor's own yacht.

The yacht's restoration, maintenance and operation expenditures were carefully hidden in the Washington

State Department of Fisheries budget until aggressive investigative reporting brought to the public's attention that over a hundred thousand dollars had been spent refurbishing her in the 1940's. This was a tremendous expenditure at the time, especially compared to the nominal amount that the state had paid to acquire the yacht as surplus US government property.

Olympus has outlived two sets of engines and is now powered with twin Detroit Diesel 6-71s from the 1980s.

Governor Wallgren, a Democrat, lost the election following the well-reported controversy over the use of public funds for the “Governor’s Yacht.”

Since 1949 *Olympus* has been privately owned and operated in Washington State, generally around Seattle. The yacht’s colorful history has been well documented by current owners John and Diane VanDerbeek of Mercer Island, Washington. Her original launching photos were discovered in the Rosenfeld Collection at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut and they have been reproduced, framed, and hung aboard.

The elegant dining saloon is again home to the original guest log signed by President Truman. The log was provided to the VanDerbeeks by the widow of the former captain who had carefully kept it since 1948 until it could be returned to the yacht and her passionate owners.

“During our thirteen years of ownership, we have re-planked over half the vessel, replaced the stem, and re-

wired the entire yacht. We have modernized all systems, upgraded the galley, and installed a large capacity watermaker” says Diane. “Of course, the brightwork maintenance is a year-round operation requiring tremendous effort from our professional crew and other talented woodworkers. “

Hard work has been rewarded. Recent honors and recognitions have included the coveted Golden Potlatch Trophy for Best Classic Yacht in Seattle Yacht Club’s Opening Day eight times. In June 2003, *Olympus* hosted a press conference to announce the Seattle Capital Campaign for the Northwest Maritime Center being built in Port Townsend, Washington. The yacht was called upon to represent the United States of America, the Seattle Yacht Club and the New York Yacht Club at the 100th anniversary celebration of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The summer schedule for this historic yacht is typically capped on Labor Day weekend when *Olympus* is on



display in Victoria as part of their Classic Boat Festival. *Olympus* has taken the Best of Show award at both events.

Although used privately by her owners, the yacht is available for charter with a full crew. The guest list in recent years reads like a who's who: Ford Motor Co. CEO Bill Ford,

media mogul Barry Diller (himself a yacht owner), former Mayor of Los Angeles Richard Riordan and Mr. and Mrs. Michael Eisner of the Disney Company. Al Pacino and Hilary Swank joined Robin Williams for dinner aboard when he chartered for a month. Julie Andrews and Blake Edwards have also chartered *Olympus* in recent years.



Olympus was built to entertain New York's financial titans. She wound up as a political pawn and plaything. She's again been called to serve, if unofficially, as "governor's yacht" although not at public expense! During the summer of 2004 *Olympus* transported five state governors and their spouses, the President of Weyerhaeuser and famous glass artist Dale Chihuly to a

dinner at Bill Gates' home during the National Governor's Conference meetings which were being held in Seattle. *Olympus*, ex-*Junaluska*, has served financial and national leaders, movie stars and those who are simply interested in her colorful history.

For chartering information and a schedule of appearances, visit yachtolympus.com



Tender Reunion

Original tender to Olympus found intact in 2001

Olympus' captain Michael Gifford has run and maintained the yacht for the past three years.

Michael Gifford, a shipwright, diesel mechanic, avid sailor and licensed United States Coast Guard Captain, has been responsible for the care and maintenance of *Olympus* for the past three years. Captain Gifford spends winters maintaining the yacht, especially her paint, brightwork and complex systems. Summers are spent attending to the busy cruising schedule of the VanDerbeeks and their guests aboard *Olympus*.

The little *Junaluska* was built in 1929 by the New York Yacht, Launch and Engine Company as part of the original equipment of *Olympus*, ex-*Junaluska*

When the mother ship made her trip through the Panama Canal on her own bottom, little *Junaluska* was carried on deck in 1938 with owner, silent film star Mary Stewart aboard. The tender was removed when the Navy came calling and left behind in California in 1941.

Olympus' current owners acquired the yacht in 1994 and through a series of lucky events found the tender *Junaluska* seven years later in Southern California, still bearing her original builder's plate. Extensive restoration of the tender has taken

Junaluska

1929 15'5" (4.7m) Motoryacht Tender
New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Company

place over the past year, much of it by Alan Thomle of Stanwood, Washington. She is in beautiful condition again and has resumed her place atop her mother ship *Olympus*. *Junaluska* is powered by a 1930 Lycoming marine engine which has been extensively rebuilt by Jim McNeely.

The first public appearance of

Junaluska was at the ACBS Classic Boat Show in Seattle on July 2004 where she won Best Launch and Skippers's Choice. She's also been acknowledged at the prestigious Classic Boat Festival in Victoria with the Best Open Power award. To cap her first year back in the water, *Junaluska* won the Restoration of the Year Award from The Antique and Classic Boat Society.

