

Sagadahoc

by John Snyder

Rare is the excursion launch that combines classical styling with functionality without appearing gimmicky or fake. Far right: That's Mike Kiernan, owner.

Sagadahoc

LOA 50'
Beam 15'6"
Draft 3'8"

Power: 200-hp 5.9-liter Cummins diesel

Designer/Builder: Willard Marine, Inc., Anaheim, California.

Refit Designer: David Coffey, D.C. Coffey & Co., 34 Freeman Ridge Road, Southwest Harbor, ME, 04679. 207-244-5901.

Refit: Southport Island Marine, P.O. Box 320, 648 Hendricks Hill Road, Southport, ME 04576. 207-633-6009; www.southportislandmarine.com.

Owner/Operator: Mike Kiernan, Long Reach Marine Group, 75 Commercial Street, Bath, ME 04530. 207-442-0092; www.longreachcruises.com.



It's not often that a modern excursion boat catches my eye. Quite frankly, most powerboats built for the sole purpose of sightseeing leave me cold. Functional as the craft may be for packing 'em in, they just don't seem "right." There's little argument, though, when schooners and other traditionally designed vessels are used as excursion boats. Then, the vessel itself is part of the experience and evokes a time gone by.

Businessman Mike Kiernan faced a challenge when he considered various designs to fit the tour boat needs of the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath through his company Long Reach Cruises, also based in Bath. Kiernan sought a boat that could accommodate at least 50 passengers, was functional, yet would be in line with the museum's image—in other words, not gimmicky or fake. Because it would be operating in the Kennebec River, where tidal currents can run strong, the boat also had to be reliable and quick, with plenty of reserve power for getting out of a jam.

Kiernan began reviewing designs. He initially considered new construction, following the trend toward classically styled vessels with modern engineering and amenities. Coming up empty in the search for a new and innovative design, Kiernan began exploring the used-boat market for a suitable hull. His search led him to San Diego, California, and a 50' U.S. Navy utility boat that was being sold by the U.S. government as surplus.

The boat was originally built by Willard Marine of Anaheim, California, and assigned in November 1991 to the USS Essex (LHD-2) as a ship's liberty and multipurpose utility

boat. In June 1996 the boat was reassigned to Pearl Harbor, where it served as a Navy personnel ferry for the rest of its career. A quick look at the lines told Kiernan that it had "classic steam launch" written all over it. He purchased the hull via sealed bid, and in January 2004 it was transported to Southport Island Marine in Maine for conversion to an excursion boat.

Design work for the new *Sagadahoc* began with David Coffey, a naval architect based in Southwest Harbor, Maine. Together Coffey and Kiernan determined what layout changes were needed to accommodate tour passengers. Today, with an expanded helm, full galley, and head, the vessel accommodates 50 persons in style under a handsome, custom-built green-and-white-striped canopy.

Southport Island Marine was responsible for fairing the fiberglass hull as well as installing tanks, a stern boarding platform, generator, bow thruster, and custom galley, while Kiernan and his crew prepped, painted, and assisted the other subcontractors with work.

Since its launch in May, *Sagadahoc* has been operating museum boat tours and private charters on the Kennebec River. Kiernan has his sights on another utility boat hull to add to his fleet.

My first ride on the *Sagadahoc* was also my first experience on the Kennebec River, and Capt. Kiernan gave a wonderful introduction to its heritage. Cruising past Doubling Point and the Kennebec Range Lights in this classic and unobtrusive vessel, I knew that *Sagadahoc* was just right for the job.