

Running With The Big Guys

By Dick Greenwood

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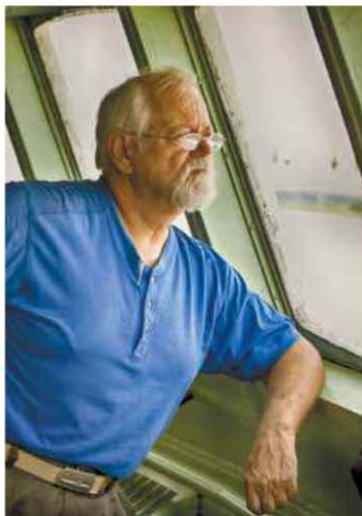
Having a conversation with Walt Mathers, agent of the Baltimore & Chesapeake Steamboat Company, Inc. (B&CSC) is a lot like running a cross-country race with the Tasmanian Devil, only in the conversation you don't know where you're going.

At one point, standing in Baltimore's Inner Harbor with a flock of curious tourists buzzing around, while we watched members of the Baltimore Police Department's diving team moving in and out of the water, I asked Walt, "Why are we here?"

To me, that seemed like a legitimate question. Walt gave me a look of incredulity and said, "Bringing yesterday and tomorrow together." By now, having spent nearly three hours with the man, I understood that his answer was a reference to his mantra: "Yesterday, today, and tomorrow." As Walt defines it, the mission of the B&CSC is to preserve and promote the legacy, the use and features, and the future of Baltimore's harbor: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Get it?

I gave him one of my patented, side-eyed looks that signaled clearly that I didn't have the slightest clue what he had said, so he explained: the Baltimore Police are very interested in the Gaither, and B&CSC is hoping to forge a cooperative relationship between the Explorer Scouts and the Police Department's harbor force, so by working with and getting to better know the people on the force, the B&CSC promotes an understanding of shared goals.

I do a quick shuffle through my mental notes and connect the dots: "the Gaither" is the "Charles Gaither," a 90-foot, nearly 75-year old boat that was named after the first Baltimore Police Superintendent of the Modern Era and was for-



(Left) Walt Mathers takes in the view. (Right) Tugboat swathed in mist. (Photo by Dick Greenwood)



PHOTOS BY DICK GREENWOOD

merly the property of the Baltimore Police Department. The Gaither is now the property of the B&CSC. In other words, the Gaither is "yesterday." The Explorer Scouts are young members of a group dedicated to public service, hence they represent the best of "tomorrow." If the B&CSC can succeed in getting Explorer Scouts aboard police boats where they can learn and do service, the mission of the Scouts will be furthered and "today" will be improved. The pieces begin to fit together.

"So," I ask later while we're at lunch, "is that what the B&CSC does? Is its sole purpose putting things together?" By now we've been joined by Maizie Cummings-Rocke, VP of B&CSC and a member of every volunteer organization I've ever heard of and I'm convinced she made up as we went along, and she jumps in. "Our commitment is to the promotion of activities throughout the Chesapeake Bay, and in keeping that commitment we end up getting involved in many different areas." I test her by asking about Wolf Trap,

a lighthouse far south of Baltimore that's privately owned and a concern for some who are focused on the preservation of historical elements of the region.

Maizie and Walt are thoroughly familiar with Wolf Trap and tell me a couple of things I didn't know. "How are you involved with the NS Savannah," I ask.

"We provide docents," Walt answers.

Still reaching for a bit of firm footing, I ask how this all started, where B&CSC came from. Demonstrating once again that asking the right questions can be more important than having the right answers, I get the insight I've been seeking. Taking turns hammering away at me, Maizie and Walt explain that B&CSC was formed in 2005 with the purpose of keeping the tugboat Baltimore from being scrapped. Once they had pushed that campaign as far as they could, they began to look around in search of other ways the B&CSC, a non-profit company under 501(c)(3) tax laws, could serve the region.

Preservation of the Charles Gaither, now officially designated as a United

States Memorial Ship—akin to a building being designated a Historical Landmark—is in the final stages. The boat will probably be back in the water this Fall or next Spring. While they continue to collect donations of dollars and materials for the Gaither, the focus of B&CSC is shifting to the effort of ensuring that the NS Savannah, America's first nuclear-powered cargo ship, remains in Baltimore.

A bit out of breath from the pace Maizie and Walt have set, I wind down our exchange by asking how people can get involved with B&CSC. Walt is quick to answer, "All they have to do is contact us with an email at Steamboatcompany@yahoo.com, or go to our website, www.bayheritage.org. Believe me, we'll be quick to get back to them. If they're interested in working on a boat, we have a job for them. If they want to do research, we have subjects for them. Whether they want to come to us or work from home, we have something they can do. If they want to help, we welcome their help." I have no doubt about that.