

Getting On Board with the Gundalow

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ROSEMARY SULLIVAN '13

ABOARD THE *PISCATAQUA* ON GREAT BAY

It's not unusual for a visitor to take a tour of the Piscataqua River aboard an historic wooden cargo barge, learn about the region's maritime past and current threats to the estuary—and then get on board with efforts to help protect these precious waters.

After all, that's the mission of the [Gundalow Company](#), which offers tours aboard the *Piscataqua*, a replica of the flat-bottomed barges used to carry freight throughout the region from the 1600s to the early 1900s. Since July, it's also been the passion of Rosemary Sullivan, a UNH senior who is quite possibly one of the University's hardest-working interns.

"I absolutely love it. I'm a total geek when it comes to this kind of work," says Sullivan, who is majoring in tourism planning and development, with a minor in environmental resources and economics. "I mean, I get to work with amazing people and I'm helping to promote a mission I really, truly believe in. What could be better?"

In addition to working 10 hours a week marketing the gundalow tours, Sullivan handles a full course load of studies as a UNH senior and also works 30 hours a week as marketing director for the 100 Club, a social dinner club for members in Portsmouth. Still, she says helping the small nonprofit lure people aboard the barge, called a gundalow, is a joy that's also giving her the tools to secure a promising career in eco-tourism.



Launched in December, the *Piscataqua* has already taken out passengers 165 times for educational tours, school field trips, corporate outings and private functions. That's no small feat considering this is the vessel's first year operating in the Seacoast's competitive tourism market.

Molly Bolster, executive director of the Gundalow Company, says the tours invite visitors to enjoy the picturesque coast while exploring the region's maritime history, studying environmental issues up close and learning about ongoing research by groups such as the [UNH Marine Program](#) that informs efforts to protect the vast Great Bay and Piscataquis River Watershed. Covering a dozen communities in coastal New Hampshire and southern Maine, the watershed includes eight rivers that feed the environmentally sensitive estuary.

The Gundalow Company has two boats, the *Piscataqua* (launched in December) and the *Captain Edward H. Adams* (launched in 1982, but not certified to carry paying guests), both funded by donations and built by local boat builders with local materials and the help of scores of volunteers.

In the days before good roads, trucks and trains, gundalows were the region's primary freight haulers, and hundreds of the slow-moving craft could be found plying the waters at any one time, Bolster says. Today, the replica gundalows offer new teaching opportunities, as well as challenges to promote a new way of looking at the region's history and current issues. An intern like Sullivan, she adds, helps the nonprofit see the best ways to do that.

"Because these trips are brand new this year, we're still trying to determine the best way to reach out for the best result," Bolster says. "So having someone like Rosemary with us is critical, because it allows us to try new ways to promote our mission that we might not be able to do otherwise."

Sullivan's infectious energy and innovative marketing also draw people to the tours, Bolster says. Working closely with the Gundalow Company's boat crew, staff, and volunteers, Sullivan has helped develop a social media campaign, outreach efforts to downtown merchants, networks with the local chamber of commerce and pitches to the

news media to attract potential visitors to the company’s website or to its office and the gundalow at Prescott Park.

“We see the gundalow as a platform for teaching about the region’s maritime history, but also for encouraging people to think about the future and the human impact on the watershed,” Bolster says.

Sullivan has been building her travel and tourism credentials since she came to UNH, working at the front desk at the Sheraton Portsmouth Harborside Hotel and also as a marketing intern at the state Division of Travel and Tourism.

“I love New Hampshire, and I love working with people in ways that let me show them what a great place this is,” Sullivan says. “And here (at the Gundalow Company), I can have a real say in building a marketing plan for a cause I really, truly believe in.”

In addition to its usual schedule, this fall the Gundalow Company is hosting a series of sunset sails on the *Piscataqua*, featuring special presentations by artists and researchers, including UNH faculty experts Win Watson, professor of zoology and an expert on lobster behavior; Jeff Bolster, an associate professor of history and an authority on maritime history, African-American history, environmental history and Atlantic history; and Cameron Wake, research associate professor at the Earth Systems Research Center. The series is funded by the NH Coastal Program in conjunction with the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership. For a complete schedule and tickets, visit: www.gundalowtickets.org.

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