

## Save Our Ship

SS UNITED STATES  
CONSERVANCY



### Media Advisory

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For more information contact:

Dan McSweeney, Executive Director  
[media@ssunitedstatesconservancy.org](mailto:media@ssunitedstatesconservancy.org)  
Tel: 202. 486. 1522

### **SS United States may be saved; Conservancy announces major donation by H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest to refit America's national flagship**

In a major development in the effort to save the legendary American ocean liner SS *United States* from destruction, the SS United States Conservancy announces a donation by Philadelphia philanthropist H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest of up to \$5.8 million. The funds will be used to purchase the vessel from its current owner, Norwegian Cruise Line/Genting Hong Kong (Norwegian/Genting), and maintain the ship in its current berth for up to 20 months, while redevelopment and refurbishment plans are solidified.

The Lenfest donation has enabled the Conservancy to enter into an exclusive purchase option agreement with Norwegian/Genting. Funds will be allocated at a future date to complete a title transfer of the vessel to the Conservancy once necessary authorizations have been obtained.

"We are thrilled that the SS *United States* has received a new lease on life. This is a game-changer in our work to save this irreplaceable American icon," said Conservancy Board President Susan Gibbs, granddaughter of the vessel's designer, William Francis Gibbs. "Mr. Lenfest's vision and generosity give us a fighting chance to preserve the SS *United States* for generations to come. We also want to recognize the support of Norwegian/Genting. They first listed the ship for sale in early 2009 and turned down higher offers to partner with us in this patriotic effort."

The SS *United States* has had a variety of owners since being removed from service in 1969. Still the holder of the "Blue Riband" (transatlantic speed record), set 58 years ago on her maiden voyage from New York to England, she is widely considered the greatest ocean liner ever built. She was also a secret weapon during the Cold War, able to be converted to a troop ship capable of carrying an army division 10,000 miles without refueling or replenishment. The ship became an icon of her era, transporting four American presidents and other heads of state, military and business leaders, and countless celebrities. She also brought many immigrants to America. The ship was purchased in 2003 with plans to be returned to ocean-going service. Bids from scrappers were accepted in February 2010.

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**P.O. Box 32115 • Washington, DC 20007 • (888) 488-7787**

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“Having established a relationship with the Conservancy in 2009, Gerry Lenfest literally swept in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour to save this national treasure,” said Dan McSweeney, executive director of the organization, whose father emigrated from Scotland to work as a crew member aboard the ship. “Like thousands of supporters across the country and world, Mr. Lenfest understands this ship is a symbol of American preeminence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She can also become a part of America’s future promise, potentially creating thousands of jobs during and after refurbishment and once again becoming a symbol of American determination and ability.”

The Conservancy’s exclusive purchase option with Norwegian/Genting will expire in February 2011. Once the title transfer occurs, the Lenfest donation provides the Conservancy with 20 months in which to begin the process of development. The Conservancy plans to establish a public-private partnership to own and operate the ship as a multi-purpose stationary attraction.

“We are reaching out to potential partners in Philadelphia, New York, and beyond as we begin laying the groundwork for the SS *United States*’ next chapter,” said Gibbs. “The ship offers some 550,000 square feet of space to develop, and her interiors can be configured in a variety of ways. We are putting together plans for a self-sustaining mixed-use complex with restaurant, retail, entertainment, and museum offerings. She has the potential to be a dazzling and dynamic waterfront attraction. The SS *United States* was an American original and we’ll pay tribute to the ship’s extraordinary history as we redevelop her for a new era.”

In conjunction with entering into the exclusive sales option, the Conservancy will develop enhanced capabilities and resources, including new office space in Philadelphia and New York, an expanded board of directors and new “Blue Riband Council” of influential Americans, as well as an Advisory Council of maritime experts and individuals with close ties to the SS *United States*. The Conservancy has also received very robust pro bono services from two top-tier law firms. Vedder Price is providing legal counsel in corporate structures and acquisition and development of the vessel. Sidley Austin is representing the Conservancy with respect to environmental issues. The Conservancy will significantly expand its fundraising efforts and develop new marketing and outreach material and an enhanced internet presence.

The Conservancy will announce these developments at a National Flagship Celebration in the Columbus Commons/IKEA South Philadelphia parking lot across Columbus Boulevard from the ship’s berth at Pier 82 on Thursday evening, July 1. The event will also celebrate July 4<sup>th</sup> festivities and the 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ship’s maiden voyage. The ship’s funnels, bridge, radar mast, and running lights will be lit, a tradition begun by artist Robert Wogan in 1999. Weather permitting, the award-winning American Public Television documentary *SS United States: Lady in Waiting* will also be screened. Events will run from 7 – 10 p.m. Light fare will be served and the band Jimmy and the Parrots will perform a set which will include their stirring tribute to the SS *United States*, “Symbol of America.”

“It’s really a testament to the commitment of the entire community of SS *United States* supporters that we’ve been able to gain significant traction in our efforts, but let’s be very clear, we are not out of the woods yet,” said McSweeney. “Mr. Lenfest’s donation has allowed us to triage the SS *United States*. Now comes the very challenging work of solidifying plans in New York or Philadelphia and that will take significant capital and operating funds. This is very far from the end of the story.”

About the SS *United States* Conservancy: The SS *United States* Conservancy is a national nonprofit organization incorporated in Washington, DC. It works to preserve America’s national flagship, the legendary ocean liner SS *United States*, and to advocate for a dignified future for this historic passenger ship while educating the American public about her significance. The Conservancy’s founding Board has a long track record of accomplishments on behalf of the SS *United States* reaching back over twenty years. The group’s leadership has been interviewed by major media outlets, published books and articles on the SS *United States*, organized educational meetings that have drawn thousands of participants from across the country, developed notable websites, produced the award-winning documentary *SS United States: Lady in Waiting*, and engaged in ongoing outreach and advocacy on behalf of the ship’s preservation. The Conservancy emerged from the SS *United States* Preservation Society, which was instrumental in placing the ship on the National Register of Historic Places.