



The Great White Fleet opens the Columbus Day Celebrations

(October 09, 2008)



The Great White Fleet exhibit is currently on display in Grand Central Terminal's Vanderbilt Hall (entrance on 42nd Street and Park Avenue in Manhattan). It opens the Columbus Day festivities which culminate with the annual Columbus Day parade on Monday

The Great White Fleet is presented by the Columbus Citizens Foundation in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Rear Admiral Terence McKnight; Richard Greco, Assistant Secretary of the Navy; Louis Tallarini, President of the Columbus Citizens Foundation, along with Chairman Lawrence Auriana attended a press conference last Tuesday to announce the exhibit. Consul General Francesco Maria Talò also gave a welcome address and Professor Salvatore LaGumina discussed the historical background of the event.



Visitors will see a display of small-scale models representing a fleet of military ships. In 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt sent 16 American battleships – their hulls painted white and later known as the “Great White Fleet” – on a mission to circumnavigate the globe in a demonstration of goodwill and solidarity among all nations. Sixteen war ships plus an auxiliary fleet with 14,000 sailors and marines on board sailed from Hampton Road in Virginia and took to the sea for a 14-month tour in which the Great White Fleet traveled over 43,000 miles and made 20 stops in as many ports on six continents.

In 1908, a massive earthquake and tidal wave shook Sicily and Calabria. President Roosevelt ordered a flotilla to set a course for Sicily and Calabria, and the Great White Fleet rushed to the southern Italian coast. In an extraordinary rescue effort, American servicemen provided medical services, food, clothing, and other essential materials and services for the population affected by the disaster. It is still considered to be one of the greatest humanitarian efforts in European history.

“The Navy’s presence,” explained Rear Admiral McKnight, “demonstrates the clear parallel between the Great White Fleet sent by President Roosevelt in response to an

emergency situation and today’s naval strategy that stresses global participation to promote peace and prosperity throughout the world.”

The Navy will participate in the Columbus Day celebration with one particular ship. The USS Nassau was used for amphibious landings, and it bears the initials LHA 4 in recognition. It will be docked at Pier 88 in Manhattan next to the Italian submarine “Salvatore Todaro” that is set to arrive in New York Bay.

The public is invited to visit the USS Nassau Monday, October 13 from 10 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. It is an important occasion for the U.S. Navy as it celebrates the 233rd anniversary since its institution.

Donald Winter, Secretary of the Navy, will take part in a ceremony to commemorate the close bond between Italy and the U.S. and their history of cooperation that dates back 100 years to the Great White Fleet, an extraordinary although tragic example of friendship between the two nations.

“This is a great opportunity not only to recognize the work of the Great White Fleet, but above all to underscore the continuity of the Navy’s and Marine Corps’ mission to safeguard international waters and provide aid when necessary. In this way,” explained Rear Admiral McKnight, “as four ships from the Great White Fleet assisted after the catastrophe in Sicily one hundred years ago, our naval vessels continue to execute missions such as this.”

As both Louis Tallarini and Francesco Maria Talò emphasize the exceptional relationship between Italy and the U.S., American military sailors and marines will be honored on Sunday, October 12 in Columbus Circle for the annual wreath laying ceremony at the foot of the statue of Christopher Columbus at the southwest corner of Central Park. The ceremony begins at 10:30 a.m. and the Banda della Guardia di Finanza will give a short musical performance.

The ceremony also honors Italian-Americans engaged in civil service, and there will be representatives from the New York City Police Department, the Fire Department of New York, the Department of Sanitation, and the Department of Corrections. Two Italian-American firefighters in particular will be honored: Robert Beddia and Joseph Graffagnino who perished while fighting a fire at the Deutsche Bank building on August 18, 2007.

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