

# Earth Voyager plans tour of Great Lakes

By NICHOLAS DESHAIS  
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Wayne Jurs is sanding down the hull of Earth Voyager, prepping it for a fresh coat of paint.

Soon, the boat's mast will be lifted. Jurs is preparing the sailboat for a 12-city tour of the Great Lakes to raise awareness about the lakes' health.

As captain, Jurs will guide the 60-foot trimaran from Buffalo to Chicago to Milwaukee and back again. But until the tour's June start date, the boat sits in dry dock on Water Street Port Huron.

As an awareness tour -- which begins June 4 in Buffalo and ends Sept. 3 in Rochester, N.Y. -- Janice Littlefield, an organizer of the Healthy Lakes, Healthy Lives Tour, said the high-profile boat will do well to bring attention to the plight of the Great Lakes environment.

"We don't have any illusions about going back to pre-settlement, pristine conditions," Littlefield said. "We just want healthy lakes."

She's organizing news conferences, receptions for community leaders and a flotilla to meet the boat in each city. Other cities include Toledo and Detroit as well as Port Huron and Sarnia.

The group's main goal is to build support to clean up the lakes. As a framework, Littlefield talks about the 1987 U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which designated 43 "Areas of Concern," or AOCs. She works on the St. Clair River AOC.

"There is a plan for restoration, there are benefits and there's a huge economic incentive to do this," Littlefield said.

According to an economic analysis done last year by the Brookings Institution, a \$26 billion investment is needed to restore the Great Lakes. But, the report said, in the short term "the benefits of the restoration would exceed \$50 billion."

The benefits would come from increased property values, more tourism and new water-based industries.

As for local interest, Littlefield said many local "stakeholders" have shown an interest in her group's doings, including the Port Huron Yacht Club and the city of Port Huron.

"It's pretty well organized and pretty well moving ahead," Mark Byrne said. Byrne is a member of the Port Huron City Council who attended a tour meeting as an official representative of the city. Byrne said he wouldn't speak for any other member of the council but he did say he was sure none of the other council members were "anti-healthy lakes."

The International Association for Great Lakes Research, which is headquartered in Port Huron, also is involved in the tour.

"They're playing a high-profile role in organizing the receptions," Littlefield said of the group and its executive director, Bob Sweeney. "He totally gets it."

Sweeney, who has a Ph.D. in water resources, said his group has 1,000 members throughout the Great Lakes region.

"Other states are running out of water and the Great Lakes contain 95% of available fresh water," he said. "This tour could be used to bring people and businesses back to the area."