

Pumping a little green into local event

VESEL EARTH VOYAGER TO DOCK HERE

JACK POIRIER, THE SARNIA OBSERVER, June 18, 2008

Environmentalists are hoping to pump a little green into this year's Canada Day festivities.

The 60-foot trimaran vessel Earth Voyager will be docked on the St. Clair River at Centennial Park as part of a 12-city Great Lakes tour to raise awareness about water health.

The high-profile boat is being used to promote the Healthy Lakes awareness tour, which began earlier this month in Buffalo and ends Sept. 3 in Rochester, NY.

It's hoped the local stop will help bring attention to efforts to have the St. Clair River de-listed as an environmental area of concern, said organizer Janice Littlefield.

"There are manageable solutions but we need to fund them," she said.

She noted how the 1987 U. S.- Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement designated the St. Clair River as one of 43 areas of concern.

Littlefield serves as the U. S. co-chair of the St. Clair River Binational Public Advisory Council (BPAC). Its mandate includes de-listing the St. Clair River.

"We're at a critical tipping point," she said. "There is a plan for restoration and there is a huge economic incentive to do it."

According to an economic analysis done last year by the Brookings Institution, a \$26-billion investment is needed to restore the Great Lakes. The short-term economic benefits would eclipse \$50 billion, the report noted, in the form of increased property values, more tourism and new water-based industry.

The Earth Voyager, dubbed the fastest sailing vessel on the Great Lakes, is a great way to promote awareness, Littlefield said.

It will be draped in banners that read: "Our Water, Our Future, Ours to Protect."

Earth Voyager was built in 1989 and has raced primarily in Lake Ontario. She holds several elapsed time records in her class, including the Bayview Mackinac and Trans Superior races. Her mast stands 95 feet off the water.

Owner Raymond Howe of Rochester, NY has entrusted Earth Voyager to the Friends of the St. Clair Watershed (FRIENDS) since last June to promote cleanup and water education efforts in the Great Lakes.

FRIENDS works with BPAC on wildlife and habitat restoration plans for the St. Clair River.

Archie Kerr, Canadian co-chair for BPAC, said the group is also planning a news conference for June 30 in Sarnia, before taking part in Canada Day celebrations on the waterfront.

"We'll be handing out literature and speaking with people about the issues," he said.

"We want to make people aware that there are things they can do personally to get this river de-listed."