

Kingston man's ship-in-the-night project

Lights up classic ocean liner

BY GERMAIN LUSSIER
Times Herald-Record

A half-century-old ship, a bunch of lights and a Kingston artist-turned-contractor all come together on PBS Saturday afternoon.

The documentary "Lady in Waiting" airs on PBS at 2 p.m. and tells the amazing story of the SS United States, a government-funded ocean liner that remains the fastest – it still holds at least one trans-Atlantic crossing speed record – and the largest ship ever built in the United States. Currently, the ship sits at Pier 82 in Philadelphia awaiting its fate.

That's where Robert Wogan, a 39-year-old contractor from Kingston, was granted special access to it in 1999. He explored the ship's huge interior and left with a thought: "I have to light it."

Growing up in Manhattan, Wogan inherited his father's love of ocean liners – which are built for speed, not to be confused with cruise ships

– and a healthy "curiosity of abandonment." So whenever he sees something long-forgotten, he immediately thinks how to make it new again.

"I like lighting because seeing things at night, in light, changes the way you perceive it," Wogan said.

That belief led him to pursue a career in industrial art. He'd lit structures all around the East Coast, including the stacks of the SS United States in 1999, before realizing there was no money in the venture. So now the married father of three does that on the side while maintaining a contracting business.

However, in 2006, when he heard of a project to preserve the SS United States, he asked for an opportunity to re-present his lighting project.

Word of his idea got to Mark Perry, who was producing a documentary on the mythic ship, and a small amount of money was allotted to help Wogan light the stacks of the ship again, this time on film.

"They use me as the drama figure through it because, honestly, trying to get this thing done was a nightmare," Wogan



Photo provided by Robert Wogan

Kingston resident Robert Wogan created the dramatic lighting of the ocean liner SS United States, shown in Philadelphia. "It's the biggest, baddest ship ever built," according to Wogan. His lighting project is part of a documentary about the ship that airs on PBS at 2 p.m. Saturday.

said.

In 1999, the project cost him \$15,000 out of pocket, a month of planning and two days of nonstop work. Doing it again wasn't something he was look-

ing forward to, but he knew it would be rewarding.

His dream was to have the ship lit up every night, much like the Empire State Building. But even though on both occa-

sions the lights remained on only for two days, hopefully the process, and this documentary, will draw attention to the ship.

"I felt it needed to be done," Wogan said.

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