

(*The Cape Cod Times*, Friday, May 5, 2023, Page 1)

<https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/history/2023/05/05/1952-pendleton-rescue-boat-readied-for-summer-cape-new-home-ahead/69912627007/>

HISTORY

## Famous lifesaving boat from 1952 rescue off Cape Cod may find new, permanent home



[Heather McCarron](#)

Cape Cod Times



CHATHAM — Dressed in freshly brushed paint, scrubbed clean like the sky after a storm, and looking fresh and tidy like a regulation uniform, the historic [Coast Guard motor lifeboat known as CG36500](#) looked like a new vessel as it stood on blocks Wednesday in a boathouse at [Coast Guard Station Chatham](#).

Volunteers moved around the vessel, up and down an aluminum ladder, along its [gunwale](#), and in and out of the compartments, getting the vessel ready for the upcoming tourist season. Up top, maintenance manager John Norton and volunteer Geoff Cabral worked to install a new canvas dodger, or spray hood, over the [wheelhouse](#) — compliments of a grant from the [Boston Marine Society](#) — while volunteer Howard Gostin reattached letters, spelling out Chatham, to the stern.



It's a busy time of year for the lifeboat, which was involved in the famous rescue of crew members from the [tanker Pendleton](#) as it broke up just east of Cape Cod during a raging nor'easter in early 1952 — a legendary feat of local heroism that was the focus of the book "The Finest Hours: The True Story of the U.S. Coast Guard's Most Daring Sea Rescue," by [Michael Tougias](#) and [Casey Sherman](#), and the 2016 film "[The Finest Hours](#)" with Chris Pine and Casey Affleck.

## **The CG36500 calls the town of Orleans home, at least for now.**

Originally assigned to the Coast Guard station in Chatham, these days [CG36500](#) calls the town of Orleans home, and each summer visitors are invited to tour the vessel on weekends at its seasonal berth at Rock Harbor. But its days on the water are coming to a close in the next few years.

### **Opinion [Famous Coast Guard motor lifeboat remains in water in Orleans](#)**

The [Centers for Culture and History in Orleans](#), also the Orleans Historical Society, which has the care and custody of the boat, is embarking on a project to construct a building to permanently protect and display CG36500, taking it out of the water and the elements. Toward that end, the organization is seeking \$55,000 in Community Preservation Act money to develop professional engineering and architectural plans for the building.

That money is among the considerations Orleans voters will take up as the annual town meeting convenes on Monday. Centers for Culture and History board Chairman [Jay Stradal](#) said the money is supported by the town [Community Preservation Committee](#).



The organization is also awaiting word on a \$35,000 grant from the [Massachusetts Cultural Council](#) that would go toward the engineering and architectural plans.

### **The project to house the boat permanently is a long-term one.**

"We're looking at four or five years off. It really depends on a number of factors," like fundraising and a site, said Stradal. "We're estimating it's going to cost about \$2.5 million in total."

The majority of that is expected to come from federal and state grants, though the organization will also seek some additional support from the town Community Preservation Act fund — roughly 10% of the cost — plus donations from the community and private foundations.

### **Why move the lifeboat indoors?**

Stradal said the boat is 77 years old this year, "and we've had the honor and privilege of being its caretaker for about 42 years now."

"In that period of time we've kept it in top operating condition, and on the water. It's berthed at Rock Harbor in Orleans in the summer, and a protected saltwater pond in the winter," he said.

**A look back** [Making way for CG 36500 history](#)

The problem, though, is that as the vessel gets older, it's fully exposed to the elements.

"When you get to be 77 you're not as spry as you were," he said.

The vessel is a national register landmark — one of 15 Massachusetts vessels on the register — so Stradal said the historical society is required both to ensure its preservation and to educate people about its importance. It is harder to find experienced people who can serve as crew, and just the cost of operating it, and insurance and all that stuff, is increasing, he said.

**Previous reporting** [Renovated rescue boat ready for the spotlight](#)

"Taking it out of the water and preserving it in a building, in our opinion, is the best we can do," he said. "It's really an experience to go out on it, but it's just not practical in the longer term."

Norton, who's been the maintenance manager and docent for the boat for several years, and Gostin, who's also a docent and sometimes crewman, both said the idea of taking CG36500 out of the water is bittersweet. It'll be sad, they said, but they understand the reasoning, including the cost of long-term maintenance.

Just to get it ready for the season, the maintenance crew sanded the entire helm, and painted all of the decks, plus the engineering room and survivors' cabin, in addition to other work.

## **Replica of one-time lifesaving station envisioned**

The vision is to build a replica of the [U.S. Lifesaving Service Station](#), or red house, that was in service on Nauset Beach from 1873 to about 1934. The lifesaving service was a precursor to the Coast Guard that in 1872 had nine red houses built on ocean-facing beaches along the outermost Cape Cod shores, offering shelter for victims of ships that frequently got wrecked in the tumultuous waters with their shifting sand bars.

**Photo gallery** [Photo Gallery: A look at the CG36500 through the years](#)

Even though the lifeboat and the envisioned red house replica are from two eras, "the two represent the finest traditions of the Coast Guard and the Lifesaving Service on the Cape."

At present, the plan is to start with the engineering and architectural plans. The organization will return to town meeting, likely this fall, to negotiate a site for the building. Currently, the historical society holds a 99-year lease on town-owned land that hosts part of the Hurd Chapel, and the plan at this time calls for extending that lease to include town-owned land directly adjacent to the chapel.



The potential site is currently a wooded area on a slope between a town-owned parking lot and School Street. It's the site that makes the most sense, Stradal said, though there is nothing final decided yet.

## **The historic boat could be pulled out of a new building, like with a garage.**

"What we don't know yet is how much square footage we're going to need, and need drawings and engineering plans first," he said. "It's quite a project and a pretty exciting one. We hope to be able to pull the boat out, like with a garage, so it can be available for parades and other events. It (a building) would also allow us to make the boat more accessible to people year-round."

**Previous reporting** [Renovated rescue boat ready for the spotlight](#)

He said the historical society would continue to have volunteer docents available to talk to visitors about the boat and its significance. The building would also hold other objects for viewing, such as items from the Pendleton, items from the boat itself and the lifesaving service on the Outer Cape.

Thousands come to Orleans every year to see CG36500, Stradal said, to see the "national treasure," and hear about what's been called "the greatest small boat rescue in Coast Guard history."

"Our intent is to keep the CG36500 story alive, and in our town, for generations to come," he said.

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