Coast

Diving the Inland Seas

A diver in the St. Lawrence River explores the *Keystorm*, a 245-ft long coal freighter that sank one foggy morning in 1912 en route to Montreal. The crew of 20 was rescued. Photo courtesy of Phil Church

Brisk and bright, with snow piled high along the shore of Lake Ontario, it was a fitting March day for the Great Lakes diving community to hear shipwreck explorers share their tales of underwater adventure. Dive enthusiasts from clubs and shops from Rochester, Syracuse, Rome, Watertown, Ontario and along the St. Lawrence River crowded the SUNY Oswego lecture hall to attend Great Lakes Underwater 2005. "The best one ever," was echoed in the halls outside this annual shipwreck and diving symposium, hosted by the Oswego Maritime Foundation and New York Sea Grant. The nearly 150 attendees, many of whom dive in pretty cold water, came to hear about the next "hot" spot or wreck to explore come summer. Even if they make a foray to the Caribbean during the winter, these divers still consider the "Inland Seas" their emerging dive mecca, according to NYSG's **Dave White**. "At Great Lakes Underwater, people can learn more about great dive sites and how to access them from the experts!" says White.

The morning's presentations kicked off with the first of several Sea Grant speakers from around the Great Lakes. **John Karl** of Wisconsin Sea Grant treated the audience to some great underwater shots of shipwrecks in the two most western lakes, Lake Superior and Lake Michigan. Partnering with Shipwreck Preserves, Wisconsin Sea Grant helped design and maintain a web site **www.wisconsinshipwrecks.org** where non-divers can take a virtual tour of these historic wrecks. Photos and maps of shipwrecks in Lake Erie were shown by **Dave Kelch** of Ohio Sea Grant. In the afternoon session, **Anne Danielski** of Pennsylvania Sea Grant gave an update on the STEAR project—Shipwreck Training, Education, Archaeology and Research–in which hosts of school children can get their feet wet about underwater archeology while learning history and aquatic ecology.

But for those who long to be underwater, two underwater videos by **Dan Scoville** of Stealth-Dive in Rochester and dive buddy **Jim Kennard** really got everyone excited. This pair recently discovered two shipwrecks in Lake Ontario–the tall ship *Etta Belle* and a US Coast Guard vessel. Scoville's video brought you right down into the 93-foot oak-hulled schooner as she lay fairly well preserved in about 200 feet of water. Canadian built in 1852 and originally named *Champion*,

Watch

A Wynne-Win situation

The program ended with talks by NYSG's Dave White on Diving the Seaway Trail and by Oswego Maritime Foundation's **Phil Church** on the Lake Ontario Dive Site Steward Project. The pair spoke of the increasing interest in the rich underwater cultural heritage that exists in the region and the need for proactive monitoring and preservation of these sites. White and Church, partnering on this their 9th annual event, initiated the concept of underwater dive preserves in the region and were the catalysts for the first ever Lake Ontario dive site.

— **Barbara A. Branca**

the *Etta Belle* was en route to Toronto, Canada from Little Sodus Bay with a load full of coal when she foundered suddenly during calm weather in September 1873. Kennard and Scoville also showed footage of a 56-foot Coast Guard cable vessel that was en route to Niagara from Oswego in 1977 when it was overcome by high waves and wind. Although not as historic or romantic a vessel, it was still an interesting discovery, especially since the Coast Guard's records show that the vessel had been salvaged.

And, lest we leave out the sometimes forgotten lake, Lake Huron, Canadian underwater photographer **Tom Wilson's** slide show gave the audience a "clear" picture of his newly found dive sites. Lake Huron has not had the invasion of zebra mussels as have all the other lakes. Thus you can still see the wooden structure in many of the wrecks—a detail often obscured by an encrustation of zebra mussels.

Couchman wins kayak

Presenters Anne Danielski of PASG, Dave Kelch of Ohio Sea Grant, Dave White of NYSG, and John Karl of Wisconsin Sea Grant treated divers to some interesting presentations at Great Lakes Underwater.

All photos this page by Barbara A. Branca

Diving Makes a Splash on the Economy

What draws divers to the Great Lakes, giving a boost to the local economy? Some divers, like Ryan Tuke of Rochester, may head for the tropics for winter dives, but stay close to home in the summer. And it doesn't hurt that zebra mussels have increased visibility in Lake Ontario, says Moe Hunt of Hunt's Dive Ship in Watertown. Business is up in area dive shops. A 1999 NYSG study found that diving has millions of dollars in impact on the Great Lakes economy. The numbers must be increasing, matching the lively turnout at each successive Great Lakes Underwater. Says Tom Rutledge, manager at Northern Tech Diver in Kingston, Ontario, the number of dive enthusiasts keeps increasing.

The diving trend is matched by greater accessibility. Says NYSG's Dave White, "Many Great Lake states have implemented shipwreck identification and buoying programs to further enable access by divers and historians to these historic and cultural resources."

According to Wynne Shaul, the region's only female dive instructor, there are more women and families getting into the sport, too. But diving is not cheap and many enthusiasts buy raffle tickets in hopes of winning big prizes. Shaul, representing Delta Dive of Rome, NY, presented winner Richard Drake of Alexandria Bay with a dive regulator donated by Delta. Grand prize winner Kyle Couchman of Ithaca (also web master and trustee of NYS Divers Association) showed off the kayak donated by National Aquatic Service of Syracuse. Aquatic World of North Syracuse was also an event sponsor.