

Photo by Philip Church

Then and now: A remote operating vehicle (an ROV) donated by the Armada Group) explores the wreck of the *David W. Mills*. The *Mills*, pictured below, was a barge carrying lumber that went aground west of Oswego in 1919.



Photo by Mary Gregway

Coast

An Event of Firsts

In perhaps the first-ever live underwater ribbon-cutting, five divers dedicate the *Mills*.



History was made on the evening news in early May as the Syracuse-based ABC affiliate station WIXT NewsChannel 9 began with perhaps the first-ever live broadcast of an underwater ribbon-

cutting. Twelve feet underwater, five divers helped dedicate the *David W. Mills Submerged Cultural Preserve and Dive Site* in Lake Ontario.

Rosemary Nesbitt — flanked by Dave Cutter of Seaway Trail, Oswego Mayor John Gosek, John Carstens (Office of General Services), OMF's Henry Spang and Dave White — "unchains" two symbolic buoys.

Located on Ford Shoal, about four and a half miles west of Oswego Harbor, the wreck of the *Mills* will be the first NY state underwater "park" in the Great Lakes region. According to NYSG's Great Lakes program coordinator **David White**, "The buoing and marking of this preserve culminates nearly ten years of hard work and determination of many people involved in diving, historic preservation, community development and education in the Oswego area and throughout the state."

Photo by Barbara A. Branca



Watch



Photo by Dave White

Oswego Maritime Foundation's Philip Church emerges from the depths. "The preserve will allow free and easy access to the shipwreck for local and visiting scuba divers. A mooring buoy will help diver's find the site and eliminate the need to drop damaging anchors onto the wreck. A hazard buoy will be placed on the shallow ships' boiler, which has been a danger to boaters for many years."

Lakes Underwater 2000 symposium. During this annual event sponsored by NYSG and OMF, presenters described the history of the *Mills* shipwreck and the current trends in SCUBA diving in New York.

Oswego Historian Rosemary Nesbitt conducted a symbolic "unchaining" of attached buoys to signify the official opening of the preserve. NYSG's White said "The *Mills* preserve will be the first in a series of underwater sites all along the New York shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie and the St. Lawrence River." Dave Cutter of the Seaway Trail imagines "this will be a model for six such dive sites along the Seaway Trail."

Sea Grant and the Oswego Maritime Foundation (OMF) worked in partnership with the State of New York to establish the preserve, which was patterned after similar preserves in Lake George and Lake Champlain. The state Office of General Services granted a permit to Sea Grant and OMF allowing development of the submerged cultural preserve and dive site.

Throughout the day, NewsChannel 9 interviewed dive enthusiasts Phil Church, Dale Currier, Tom Rasbeck, Jim Walker, and brothers Marty and Steve Williams at the site of the shipwreck. Before and after the live broadcast of the preserve's ribbon-cutting, state and local officials, agency representatives, divers and researchers gathered on dry land for the Great

Photo and story by Barbara A. Branca



Researcher Sharon Todd and Sea Grant Scholar Walter Mann presented results of their survey during the dedication of the *David W. Mills*.

From Novice to Professional

Will the *David W. Mills* Preserve become a favorite dive spot among New York's thousands of certified SCUBA divers? Load up the gear because prospects look good. According to NYSG funded researcher **Sharon Todd** of SUNY Cortland, the usually chilly temperature of Lake Ontario does not keep divers away. As for many leisure activities, the lack of free time does. The 12 to 15 foot depth of the *Mills* wreck is also a positive. According to Todd's 1999 diver survey, "75 percent of respondents felt most comfortable at depths of less than 70 feet." About the same number answered that additional artificial reefs, more intentionally sunken ships, and underwater parks and trails would positively affect their experience.

With a response rate of 37 percent, Todd found that 60 percent of surveyed divers had gone diving in NY's Great Lakes sometime during their lifetime. Todd, Sea Grant Scholar **Walter Mann** and Tiffany Cooper mailed surveys to 2,850 divers around the state who ran the gamut from beginner to post-expert. The team also conducted focus groups and phone interviews with dive shop owners throughout the NY Great Lakes region. They found the average amount spent by active divers is nearly \$1,000 annually, with two-thirds being spent on equipment. When food and travel are accounted for, divers spend millions of dollars annually on dive-related excursions in the Great Lakes with 60 percent of the money generated from divers who live within the region.