

Below is a story of the successful introduction of our new Canal Boat this summer. Be sure to also open the [CURRENTS Newsletter](#) PDF file that is attached above.

The Canal's Ups and Downs by Captain Steve Gray



Our first season with the colorful canal boat "The Delphi" has been one of ups and downs beginning with the elation of the arrival of the Delphi, all secured within her plastic cocoon. Unfortunately she arrived during a storm so she had to be unloaded in the rain and with the loose soil around the freshly seeded boathouse our new vessel had mud tracked onto her as we secured her and prepared to test her. We filled her 7 ballast tanks and tested her with Bill Hubert from Scarano, the company in Albany, New York that built the Delphi. Again fortune was not with us as we sheared both pins on the two motors making it necessary to pole the Delphi back to the dock. A spare shear pin was found and the Delphi limped back to the boathouse without the aid of the bow thruster and more shear pins were ordered to be delivered the next day.



The Delphi, which can carry up to 40 passengers, became a training vessel over the next few weeks, with different Captains at the helm and the learning began. After a few mishaps trying to turn her from the stern it became clear that we needed a bow person to perform the turn while the steersman concentrated on keeping the rudder protected and the bow from getting too close to the shore. We learned while shearing more pins and scraping the rub rail on the side of the boat. Once our boat crew passed our piloting test they helped train other boat crew in operating the Delphi.

About this time as we prepared to offer our first public rides and introduce the boat to the public we began to experience overheating with the motors. Fuses blew and the free rides we were offering on June 20 resulted in vouchers for free rides at a later date. We even had to install our spare motor as first one then the other burned out. By June 25 Bill Hubert with Scarano conferred with David Popejoy, our resident boat electrician, to decipher the problem. We received one new motor but still had issues with the power supply. Finally the problem was diagnosed as no charge was getting to the batteries and had not been since we received the boat June 2. Bill climbed on a plane from Albany, NY on June 26 flying into Chicago and renting a car for the trip to Delphi. He and Dan McCain worked into the night before getting the charging system to run. The next morning they had to tweak it again to get it to operate but we were finally able to offer rides without the Delphi overheating. The motors have been re-built and breakers and a vent screen have been replaced since this time. I offer our profound thanks to Bill Hubert for all his efforts to get us up and running.



The next test of the Delphi and our crew was Canal Days, July 4 and 5. We decided because of the overheating issue to offer rides on the hour to enable the motors time to cool off and the batteries to recharge. July 4 we gave 6 full boat rides and July 5, five rides. In all we had about 375 passengers, many on the 4th who waited in the rain to ride the Delphi. The Delphi's charging system easily recharged after each days operation erasing our fears that we couldn't handle multiple back to back rides. From this point on most of our problems were behind us.

The Delphi wasn't our next issue; it was an injury to our crew. On July 18 while inspecting the bow thruster (motor in the front of the boat) Ron Cripe and Don Smith had the hatch fall on their heads while down in the motor compartment. Don had a cut in his scalp that required 8 stitches. Ron was knocked into the hold aggravating an old injury and resulting in some numbness and tingling. The Delphi's bow thruster only needed minimal work to return to operation but this accident reminded us all that we need to remain safe in whatever we do while operating the Delphi.



We have operated from mid July to now with only one new challenge, water. We anticipated having to deal with too much water making it difficult to travel under the Washington Street Bridge but didn't realize we would hit bottom traveling under this same bridge. The normal diversion of groundwater from the Delphi Quarry easily fills the canal but dry weather cut the inflow. August 22 & 23 we experienced this and after scraping bottom had to confine our trip from the dock to the guard lock at the south end and back to the stone arch bridge on the 22nd. We made it back to the boathouse but canceled our trips on Sunday. Since that time we have fared much better with near normal discharge through the help of the quarry's water management. Now we are within one weekday charter and one weekend before completing our season. We stop early to drain the canal and allow installation of the new dock for use next year.

To conclude we have faced some of the same challenges our canaler forefathers faced and some they didn't but what made this all worthwhile has been the delight of our passengers. We have had no complaints even when we had to shorten our ride because of low water conditions. Instead we have heard how much they enjoyed our canal and how many others they were going to tell about the Wabash & Erie Canal in Delphi, IN. I would estimate we have had over 2,000 people ride the Delphi and many of our riders have come from out of state. The log in the Interpretive Center indicates traffic through the museum is up 2 to 3 times over last year and the money raised through the Delphi's operation of more than \$6,000 will fund our "floating museum" program as well as other canal activities in the future. We can expect to see more exposure of our canal in 2010. The Delphi is kept inside the warehouse when not in use and in the winter will be raised above the ice in our canal.



Editors note: Steve Gray is a volunteer from Lafayette who coordinates an able crew of many volunteer mates and narrators. If you are interested in becoming a crew member for next year call Steve at 765-447-1627