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Board of County Commissioners

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DESTIN
FORT
WALTON
BEACH
FLORIDA

SS United States Takes Major Step Forward in Becoming World's Largest Artificial Reef

Mobile, Alabama – Okaloosa County and Destin-Fort Walton Beach are excited to announce the arrival of the SS United States (SSUS) in Mobile, Alabama, following an epic 1,800 nautical mile journey from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The next phase of her journey to become the World's Largest Artificial Reef will include about six to 12 months of work to prepare her for an environmentally safe deployment before she is submerged into the Gulf. This includes removing all non-metal items, wiring and fuel. All of the preparations in Mobile are in close collaboration with multiple environmental agencies including the Department of Environmental Protection and Environmental Protection Agency. To ensure an efficient, safe and quality deployment, holes will be strategically cut around the ship to ensure she lands upright as she is submerged. Passages will also be opened allowing for marine life to thrive in and around the ship.

"We are proud to continue the story of this historic vessel as an artificial reef along with the land-based museum," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Paul Mixon. "I applaud the Destin-Fort Walton Beach team in their efforts to succeed in this important next step and look forward to the immense impact she will continue to have on the lives of those who appreciate her history."

As an artificial reef, she will be providing much-needed habitat for a variety of marine species like grouper, snapper, mackerel and tuna. While enhancing a thriving ecosystem, the SSUS will be a worldwide hub for divers of all skill levels. The SS United States remains the largest passenger ship ever built in America and her size will allow for enjoyment of diving skill levels. The proposed depth of the reef is 180 feet to the bottom and about 55 feet to the upper deck which will satisfy the diving aspirations of both beginners and technical divers. The exact location of the deployment has not been determined but she is expected to be deployed about 20 nautical miles south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach. In addition to becoming a worldwide diving attraction, the SSUS will benefit the local and regional fishing industry which depends on a healthy fishery.

Land-based museum to preserve the SS United States' history for generations

Okaloosa County will continue to partner with the SS United States Conservancy as it pivots to develop a land-based museum and visitor center in Destin-Fort Walton Beach that will celebrate and commemorate our nation's flagship. The County will provide the Conservancy with regular ship updates and will support the Conservancy's museum. This will preserve the SS *United States*' storied history and the memories that she has created for so many people over the years. Information about the history of the SS United States can be found on the Conservancy's website at www.ssusc.org.

Learn more about the SS United States with these Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://myokaloosa.com/ssusfaqs>

Learn more about Okaloosa County's artificial reef program at

<https://www.destinfb.com/explore/eco-tourism/artificial-reefs/>.

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