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Historic Tall Ship *Gazela* arriving in New Bedford for the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament

Ship tours, sail-handling classes open to the public

NEW BEDFORD – A part of Portuguese history will be sailing into New Bedford in time for the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament when the tall ship *Gazela* arrives at the south side of State Pier. The 100+ year old wooden-hulled former Grand Banks fishing vessel will be docked from July 29 through August 2.

One of only a few Portuguese sailing vessels that have survived from the days of dory fishing, *Gazela* will be open for public tours on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 PM until 5 PM each day. *Gazela's* crew will also be giving dockside sail handling classes for those who have ever wondered what it's like to sail an old square-rigger. Classes are just \$25 per person. Schedules and registration may be found at www.gazela.org

In the evenings, *Gazela* will be hosting private receptions for area businesses, which help the Philadelphia Ship Preservation Guild, the non-profit charity that owns *Gazela*, pay her operating expenses.

Built in Portugal at the turn of the century, *Gazela* had a remarkably long commercial career. She was described in Allan Villiers' 1951 book, *Quest of the Schooner Argus*, as "the last commercial square-rigger operating out of Western Europe." Her owners retired her after the 1969 season following a disappointing harvest. She was still seaworthy and was soon purchased by William Wikoff Smith, a philanthropist from Philadelphia, who formed a crew of his friends to sail her to the United States. She has been Philadelphia's tall ship since.

Little has changed on *Gazela* since her Portuguese fishing days. The cook still uses the old stove and the anchor windlass is still powered by a hand-cranked 1930's vintage diesel engine. A brass ring on the ship's wheel shows she is from "Lisboa". Posted in the crew's quarters is a list of codes that were once used for radio signals, where a number was short for "You have a new son. Mother is doing well."

All maintenance work on *Gazela* is done by one paid shipwright and an army of volunteers, who also serve as her sailing crew. Last year, over 20,000 hours were donated by the ship's volunteers.

When *Gazela* isn't doing educational programs in Philadelphia or visiting other ports, she sometimes gets a movie role. She made a brief appearance in the 1994 film, *Interview with the Vampire*, starring Brad Pitt. A few years later she had extensive screen time in *The Widow of St. Pierre*, starring Juliette Binoche.

The visit to New Bedford marks *Gazela's* first trip to New England since 2005.

For more information about *Gazela*, to sign up for classes, or for details on hosting an evening reception, please visit www.gazela.org or call the guild's office at 215-238-0280.