

Sail freighter Apollonia returns to Red Hook, hauling shiitake logs and Hudson Valley artisanal goods

Labels proclaim 'Wind Shipped'



Captain Sam Merrett aboard the Apollonia. Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

Roughly 300 oak and sugar maple logs from upstate forests were delivered to the industrial waters off Red Hook on Friday aboard the sail-powered cargo vessel Apollonia. They will be used to cultivate shiitake mushrooms using a traditional Japanese method.

Shiitakes are prized by cooks for their smoky, savory flavor. But it was their “wind-shipped” mode of transport that attracted dozens of enthusiasts to the Gowanus Bay Terminal (GBX~).

The delivery turned into a Red Hook shindig, with local food and drink, Hudson Valley products for sale, traditional music and a lecture on growing shiitakes.



Captain Sam Merrett handles a log which will be used to grow shiitake mushrooms from the hold of the Apollonia.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

The return of sustainable sail freight

The Apollonia is in its second month of transporting local products to ports along the river. Bringing back sustainable, carbon-neutral shipping is the dream of Apollonia's Captain Sam Merrett. Creating community is equally important to him.



Cornell mushroom specialist Steve Gabriel holds one of the shiitake logs shipped down river on the Apollonia.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

GBX~, just a stone's throw from the Brooklyn Ikea, on the last Friday of every month through October.

Once unloaded, deliveries are made by [solar-powered cargo bikes](#) and, when logistics can be arranged, a wooden horse-drawn wagon.

While transport time is slower than conventional trucking, the Apollonia uses renewable energy and is emission free, making it a net positive for cargo that isn't time sensitive, Merrett said.

“What we're trying to do is bring sail freight back,” he told the *Brooklyn Eagle*. “We would love to find a community of people who are interested in getting sail freight goods. By doing that we can help them make a responsible choice as consumers and also connect them with our awesome upstate partners who make all these delicious things.”

The Apollonia will be docking at

A floating garden system

Off the side of the RETI Center barge, tall, grass-like spartina plants floated in open wooden frames.

“Today is the launch of our floating garden system,” said Tim Gilman-Sevcik, executive director of RETI Center. (RETI stands for resilience, education, training and innovation, he said.) “It’s going to get tugged over to Governors Island. We’ll have an archipelago of them, a series of six.”



Tim Gilman-Ševčík, RETI Center’s executive director, examines spartina plants growing in the center’s prototype floating garden.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

“Spartina is a marshland plant that can stand inundation in brackish and salt water,” he said. By floating it in the water, “You’re generating a lot of biome from phytoplankton to insects. We’ll have oyster lines and muscle lines hanging off them, and we can cultivate kelp from them ... There will be a lot of feeder fish coming up as the nutrients go down into the water and so it can have kind of a reef effect as well.”

A floating industrial eco-lab

The Apollonia's port of call in Brooklyn is on a barge provided by GBX~'s owner, industrialist John Quadrozzi. He is sponsoring the barge for the nonprofit RETI Center, which is converting it into a learning center. RETI Center was founded to develop Red Hook's resiliency after Superstorm Sandy devastated the neighborhood in 2012.



(From left) Apollonia Captain Sam Merrett, GBX~' owner John Quadrozzi, Jr. and Brooklyn equine horse trainer and Pratt Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment Historic Preservation student Shanaz Khan exchange ideas on the RETI Center barge.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

Quadrozzi is working with RETI Center to build a [floating industrial eco-lab](#) and community space (dubbed BlueCity) in GBX~'s waters.

Quadrozzi is a lifelong horseman, son of a trick horse rider, and grandson of an immigrant blacksmith who [revived the historic Prospect Park Stable](#), operated by his daughter Xiana Quadrozzi as Brooklyn equine, aka "Be."

The Quadrozzi father-and-daughter team [arranged for a horse & wagon](#)

[team to deliver last month's cargo](#) of rye to local breweries, and plan to bring back the wagon for future deliveries.

“GBX~ is not only here sponsoring and facilitating this water, wind, pedal and traditional horse power project, but is sending a message that fossil alternatives and sustainability are within our grasp — that if we stop accepting what’s been delivered to us, start thinking for ourselves, and apply the effort, the reward will be ten-fold.” Quadrozzi said.

GBX~ also plans to host an electric vehicle on-street charging startup, *itselectric*, founded by Nathan King, at the RETI Center. The charger will be “powered by solar and by anaerobic digestion of horse manure in an off-grid, fully sustainable system,” Quadrozzi said.

Punning on the mushroomed-themed event, Quadrozzi added, “I want to be a *fun guy* by connecting the dots and facilitating the *fungi with horse manure*. I want to make the most of everything *green and brown!*”

‘There’s a story to go with it’

As musicians Jackson Lynch (on the fiddle) and Wyndham Baird (on guitar) provided a cheerful backdrop of folk music, Brad Vogel, executive director of the New York Preservation Archive Project and captain of the Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club, manned a table laden with items like wool, honey and maple syrup, “including some hot chili maple syrup, which is very good, I must say.”

“The whole point of this venture is to make people think about how they get their goods and realize that they have a better, more sustainable option,” Vogel said.

“And there’s a story to go with it, and there’s connections, real human connections. When the boat picks up goods from users upstate, when it stops in various ports along the way, when it comes here and we have an event for people, there’s human interactivity and connection happening — which in today’s world, is a very valuable thing.”



Jackson Lynch (on the fiddle) and Wyndham Baird (on guitar) provided a cheerful backdrop of folk music at Friday’s Apollonia shindig.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

Connecting a logger near Kingston to gardeners in Brooklyn

Mushroom specialist Steve Gabriel and urban agricultural specialist Yolanda Gonzalez work with the [Cornell Small Farms Program](#). Community gardeners in Red Hook had asked them where they could find logs to grow shiitakes, Gabriel said.

The team found a logger near Kingston who was eager to harvest the logs and deliver them to a nearby dock.

“We unloaded them today and then inoculated a bunch with our community partner, Red Hook Community Farm,” Gabriel said.

“When you inoculate it you drill about 30 or 40 holes,” he explained. “You insert the mycelium, which is the body structure of the fungus, versus the mushroom, which is the fruit. You wax over the holes, and then you put the log in the shade. It has to sit for about a year and it will produce mushrooms for about three years. The log will actually break down over several years and the mushrooms will pop out of wherever.

“A lot of people are excited because shiitakes are so perfect for shady spaces in community gardens,” he said.



Brad Vogel (left), executive director of the New York Preservation Archive Project and captain of the Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club, manned a table laden with items like wool, honey and maple syrup.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

‘Just like wine, it takes time’

Nika Carlson, who owns [Greenpoint Cidery](#), lives on a trailer on her apple orchard in Hudson when she not in Greenpoint. On Friday, she handed out samples of her artisanal cider.

Like sail freight, producing fine cider is a slow process, she said. “It all takes time. It takes a long time for apple juice to mature, it takes a long time for apples to grow, and once it’s pressed into juice it takes at least a year, in the process that I’m using, to be ready to be served. Just like wine, it takes time.”

Laurent Apollon, a photographer who moved from France to Brooklyn, said he has been interested in the “Slow Movement” for years. He is involved in the French company Grain de Sail’s eco-friendly cargo ship, which transports deliveries by sail across the Atlantic Ocean. He said he sent out one of the [Eagle’s articles on the ship](#) “thousands of times.”

‘Sail Mail’

“We’re sending Sail Mail,” said Jessie Hutt, who makes greeting cards out of old photos and sells them through her company Squid Bath.

“If you know somebody along the path of the schooner — Manhattan, Ossining, Newburgh, Kingston, Saugerties and Hudson — you can write a letter here, send it to your friend, and you can have your friend come to pick up a piece of mail,” she said.

“I like the message and the kind of vision about leaving a good carbon footprint and bringing things back to a more eco-friendly place. Plus I really like boats, so anything I can do on the water,” said Kylie Bobeck, assistant general manager of Red Hook’s Fort Defiance General Store. “And I really love all the little eclectic vendors.” [Fort Defiance](#) is reopening soon, she said.



“We’re sending Sail Mail,” said Jessie Hutt, left, who makes greeting cards out of old photos.

Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle



Solar-powered cargo bikes used to deliver cargo the last mile.
Photo: Mary Frost/Brooklyn Eagle

“I’m impressed with what they’re doing — changing a bit of a paradigm. It doesn’t all have to come by truck,” said Matthew Grandin, who does custom fabrication in Brooklyn.

Architect Will Ngo, a principal at TO+WN Design in Manhattan, said he met Tim Gilman-Sevcik on a project called [Gulliver’s Gate in Times Square](#). “We became friends,

and two years ago he invited me to join the board of directors at RETI Center.

“Architecture, design and problem-solving through design has been an interest of mine for the past couple of decades now. So when Tim approached me about RETI Center, and what the group is trying to do — essentially building more resilient neighborhoods in the wake of something like Hurricane Sandy in 2012, immediately I became interested,” Ngo said.