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PRESS RELEASE

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**LIBERTY SHIP DUE TO ARRIVE IN ATHENS THIS WEEK AFTER YEARS OF
WORK TO DONATE VESSEL FOR USE AS FLOATING MUSEUM**

**Public/private partnership involved years of efforts by Greek and American officials
to preserve this vital piece of history as reminder of strong ties between two countries**

(Coventry, RI 1/6/09) It has been called a “ghost ship” and a “maritime Lazarus”. The *Arthur M. Huddell* is the last of the Liberty Ships, vessels which played a vital role in the efforts of the United States to aid European allies during World War II and during the Cold War years. For years, the *Huddell* had been anchored off Fort Eustis in Newport News Virginia and managed by the United States Maritime Administration.

Today, the *Huddell* is en route to Athens, thanks to an ambitious public/private partnership involving government officials and private citizens from both Greece and the United States who shared of a vision of using the last Liberty Ship as a floating museum to commemorate Greece’s maritime history and its strong ties to the United States. The Liberty Ship Project confirmed the existence of the *Huddell* and worked to facilitate its donation to Greece, raising funds to conduct necessary renovations and complete environmental tests necessary to finalize the donation.

“There have been a number of people, both in Greece and the United States who have been working hard to secure the donation of the Huddell for more than two years,” said Rhode Island State Senator Leonidas Raptakis, who helped launch the Liberty Ship Project in 2005. “Ship owners, historians, government officials, and concerned citizens in both countries have come together to make this happen...to preserve a vital piece of history and create a lasting reminder of the strong ties between Greece and the United States. What started as a dream has

become a reality thanks to the commitment and dedication of people who wanted to create a living resource to educate future generations about a vital era in the world's history.”

More than 2,000 Liberty Ships were constructed in US shipyards beginning in 1942 to support the war effort. They were the first ships to be built using production line methods that resulted in a four day construction process for each ship. Although the Liberties were designed as cargo ships that could be built quickly and cheaply to meet immediate wartime needs, they proved to be very resilient and long-lasting. About two-thirds of all cargo shipped from the U.S. during World War II was shipped on Liberty Ships and more than 200 were sunk by enemy action.

After the war ended, many Liberty Ships were purchased by Greece to build up a merchant fleet which had been decimated by World War II and to deliver food, medicine and supplies in the crucial Cold War years.

The *Huddell* was launched on December 7, 1943 and within a year was converted to lay gas pipeline across the English channel to supply fuel to the Allied forces after the D-Day landings. The *Huddell* subsequently worked as a cable layer in commercial service after the war.

In June of 2005, Raptakis joined Virginia State Senator Nick Rerras, Connecticut State Representative Dimitrios Giannaros, adviser to the Greek Minister of Merchantile Marine Manolis Alifierakis, Hellenic Maritime Attache Commander Andreas Lelakis (New York) and Superintendent Engineer of Seacrest Shipping Matheos Ferenduros in inspecting the *Huddell*. The *Huddell* had been identified as the last remaining Liberty Ship in private hands and the inspection confirmed what Raptakis and others had already suspected – that the *Huddell* was a very likely candidate to be restored as a floating museum.

Seacrest Shipping owner Spyros Polemis played a vital role in working with Raptakis and other legislators to initiate the Liberty Ship Project. After working to educate members of Congress about the project, project supporters won passage of a bill to facilitate the donation of the vessel. But it took months of work and meetings with American and Greek government officials to overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and raise money as part of a campaign to create a public/private partnership to give the *Huddell* new life.

In the spring of 2007, meetings with the U.S. Maritime Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency made it clear that a range of environmental tests would have to be completed on the vessel to ensure the final donation. In addition to working with those

agencies to ensure the development of an environmental sampling plan and remediation plan, supporters of the Liberty Ship Project began working to raise money to demonstrate Greece's ongoing commitment to advance the establishment of the Huddell as a floating museum. A number of major Greek ship owners contributed to the effort and the American Bureau of Shipping contributed \$250,000.00.

In June of 2008, the final transfer of the vessel to Greece was finalized with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the US and Greece, by the United States Maritime Administrator Sean Connaughton and Greek Minister of Merchantile Marine George Voulgarakis.

The vessel has been re-named *Hellas Liberty* and its new home will be in Faliron Harbor, near Piraeus, Greece. The hope is that the vessel will be placed alongside two famous Greek ships anchored there, the armed cruiser *Georgios Averof*, the flagship of the Royal Hellenic Navy during most of the first half of the 20th century and the destroyer *Velos*, a former American vessel given to Greece in 1959 which sailed for a time in the Greek Navy.

“The idea of helping new generations reconnect with the shared history of the Greek and American people and with Greece's rich maritime heritage brought a wide range of people to the table,” said Raptakis. “When it came time to raise money for initial renovations and environmental testing, Greek business and civic leaders played a vital role in advancing this effort and making sure the final hurdles were overcome.”

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