

**Prepared Remarks of
Susan Gibbs, Executive Director, SS United States Conservancy
Crystal Cruises Option Announcement
February 4, 2016 – New York, New York**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for joining us today.

The journey of America's Flagship began nearly a century ago as one young man's dream.

My grandfather, William Francis Gibbs, dreamed of the fastest, safest, strongest and most technologically advanced ship ever to grace the sea.

As chronicled by many maritime historians, some of whom are here in this room, this extraordinary ship's emergence was as improbable as it was ambitious.

This ship emerged as a powerful expression of American innovation and ambition. Before the moon shot, the space shuttle, the computer, and the iPhone – This nation gave the world the *SS United States*.

The *SS United States* was the epitome of design, luxury, and cutting-edge technology. She was also a top secret Cold Warrior; her propellers, speed, and hull design were carefully hidden underneath her luxurious veneer, away from the prying eyes of the Soviet Union (and the Cunard Line!)

When she smashed the transatlantic speed record in both directions in 1952 - averaging an astonishing forty miles an hour using only two-thirds of her power – she epitomized our nation's post-war can-do spirit and global reach.

After her retirement, our nation's flagship has continued to surprise us, captivate us, inspire us, and endure against all odds.

Today, we announce – and we celebrate – a major new milestone in our ship's extraordinary journey. She will again be a true global ambassador and icon of technology, innovation, and impeccable design.

The *SS United States* is ready to make history once again because so many people from all over the world refused to give up on her.

They shared our conviction that - as the late Walter Cronkite put it, scrapping this ship would be a "crime against history."

Over the past five years, the ship's global community of supporters has grown. It has become unstoppable. It has brought us here.

As the SS United States Conservancy has worked tirelessly to keep our ship safe and sound and give her a new life and purpose – we have been inspired by the support and dedication of so many. I'd like to thank in particular, the Conservancy's Board of Directors, our advisory council, our local chapter leaders –including Jordan Morris who is beaming from where he is now – and our thousands of members, volunteers, and donors.

To Jim Pollin, Richard O'Leary, and a game-changing anonymous contributor: we can't thank you enough for responding to our SOS last fall and giving us the lifeline that led us here.

Thank you to the team at Atlantic Logistics, who have tended to her day and night, through blizzards and hurricanes and the scorching sun – you have cared for her like a member of your family.

Thank you the artists, musicians, writers, and dancers who have been moved by the ship and have shared their gifts with all of us.

To the Conservancy's staff and consultants – a small but mighty team that continues to work wonders.

Plus we can't forget our legal team. I need to give a special thank you to the law firms that have provided us with such invaluable counsel or have permitted some of their top talent to moonlight on the Conservancy board, particularly the firms of Vedder Price, KL Gates, Greenburg Traurig, and Palmer, Beizup & Henderson.

I'd also like to thank the city of Philadelphia for so warmly hosting the SS *United States* for the past 18 years. Philadelphia's Pier 82 has now served as her home for even longer than Pier 86 here in New York.

Together, we beat all the odds. Together we refused to give up

When the Conservancy acquired the Big U, as we like to call her, five years ago with help from the visionary philanthropist Gerry Lenfest, we rescued America's Flagship only days away from the scrappers' blowtorch.

We knew we had acquired a not only an extraordinary historic treasure but also one of the world's most unique and complex development opportunities.

As we developed curatorial programming showcasing the ship's legacy and worked to attract international media attention to the cause, we also evaluated and advanced a range of potential redevelopment scenarios.

We knew from the beginning that the ship's future depended on activating her commercial potential. We knew that renovating and leveraging the ship's 500,000 square feet of space would present unique and capital-intensive challenges.

We worked with some truly visionary designers and developers and we made major progress.

We knew whatever the final scenario; we wanted the SS *United States* to make some real waves.

We wanted to ensure that America's Flagship was not just relegated to history books and video clips. We wanted to save her.

There has been much speculation about today's event. Many wondered whether she would be returning to New York – and she will – but New Yorkers will have to share her with the rest of the world!

I am incredibly proud and deeply honored to announce that the SS United States Conservancy has entered into a formal option agreement with Crystal Cruises with the goal of returning America's Flagship to seagoing service.

The SS *United States* will again energize, excite, and inspire a new generation.

I believe my grandfather would be thrilled to see his ship reemerge as a technologically innovative, beautiful, luxurious, and modern vessel for the 21st Century. Of course he'd want her to be fast. *Really* fast.

The Conservancy looks forward to working with Crystal to ensure that as the ship is converted into a modern luxury ocean liner and – crucially - that the essence of her history is front and center.

Our new partners will confront some challenges, just as Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company, United States Lines, Gibbs & Cox, and the United States Navy confronted and surmounted challenges in bringing her into the world. Like them, Crystal is poised to be big and bold and truly make history.

The ship obviously needs some upgrades. She'll need to adhere to sixty years' worth of new rules and regulations. Her passengers will expect new amenities and updated cuisine. (I was reading some vintage promotional brochures touting "Kangaroo tail

soup... caviar from Iran... Scotch grouse in season” – perhaps these will make a comeback?)

Of course the ship will still sport her iconic funnels and retain her soaring name. She'll keep her unique razor sharp bow and battleship bones and sleek racing hull. Iconic interior spaces such as the Navajo Lounge and Grand Ballroom will be recreated.

But she will change. And change is both exhilarating and challenging. As a mother of three children with a newly empty nest, this transition strikes a deeply personal chord. A Hodding Carter quote comes to mind. He said “There are two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots; the other, wings.”

Crystal is in a position to give her those wings.

The Conservancy will continue to tend to our Big Ship's roots.

We remain passionately committed to honoring, celebrating, and preserving the extraordinary legacy of America's Flagship.

We will be working with Crystal to identify and preserve artifacts currently on board the ship that can't be utilized in the ship's renovation.

We will be advising Crystal on the ship's history and design. We will curate ship-board exhibitions of original artifacts on loan from our permanent collection.

We will develop a land-based museum for the general public focused on the SS *United States*' legacy, in the context of broader themes of innovation and design. And we're hoping to anchor it right here in New York.

Over a million people traveled aboard the ship during her service career, and we're working to collect and curate as many of those personal histories as we possibly can.

As we work to preserve and showcase the ship's extraordinary history, we will bring the same zeal we've brought to protecting her over the past five years and that has enabled us to reach today's momentous milestone.

This journey began with a young man's dream. And when the SS *United States* was launched in 1952, she was a dream come true not only for my grandfather, but for so many others.

And now here we all are on this historic day, so many years later. Our own dreams for the SS *United States* are being fulfilled. We are ready for Voyage 401 and we are ready to Save History – Full Speed Ahead!

Now, it is my great pleasure to introduce the President & CEO of Crystal Cruises – Edie Rodriguez.