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U.S. Naval Sea Cadet ship Grayfox undergoes boatload of change

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St. Clair County Sheriff Dive Team train underneath... Chief of the St. Clair County Sheriff Dive Team, Wayne Brusate, talks about training in the icy waters and frigid temperatures, Sun, Mar 9, while working on the Grayfox in Port Huron.

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Times Herald

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The U.S. Naval Sea Cadet ship Grayfox might be hemmed in by ice, but plans for the boat's improvement and certification are in motion.

The former torpedo retriever stationed in Port Huron since 1997 is being spruced up for certification by the U.S. Coast Guard. The ship is used to train Naval Sea Cadets.

"It's always been an informal certification," said Jim Semerad, commanding officer for the Grayfox. "I have determined that we need to go through this formal certification process, because the ship is training cadets and we should be a model for every ship in the Great Lakes, and if we are going to be a model, we need to set a very high standard."

Thousands of area and visiting Sea Cadets have trained on the ship, which was used to retrieve torpedoes in the Bahamas from around 1986 to 1996.

Sea Cadets are youths ages 13 to 17 who participate in leadership and seamanship training. Part of their training includes two-week trips on the Grayfox where they learn ship handling, navigation, engineering and mess duties.

The St. Clair County Sheriff Dive Team was hard at work Sunday near the Grayfox's mooring at the south end of the Blue Water River Walk.

The team dove through the ice and under the ship's hull to take thickness readings on the hull and clean off some zebra mussels attached to the bottom. Dive team chief Wayne Brusate said the crew used the task as training.

"They're going to dry dock sometime in the spring, and anything we can do ahead of time, we'll help them out," Brusate said.

Semerad said the dry dock maintenance period in the spring will be used to bring the ship up to code.

Other recent changes have been made to the management of the Grayfox.

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At the end of January, Semerad was made commanding officer of the Grayfox, a position that had remained vacant since the death of former Commanding Officer Bill Barnhardt in September.

"We can't operate the ship without a commander," Semerad said. "I had agreed to step in.

"I'm working on my captain's license, because if I'm going to command the ship, I'm going to need my captain's license."

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