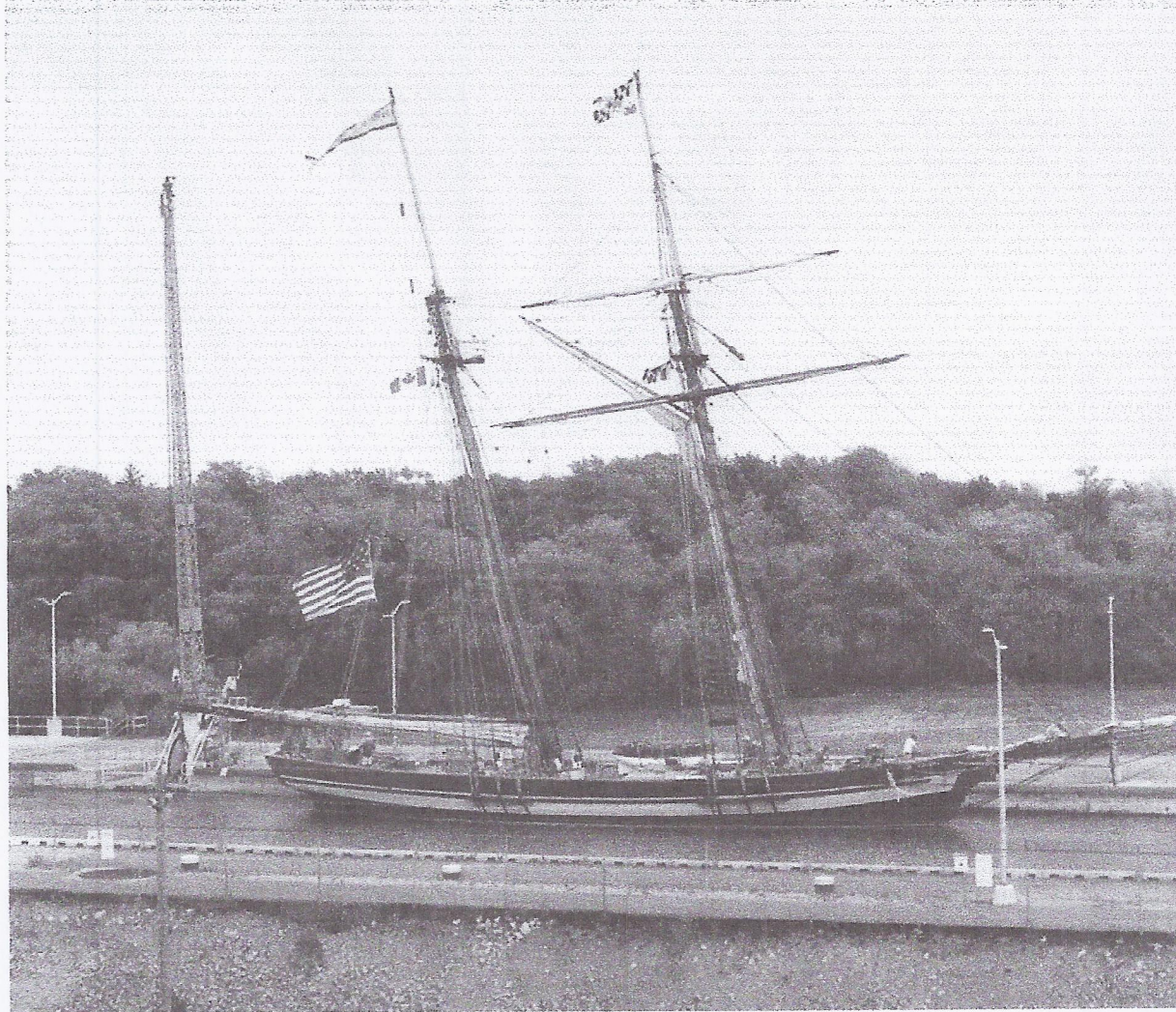




## Unique inn offers views of interesting vessels on the Welland Canal

BY PAT BRENNAN AUGUST 4, 2016



The schooner Pride of Baltimore passes through the Welland Canal.

Photograph by: Pat Brennan, Postmedia News

THOROLD, ONT. - Guests registering at this unique motel always ask for a room as close as possible to one of North America's busiest highways.

But Highway H2O doesn't carry cars or trucks. It's the marketing name for the Saint Lawrence Seaway, which carries ships from around the world 3,600 kilometres inland to ports like Chicago, Duluth and Thunder Bay.

These huge vessels have to climb 198 metres up from the Atlantic Ocean to reach Thunder Bay. Half that climb is to get over the Niagara Escarpment that separates Lake Erie from Lake Ontario.

Erie sends its water plunging over Niagara Falls to supply Ontario, but big ships can't take that route. They use the Welland Canal to overcome the 99.5 metre elevation difference between the two lakes.

The steepest part of that climb happens in Thorold where the Flight Locks, (lift locks five, six and seven) are connected to each other.

All 24 rooms at the Inn at Lock Seven and their balconies overlook Lock Seven. Landlord Girish Ramchandani says nearly all his clients are ship enthusiasts and most book a room at his inn for a day

or two just to sit on their balconies and watch the ships come and go on the Welland Canal.

Some guests are ambivalent about ships, but they love the people who operate them, and blowing kisses from a balcony is as close as some couples will get for weeks on end.

There is an endless supply of interesting vessels moving up and down on the Welland Canal. It could be an authentic War of 1812 frigate, like the Pennsylvania-based USS Niagara, heading for Toronto; or it could be a modern U.S. Navy missile carrier up-bound to Chicago.

In July, it was the largest Viking longboat in the world. The 32-metre-long vessel, designed just like the Viking ships that arrived in Newfoundland 1,000 years ago, sailed across the north Atlantic in April with its crew living fulltime on an open deck to attend a tall ship rally in Toronto on Canada Day. It pushed on to Chicago from there.

But most often it's a 730-foot-long freighter loaded with wheat and heading to Quebec City to offload into a larger vessel for transshipment to India. Or maybe it's a freighter carrying iron ore pellets from Sept Isles to a Cleveland steel mill.

More than 3,000 vessels pass through the Welland Canal each shipping season and when the canal closes down for the winter, so too does the Inn at Lock Seven.

If you're planning to spend a day or two watching ships climb a mountain, don't choose September 16 or 17. Inn at Lock Seven is fully booked that weekend with "boatnerds."

[Boatnerd.com](#) has hundreds of members who admire, work and research ships that work or visit the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence Seaway. It's composed of merchant sailors, but also landlubbers who learn everything they can about the ships that sail the Great Lakes and the people aboard.

Their annual convention is in Thorold in mid-September and the lucky ones are booked into the Inn at Lock Seven. Others are staying in less ship-shape hotels.

But they can have breakfast in Ramchandami's motel dining room, which is more like a Great Lakes museum. Its walls are plastered with photos of ships – some still on active duty and others long gone to the scrap yard. There are also ships logs and shipping magazines to keep diners up to date on the industry.

Some of their clients also come from exotic lands. Girish said foreign sailors who visited the Great Lakes on a freighter have registered at his inn while on a return visit to Canada as a tourist. "They said they always wanted to visit Niagara Falls, but they only got as close as the Welland Canal when working. They liked the look our inn when they were passing by on a ship and decided then to stay here if they ever got back to Canada."

Inn at Lock Seven is in the midst of the [Niagara Region](#) and its many tourist attractions and attracts even clients who are not board nerds. It also sits at the top of the steepest, highest hill in Niagara and on one of the region's most popular bicycle trails, which runs alongside the Welland Canal. It's at the top of the hill that many bikers decide its time to rest a while – and watch ships climb a mountain.

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