



Left, Ailuk Elementary School students and teachers and the SV Liberty in 2020. Photo: Mayor Ankit Typhoon. Above, AES students, teachers, Principal Tibon and MBYC Commodore Mark Stearns in 2023. Photo: Angie Stearns. Right, Ruthy Typhoon with the SV Liberty. Photo: Ankit Typhoon.



# Tales of SV Liberty's journey through RMI

## MARK and ANGIE STEARNS on the yacht Uno Mas

In November, 2020, the Columbia River Maritime Museum's then Education Director Nate Sandel found out that one of their mini-boats, SV Liberty, was stranded in Ailuk Atoll. The subsequent relaunch of SV Liberty morphed into a project involving people around the world: Nate found New Zealand yacht Double Trouble's Ailuk YouTube videos online and contacted owners Rob and Jo Birch, hoping they could help.

The Double Trouble crew was already back in New Zealand, so they reached out to us, Mark and Angie Stearns, on Uno Mas, here in Majuro while we waited out Covid-19. Between our friends, Anious and Emily Kaious on Ailuk and Mayor Ankit Typhoon, the mini-boat was located in the lagoon and taken ashore for safekeeping. Mayor Typhoon and his wife, Ruthy, sent us photos to send back to the CRMM Mini-boat Program in Oregon. Everyone was very excited that SV Liberty was found. We became ambassadors of the CRMM Mini-boat Program to help the children of different countries learn about other cultures around the world while learning about sailing and navigating the oceans.

We were able to complete the relaunch 26 months later after working closely with the Mayors of MIMA, the people at the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs and Ailuk Atoll.

The CRMM program began in 2017 and has had school children in Oregon, US, and Japan design, build, launch and track the five-foot-long sailboats with the intent of them catching the right ocean winds, waves and currents to sail across the Pacific Ocean. Quite a few from Oregon have transited through RMI. Instructions in multiple languages are included in the mini-boat's hatch and on its deck. If a boat is found, it is asked that it be taken to the nearest school to have the children become involved.

The Marshallese have mastered ocean transit, navigation and the sailing between atolls by understanding and mapping how islands affect waves and current. The evidence is shown by the stick navigation charts that are prominent in the

Marshall Islands handicrafts (amimono). What a phenomenal learning experience for everyone involved. School children in Japan and Oregon were researching the Marshall Islands and the Ailuk children were learning about the mini-boats and children in Japan and Oregon.

Mayor Typhoon had the SV Liberty placed in storage and we coordinated repair items shipped from CRMM in Astoria, Oregon. After being in Majuro for three years, our initial shakedown sail for Uno Mas in January, 2023, rerouted us unexpectedly to Ailuk Atoll when we needed to hide from bad weather at sea. We were planning to go to Ailuk in June, 2023, to relaunch Liberty but we were given this tremendous opportunity to do it sooner than expected. We met Taralynn who, along with her partner, Jerry, helped with the original communication about SV Liberty's arrival to Ailuk. Assistant Mayor Alfred and Police Chief Haice Haice were instrumental in coordinating the repair of Liberty. We asked the children of Ailuk Elementary School to write letters or make artwork to include in the new water-sealed hatch, for the kids at the next landing site to find. Mark presented the Elementary School and Principal Tibon with a placard for the school from the CRMM program, thanking them for keeping SV Liberty safe.

We were able to relaunch SV Liberty out to sea on January 20, 2023. It has a solar powered GPS tracking device, and is currently located 250 nautical miles away from New Ireland, Papua New Guinea.

Meanwhile, a second CRMM mini-boat landed in Mili Atoll in March, 2021. We spoke with Mayor Joel Jitiam who was able to provide us a photo of SV Philbert with the kids at that location. The relaunching SV Philbert, in Mili Atoll is on our horizon.

If you find a small, unmanned five-foot sailboat with a fixed five-foot tall sail on your atoll, please contact CRMM at [www.CRMM.org/miniboat-program.html](http://www.CRMM.org/miniboat-program.html), send a picture, and another international relaunch may be coordinated. You can also track SV Liberty on this website where you can further track SV Liberty.



Relaunching SV Liberty at 10° 48.455' N, 168° 45.003' E January 20, 2023

Commodore Mark Stearns relaunches the rebuilt SV Liberty from the stern of his yacht Uno Mas. Photo: Angie Stearns. Children pose with the SV Philbert on the beach at Likunwor Island, which is where it landed on Mili Atoll. Photo: Mayor Joel Jitiam.

