

MEDIA RELEASE



Vancouver Maritime Museum
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Historic *PX-15 Ben Franklin* Reunion brings Dr Bertrand Piccard to Vancouver

The Vancouver Maritime Museum is excited and pleased to host a reunion of the crew of *Grumman/Piccard PX-15 Ben Franklin* from September 28 to September 30. Designed by Jacques Piccard and built by Giovanola Freres in Switzerland, the research submersible made world history in 1969 on a thirty-day drift mission to chart the Gulf Stream off the east coasts of the United States and Canada. The deepsea submersible that revolutionized ocean and space exploration has been undergoing restoration at the Vancouver Maritime Museum since 1999.

Dr Bertrand Piccard, son of Jacques Piccard, the leader of the 1969 expedition along with Erwin Aebersold the sub's pilot will attend from Switzerland. The submersible's American captain, Don Kazimir and Chet May, NASA's representative on the 1969 drift dive will also attend.

Both worlds of science and exploration merged dramatically in the summer of 1969 when the submersible *Ben Franklin* (PX-15) made a 30-day dive, completely submerged, on a mission that made deepsea history and earned a place in NASA's history books. NASA played a key role in the sub's mission and placed an observer and equipment aboard to learn more about how people respond and react to prolonged voyages in an enclosed capsule. To this day, the lessons of *Ben Franklin's* 1969 mission are used as NASA plans for the International Space Station and the first missions to Mars.

Ironically, though, *Ben Franklin* is largely forgotten, primarily because the sub surfaced at the end of its historic mission to a world swept up in the euphoria of Apollo 11's landing on the Moon while the sub was drifting a thousand feet beneath the sea in the Gulf Stream. In the aftermath of Apollo 11, space travel was in, and ocean exploration was out – until the Cold War revived the military's interest in the deep ocean for surveillance and the recovery of intelligence prizes like Soviet submarines lost in the deep sea.

PX-15 Ben Franklin is a symbol of Swiss genius and American "can-do" initiative. The submersible was the brainchild of famed inventor and scientist Dr Jacques Piccard, who with his father, Auguste, pioneered the development of the bathyscaphe. *PX-15 Ben Franklin* was developed with funding from NASA and Grumman Aerospace in the United States, reflecting Piccard's ties to the US Government's "aquanaut" programs as well as the astronaut programs. Dr Piccard made world history on January 23, 1963 with Lt Don Walsh of the United States Navy when they made a dive in Piccard's bathyscaphe *Trieste* into the Marianas Trench, which is the deepest part of the ocean – seven miles down. Since then, no one has dived deeper.

PX-15 Ben Franklin was Piccard's foray into the mid-range depths of the ocean. Rated to dive to 3000 feet (900 meters), the submersible was intended for extended "drift" missions that could last months. NASA was particularly interested in these missions as an analog for extended space travel, and Grumman, NASA's partner in the "lunar lander" as well as other components in the Apollo program, was keen to investigate the potential of the submersible for exploration of the ocean as well as a probable model for future spacecraft.

The partially assembled *PX-15* was shipped to Florida, completed by Grumman and named *Ben Franklin* for the American patriot and scientist, who was the first to note and chart the presence of the Gulf Stream. On July 14, 1969, *Ben Franklin* embarked with a seven-man crew commanded by Dr Piccard on a 30-day drift mission in the Gulf Stream. Their final destination, off Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, completed its unparalleled feat when they surfaced on August 14. No research sub has gone for a more extended dive.

The Maritime Museum's executive director, James Delgado, a maritime archaeologist, has spearheaded the drive to save and restore *PX-15 Ben Franklin*. "It was in bad shape when it arrived," Delgado remembers. "The truck delivered this huge cylinder, streaked with rust and moss, and tons of parts and machinery." Delgado set to work and with donations from Vancouver businesses, and help from volunteer workers, the external restoration is now complete and gleaming white and bright yellow in her original colors, the sub now stands two stories high overlooking Vancouver harbour in front of the Vancouver Maritime Museum.

REUNION EVENTS

PX-15 Ben Franklin Dedication - 10 am on Monday, September 29,

PX-15 Ben Franklin will be rededicated as an educational exhibit at the Vancouver Maritime Museum. This event will recognize the crews that built and operated the submersible as well as recognize those individuals involved in the restoration of the submersible since its arrival at the Maritime Museum in 1999. This dedication and reunion also provides an opportunity to meet and talk with crewmembers and support staff from this famous drift mission.

Exploration is a State of Mind with scientist-adventurer Dr Bertrand Piccard

On **Monday, September 29 at 8 pm**, the Museum is proud to host a presentation by Swiss scientist-adventurer, psychiatrist and aeronaut, Dr Bertrand Piccard. Dr Piccard will tell the story of the famous Piccard family; grandfather Auguste, father Jacques, as well as his own amazing exploits.

Grandfather, Auguste Piccard, paved the way for modern aviation and the conquest of space by inventing the principle of the pressurized cockpit and the stratospheric balloon. In making the first exploration of the stratosphere at 16,000 metres in 1931, he studied cosmic rays and became the first man to see the curvature of the earth's surface with his own eyes. Applying the principle of his stratospheric balloon to oceanographic research, he invented and constructed the bathyscaphe which made him the man of extremes – having flown higher and dived deeper than anyone ever before.

Father Jacques continued the work of Auguste with whom he dived several times before executing the world's deepest dive (-10916 metres in the Marianas Trench, the greatest known ocean depth). He then invented submersible mesoscaphes for descending to average depths, built the world's first submarine for tourists and explored 3,000 kilometres of the Gulf Stream during the month long Gulf Stream Drift Mission.

Dr Bertrand Piccard seemed predestined to perpetuate one of the greatest family adventures of the 20th century. Married, and father of three children, he combines science and adventure to explore the human soul. After a classical education, he studied medicine, becoming a senior consultant in a psychiatric hospital and specialized jointly in psychiatry and psychotherapy for adults and children. Considered to be the last great adventure of the 20th century, Bertrand Piccard, along with co-pilot Brian Jones, completed the first non-stop around-the-world balloon flight, achieving the longest flight in terms of both duration and distance in the history of aviation (45,755 kilometres in 19 days, 21 hours and 47 minutes). Much more about Dr Bertrand Piccard is available at www.bertrandpiccard.com

LECTURE DETAILS:

Dr Bertrand's lecture is presented by the Vancouver Maritime Museum in cooperation with the Consulate General of Switzerland in Vancouver and sponsored by Presence Switzerland and UBS Bank Canada (Vancouver Branch) with the proceeds from the lecture benefiting the interior restoration of *PX-15 Ben Franklin* at the Maritime Museum.

The lecture will be held at the Plaza Theatre, Enterprise Hall Building, Plaza of Nations, 750 Pacific Boulevard South, Vancouver

Tickets: Cost \$20 per person in advance or \$25 at the door.
By phone 604 257-8300
In person at the Maritime Museum - Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am to 4.30 pm

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