

USS Caliente (AO-53) Association



PIPELINE

March 2011

President's message

By Pat Hurton

Norm, Karl and I hope you all had great holiday season and that the very severe weather, experienced all over the country, didn't adversely affect you.

Planning is well underway for our Sept. 22-25 reunion in Norfolk, VA. Attached to this Pipeline is the planned itinerary and sign-up sheet. As you can see, I have put in two optional activities. Depending on the responses I receive, I can put either one or both on the final itinerary. I need each of you who plan to attend to indicate your preference. You don't have to send in any money for the optional activities until a decision is made regarding their desirability. If anybody has other suggestions please inform Norm or me. The final agenda will be published in the June Pipeline and there is still time for items to be added.

The city of Norfolk has a Norfolk Electric Transit that provides free transportation throughout downtown Norfolk and to many of Norfolk's attractions. It stops in front of the Marriott every six minutes. There is also a service called FRED (free ride everywhere in Downtown) that is a golf cart that



Merle Kersten provided this view of the eye of a typhoon through which the Caliente sailed in June 1952. Accounts of that dangerous passage by Merle and Milan Nikeceovich start on page 5, along with pictures from Jack Hanrahan and others.

holds five people and can provide return rides to the Marriott. More details about the various attractions in and around Norfolk will be included in the June Pipeline and are on the Caliente website.

I received an email from Scott Kelley. Scott is the son of Fred W. Kelley, Fireman 1st class, who served on the Cal during WWII. Fred passed away in 1981 and Scott recently found an old photo album of his. Below are two photos that we believe were taken of the Cal when it was in Bahrain in 1946. If anyone remembers this, you should get in touch with Scott at irish4251@yahoo.com. He would like to hear from anyone who could fill him in on more details about his dad. Any info would also be great for the Pipeline, so any memories should be shared with Karl (seitzao53@gmail.com).



I have been working with the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, TX on the USS Caliente Plaque. The final version can be found on page 11. I think this is a great tribute to the Caliente and will preserve her memory forever.

While finalizing plans for the plaque I received a phone call from Joe Benziger. Joe served in sick bay (as a pharmacist's mate not a permanent patient) during 1945–1946, with Richard Trogan. As Joe puts it “they ran a very ‘tight’ (Joe pointed out that “tight” referred to themselves only occasionally) sick bay.” Joe has some very fond memories of his time served with Dick and in trying to get back in touch, a long time ago, he was saddened to hear of his passing from Dick's son Richard. Richard introduced Joe to his brother Mike. Both Richard and Mike joined Joe at the Long Beach reunion in 1995 sharing fond memories of Dick.

Joe and Mike have stayed in touch and, over the years, Mike has made several donations to our general fund. This year Mike has made an exceptional donation to our association. Mike wanted to do something special for his dad's ship and has done so. We are very, very pleased to be in receipt of a \$1,000 donation to the USS Caliente Association in memory of Richard Trogan. The timing couldn't have been more perfect as I was about to send a check to the Admiral Nimitz Foundation for the USS Caliente for the Memorial Wall plaque. The donation put us within \$415 of our \$3,500 goal for donations. A special thanks to all who contributed in making sure the USS Caliente is permanently remember in a special place.

If anyone hasn't had a chance to contribute, but still wants to, it would be very much appreciated. We have been able to maintain our \$10 annual dues through your donations. Once again, very, very special thanks to Mike Trogan for the, extremely generous, donation.

Charleen and I hope to see all of you at the Norfolk reunion and hope your spring is a good one.

Welcome aboard to our new members:

Richard Buettner, who lives with his wife Shirley in Chesapeake, VA, was an EN3 when he served aboard the Cal from 1955 to 1957.

Bernard Buscher, who lives with his wife Joan in Lakeland, FL, was a LTJG when he served aboard the Cal from 1958 to 1960.

Herbert Chasten, who lives with his wife Norma in Pooler, GA, was an SN when he served aboard the Cal from 1955 to 1956.

Paul Cirafesi, who lives in Norristown, PA, was a BM2 when he served aboard the Cal from commissioning in October 1943 to 1945.

Eugene Ellis, who lives in Prarie View, IL, was a YN3 when he served aboard the Cal from 1968 to 1971.

Samuel Maggio, who lives in Fredona, NY, was an SN when he served aboard the Cal in 1965.

Thomas Owen, who lives in Virginia Beach, VA, was a GMG3 when he served aboard the Cal from 1967 to 1971.

Mason Ruhlen, who lives with his wife Donna in Bayonne, NJ, was an RM3 when he served



USS Caliente Association
President: Pat Hurton
Vice President: Norm Street
Secretary: Red Ward
Pipeline Editor: Karl Seitz



The Pipeline is the official quarterly newsletter of the USS Caliente Association. It is a place to share your memories. Please send them via e-mail to seitzao53@gmail.com or by regular mail to Karl Seitz, 1212 30th St. South, Birmingham, AL 35205-1910.

Masthead picture of USS Caliente (AO-53) used with permission of Dan Davis.

Association dues are \$10 per year due Jan. 1, payable by Jan. 15. Checks should be made out to The USS Caliente Association and mailed to Pat Hurton, 14075 Kelsey Drive, Chico, CA 95973-9262.

aboard the Cal from 1964 to 1965.

James Stephenson, who lives with his wife Jimmie Sue in Orchard Park, NY, was a PCSN when he served aboard the Cal from 1961 to 1962.

Peter Werner, who lives with his wife Pat in Hawthorn Woods, IL, was a LT on the Cal from 1966 to 1969.

In memoriam:

We are sad to note the passing of two former shipmates:

We have belatedly learned of the passing of John R. Mahoney, 82, of York, ME, on July 25, 2009. He was a S 1/c when he served on the Cal from 1944 to 1946. His naval service included World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He was later a firefighter at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. He was survived by a daughter, Ruby Works of North Berwick, ME, a sister, Anna Newbury of Taunton, MA, and two grandchildren.

Warren M. Howell, 92, died Nov. 12, 2010, in Clearwater, FL. Warren joined the Navy in 1944 and was a DC1 on the Cal from 1961 to 1962. His oldest son, Bud, was a shipmate. William joined the Salvation Army at an early age and was a dedicated member throughout his life, serving in a variety of positions, both during and after his naval service. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Margaret; children, Mary Jane Selver of Merrimack, NH, Warren B. Howell of Camden, SC, Joyce Field of Manteca, CA, Willis Howell of Charlotte, NC; ten grandchildren and several great grandchildren.

Editor's message

By Karl Seitz

I am particularly proud of the stories and pictures about the 1952 typhoon in this issue of the Pipeline. Not only was the passage through that storm an important event in the history of the Caliente, but the men who contributed words and pictures to bring this story to those of us who served before or after that voyage have provided an excellent example of what the Pipeline should be: a window into the lives of the ship and its crew.

Some of the material arrived unsolicited. The rest was requested. I am grateful for both. The combination was fun to work with and I'm sure you will enjoy reading it. And please, send your memories and photographs. I'd like to have another project like the typhoon in a future Pipeline.

Seeking shipmates of fathers

Two individuals are seeking to make contact with men who knew their fathers on the Caliente:

Will White wishes to contact any shipmate who knew his father, Norval Crawford White. The elder White served on the Cal in 1945 and 1946. He was a second class petty officer whose rating had something to do with radar, possibly an ET. Will's email is whitewc@gmail.com

Leslee Levin wishes to be contacted by anyone who knew her father, Capt. Robert H. Wanless, who commanded the Cal from February 1957 to March 1958. Leslee's e-mail is lwlevin@aol.com.

Memories



The origins of these pictures taken during the typhoon of 1952 are unclear. Pipeline received them on a CD from Milan Nikceovich. However, the person who gave him the CD does not remember the pictures and was not on the Cal during the typhoon. They appear to have been copied from a photo album. If anybody knows who took the original pictures, let us know and we will acknowledge him in a future Pipeline. The picture on the left is the cargo deck. The picture on the right is the forward well deck.

Caliente survives a trip through a typhoon

By Merle Kersten, LT

1950-1952

In June 1952, the Caliente was on the way to again join the naval task force operating off the east coast of Korea, where we had been for the prior 12 months. We had returned to the states, after a year with the task force, for repair and minor overhaul in the San Francisco Naval Yard during the first quarter of 1952. Upon completion at the Navy yard and after a few days of underway training, filling all tanks (oil and aviation gas) and ammunition, we headed for Korea. Enroute we had an emergency medical stop at Guam.

After leaving Guam, reports started flowing in on the typhoon traveling from the southwest in a northeasterly direction. As the storm was being tracked, it appeared that our course and speed would let us avoid the worst of the storm. Unfortunately, a sudden change in speed and direction of the typhoon put us on a collision course that we could not avoid. We didn't anticipate that we would end up going through one side of the typhoon into the eye or center and then have to re-enter the other side of the typhoon to get out of it.

On the afternoon prior to entering the typhoon, I had the 1600 to 1800 hour OD watch. Somewhere around 1700, I called and asked the captain if he would come to the bridge. Our captain was Commander Robert Dawes. It was an eerie setting ahead of us because there was no distinction on the horizon between the sky and the sea. It appeared as though we were heading into a huge fog bank that was dark and with no breaks on either the starboard or port side when looking ahead. Upon review and discussion with Captain Dawes, he ordered the ship be placed in

Condition 1 (I'm going by memory having forgotten the exact term for setting full water-tight integrity).

The seas soon became very rough and at approximately 2300 General Alarm was sounded. My stateroom was located on the upper well deck amidship port side. As gunnery officer, my station was on the bridge. I opened the hatch to the deck and immediately saw that we were taking water over the deck. So I closed the hatch and took the interior ladder to the bridge. At that point I really thought we were sinking, but it got worse when reaching the bridge.

Warning lights to the forward ammunition storage in the bottom of the ship were indicating a fire. The anemometer registered 100 mph before it became inoperative. Other bells were sounding and many lights were flashing. It was pitch black. The helmsman had a tough job trying to keep on course and as I remember, the captain reduced our speed to about 10 mph and headed the ship into the high waves, taking them off the port bow. At the lower speed we could still maintain control of the ship.

When daylight arrived, we could see the magnitude of the waves. Many appeared higher than the bridge deck. When hitting them, we were completely under water with the ship shuddering. These conditions lasted throughout the day, finally subsiding through the night. The following morning we were in the center of the storm and luckily still afloat. But at this point we were now entering the back part of the typhoon, thus it was a repeat of the prior 24 hours or so.

After finally getting out of the major part of the typhoon (some 48 hours of typhoon sailing), we could start to access the damage. The following conditions existed as I can best recall:

- The mooring lines stored on large reels mounted on the forward bulkheads were gone (ripped from the bulkheads).
- The ammunition storage lockers within the two 3-inch forward gun mounts were broken from the bulkheads, lost with the ammunition.
- The below deck lower ammunition storage was completely filled with sea water.
- The forward storage area for all supplies (dry food and clothing) was filled with sea water. The water surface was polluted with black-eyed peas. Looked like soap (a side light, I can't eat black-eyed peas to this date).
- All of the forward deck CO₂ lines for fire protection of the two aviation gas tanks were stripped from the deck.
- The wood bushing (*lignum vitae*) bearing where the port engine shaft to the propeller goes through the hull of the ship was leaking and flooding the engine room. Fortunately the bilge pumps handled the problem.

There were probably other areas of major damage, but these are the ones that come to mind.

As a result, the ship was ordered to the Yokosuka, Japan, shipyard for repair and replenishments. We were there for several weeks.

During this time, a board of inquiry was conducted. Court martial proceedings were called by five or so admirals and captains requiring testimony from selected Caliente crew personnel. It

was not an enjoyable event. I had to testify because of being the officer of the deck at the time we set Condition 1. The end results were that our captain (CDR Dawes) and the damage control officer received letters of reprimand. These, of course, become part of your fitness reports and a negative for future promotions.



These pictures from Jack Harahan were taken after the Caliente travelled through the typhoon.

Worst experience in four years of naval service

By Milan Nikceovich, BMSN

1952-1955

The seas were the worst I had encountered during my naval service. Waves breaking over the bow was a new experience. The bow was normally 50 plus feet out of the water, so the waves were huge.

Most of the inside of the bow storage areas suffered flooding and was a big mess to clean up. The forward provisions storage area flooded and all the gallon tins of fruits and vegetables were squashed. The labels were torn off, leaving no way to identify the contents. I opened a squashed can and it contained peaches, which I ate my fill of. Although the cans were smashed, the contents were still inside; very few of the cans broke open.

The forward paint locker was another mess with all the different paint cans broken open and their contents mixed and splattered on the bulkheads and overhead with a big deep mess on deck. Some of the paint got into the passageway and was all over the deck and bulkheads.

Back aft in the Second Division and snipes' area, there was a big problem. When the stern came out of the water, the twin screws would shake the stern so bad that if you were in your rack and not hanging on, you would be shaken out of your rack. Personal lockers were shaken open and their contents spilled out on deck. Trying to eat in the mess deck was an adventure. You tried to hang on to your tray and at the same time the table you were sitting at.

When things calmed down and we came into calmer water, there was a big mess to clean up. We eventually got back to normal. The forward small stores storage area also flooded and all of the clothing was soaked. We laid out all the dungarees, shirts and whites on the forward well deck

to dry out before washing them in the ship's laundry. We dunked all the clothing in pails of fresh water to get out the salt water prior to the laundry cleaning.

I think this experience was my worst in four years of naval service.



Four more pictures passed on by Milan. Top left, debris from forward provision locker. Top right, drying small stores clothing on forward well deck. Bottom left, Hoisting pails from forward provisions storage. Louis Diaz is second from right. Milan is one with gloves on line. Bottom right, clean up of forward provision storage begins. Milan is at far right.

Odd place for friend to drop in

By René Pellet, ET2

1956

In a recent Pipeline there was an article about the Caliente and Operation Redwing.

Yea, verily, we were at Operation Red Wing, Austin and me, plus a lot of other shipmates. Observing hydrogen bombs explode involved a combination of awe and concern about what those bombs could lead to in the future. At the time, however, the visual observations, the sound waves reaching us and the ocean waves involved were stashed in memory banks, to be brought out and re-examined from time to time.

I open those memory banks sometimes and find myself wondering how it came about that I was lucky enough to participate in such unbelievable, world important events.

Bikini Atoll was an odd place for having a friend drop in to say “Hi.” Shortly after we reached Bikini someone came to the ET shack to find me and told me that there was someone who was asking for me. When I reached the quarterdeck I was surprised, to say the least. Out there in the middle of nowhere Chuck Surman appeared! He was an ET friend from Guam, who was then on the carrier in the atoll.

New members write So much for secrets

By Mason Ruhlen, RM3

1964-1965

My orders to report to the USS Caliente list the ship’s location as classified. I fly into Tokyo. I go to the B-bars and talk to the girls. They say Caliente is in Subic Bay, Philippine Islands.

Just a few challenges to start with

By James Stephenson, PCSN

1961-1962

Straight out of Postal Clerk “A” School, I had one week to prepare the ship’s post office for deployment. Previous postal clerk took off with stamps, money orders, money and .45. Had to start from scratch, but I got it done.

On the following page is the letter Pat Hurton received from the Admiral Nimitz Foundation acknowledging receipt of the contribution from the USS Caliente Association that makes the association sponsor of a plaque honoring the USS Caliente (AO-53). See the president’s message for more details.



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February 19, 2011

Mr. Pat Hurton, Pres.
USS CALIENTE Association
14075 Kelsey Dr
Chico, CA 95973-9262

Dear Mr. Hurton,

We thank you and the USS CALIENTE Association for your generous donation of \$3,500.00 to the Admiral Nimitz Foundation. This is sponsorship in full of a 20x20 Memorial Wall plaque and a perpetual Memorial Day tribute.

A portion of your donation, \$1,000.00, will be contributed to the memorial Wall Endowment Fund to provide interest for the purchase of a standing floral tribute each Memorial Day to be placed at the USS CALIENTE Memorial Wall plaque. This is the 55th participant in the Memorial Wall Endowment Fund.

Each Memorial Day, we will ask if you can have a representative here to place your wreath. I will list you as the contact person unless you direct me to someone else. If you will not have a representative present, just let me know and I will find a substitute. It is the responsibility of our Foundation staff to order the wreath. The ribbon on the wreath will read: USS CALIENTE (A0-53).

Enclosed is a preliminary proof for the 20x20 USS CALIENTE plaque for you to review. Please feel free to make any and all changes or corrections you wish. I'll be happy to redo it for you!

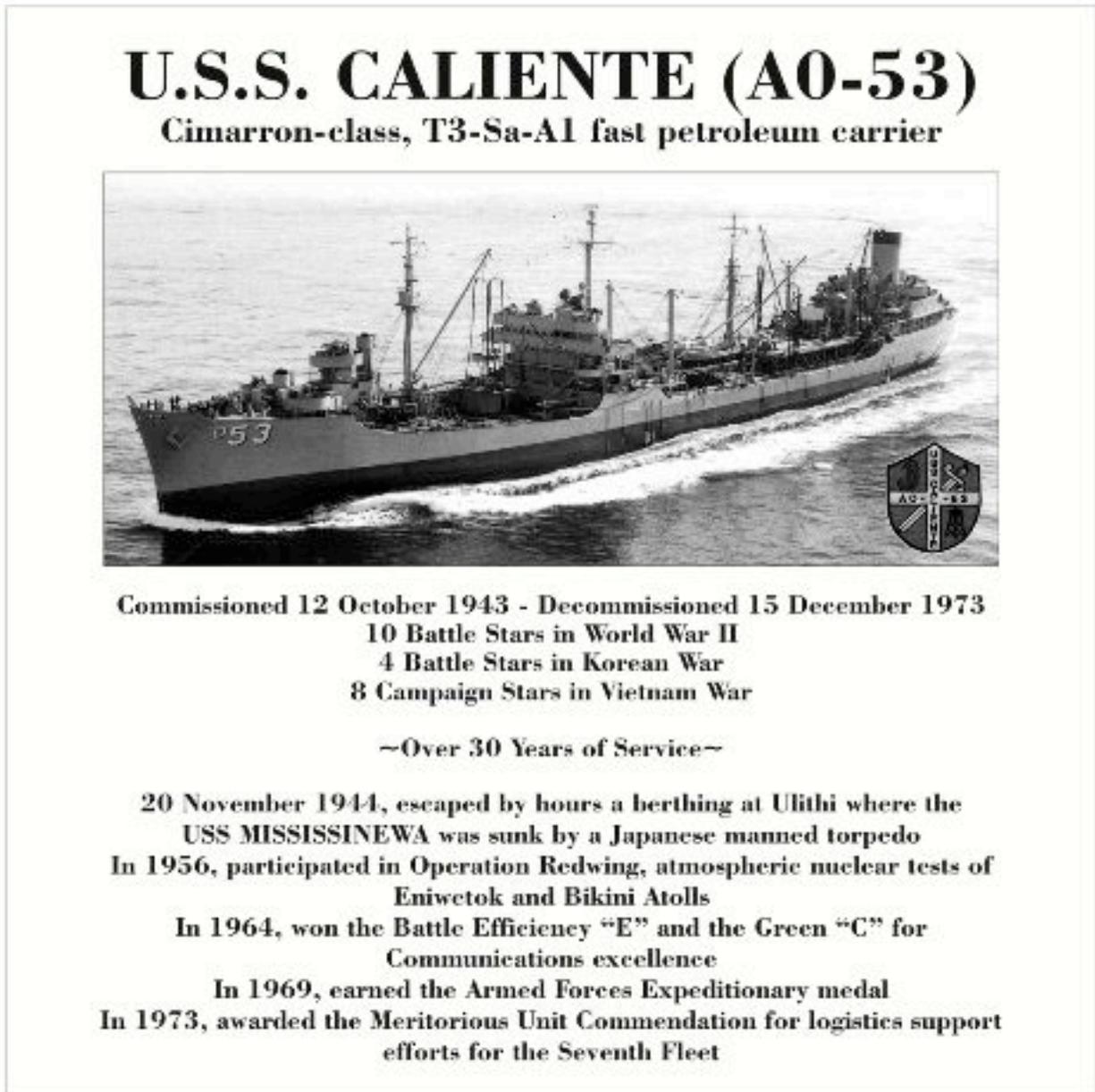
Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Marty Kaderli
Membership and Memorials

The Admiral Nimitz Foundation has received a determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service stating that it is a tax exempt organization as described in 501©(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and is not a private foundation according to 509(a). No goods or services have been provided for this donation.

We inspire our youth by honoring our heroes



Above is the final proof of the wall plaque that will be placed at the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. .

On the next two pages, you will find the tentative agenda and a registration form for the 17th Reunion of the USS Caliente Association in Norfolk, VA, Sept 22-25, 2011.

USS CALIENTE (AO-53) 17th REUNION
Thursday Sept. 22 – Sunday Sept. 25, 2011
The Marriott Norfolk Waterside



Reservations can be made at the Marriott Norfolk Waterside, Norfolk, VA by calling 800-874-0264 and identifying yourself as part of the USS Caliente Group. The rate is \$129.00 plus Norfolk city tax (8%), a Virginia state tax (5%) and a \$1.00 bed tax per room per night. The room rate is good for three days before and three days after the reunion dates on a space available basis. Reservations must be made by Sept. 9, 2011. As in the past, room availability will be at 4:00 PM on arrival day. An early check-in may be requested but some hotels are good about this and some are not. I don't think the hotel will be full on Sept. 22, so an earlier check-in should be OK.

AGENDA FOR THE REUNION

Thursday Sept. 22

- a) Hotel check-in
- b) 3:00 PM until ??? – Reunion check-in at the Hospitality Room – all hands are invited to join in as we catch up with shipmates, get (re)acquainted and share stories. Hors d'oeuvres will be provided from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM. A no host bar will be available (I'm always available to be hosted)

Friday Sept. 23

- a) Coffee, tea, juice and rolls provided in the Hospitality Room from 7:00 AM until 9:30 AM
- b) Free Time
- c) 7:00 PM - An optional three-hour dinner cruise of the harbor is offered. The cost is \$65.00 per person. The dinner is buffet style and staff will be available to help anyone who needs assistance. There will be a live DJ for your entertainment and dancing.

Saturday Sept. 24

- a) 9:00 AM – Annual business meeting; Coffee, tea, juice and rolls will be provided from 7:00 AM until 9:00 AM
- b) Free time until the banquet
- c) For those not interested in the dinner cruise on Friday night I could make arrangements for an optional two-hour luncheon cruise. The cost would be \$45 per person. The luncheon is buffet style.
- d) 6:00 PM – no host cocktails and pictures in the Banquet Room, Dinner will be served at 6:45 PM and will be followed by dancing to a DJ.

Sunday September 25th

- a) Farewells in the Hospitality Room; Coffee, tea, juice and rolls will be provided from 7:00 AM until 9:00 AM
- b) 12:00 PM – Hospitality room closes

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGN-UP SHEET TO:

Pat Hurton
14075 Kelsey Drive
Chico, CA 95973-9262
Phone: (530)343-4060
Email: gigandpat@digitalpath.net

Shipmates Name: _____

Spouse or Guests Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip: _____

Tel: _____ Yrs on Cal 19__ to 19__ Rate/Rank on Cal _____

Registration Fee: No. of attendees: _____ x \$125.00 per person = _____

Optional cruises: Please indicate whether or not you are interested in taking the optional cruises (costs included above; please do not pay for this now)

Luncheon Cruise: Yes _____ No _____ No. of persons _____

Dinner Cruise: Yes _____ No _____ No. of persons _____

If you are interested in these options I need to know as soon as possible so I can firm up the plans. If you are not going to mail in your registration immediately please call me, or email me, to indicate you interest or lack thereof. I will include one (or both) cruises in the final agenda and put the information in the June Pipeline. I will also include the payment arrangements for the options in the June Pipeline.

Please select from the following banquet entrees:

- a) Herb Roasted Chicken No. _____
- b) Roast Prime Rib of Beef with Herb Jus and Horseradish Cream No. _____
- c) Fresh Atlantic Salmon with Leeks and Lobster Butter No. _____