

# On People

by Hope Noah

**D**avid Sharps has led an interesting life since his childhood in the western part of Maryland. At Towson State, he was an athlete and a participating champ on the school's basketball and football teams. But since golf was his favorite sport, he decided to move to Florida, where he could play all year-round.

"I found work as a juggler," Sharps says, "and although I had serious thoughts about becoming a professional golfer, I decided that free-lance entertaining was for me."

When he transferred to West Virginia University, he decided to major in recreation program leadership and met Karen Lesile, a theater major. They combined their talents and established a variety act that they performed on cruise ships in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. While cruising, Sharps became interested in marinas and started perusing ships, harbors, ports and boats.

"I became fascinated with boats and had a great opportunity from the French government to study with master theater teacher, Jacques Lacoq, in Paris. During that time, a captain I befriended needed someone to take care of his barge while he went off to the Philippines. The barge was located right by the Louvre. I was the caretaker and loved the experience, and it was during that scholarship that we learned several theater styles, including the *comedia del arte*, the buffone, the old world clown and melodrama. Karen and I were among the small group Lacoq selected to stay for the second year of training. We formed the basis of a four-person company then, which was the beginning of my new show *Serious Foolishness*.

After the two-year program, the city of Paris invited Sharps to teach juggling, but he opted to return home to America, specifically to New York City. While stopping by the 79th Street Boat Basin, he was asked again to be a caretaker for a barge, this one owned by a film producer in North Bergen.

"Because I love the old tugs and barges, I bought the *Lehigh Valley Barge -79* and created a museum. I began to restore it by pumping out water and caulking the seams and I used my savings from the cruise ship days and hired artist/carpenter James Desmond Kovic to work with me as part of a team. We restored the deck house corner poster and the roof. We patched and repaired the hull and generally put it in fairly good condition. After the restoration, I

placed it on the Register of National Historical Places."

Back in the Sixties, we passed into an era where the covered barge became obsolete and in its obsolescence, it lost its function as an integral part of transportation and commerce. David Sharps' efforts to bring these restored tugs and barges into our culture have now become a reality and the museum has become a favorite tourist spot in the Hoboken area.



David Sharps

"'Tugs on the Hudson' for the Liberty State Park was a past exhibition and we also sponsored a college design competition for the creation of a waterfront museum based on the Todd Shipyards in Hoboken," he describes. "Captain Dick Forster's 1892 tugboat was among the six tugs displayed as an attraction for the community. Our tug and barge exhibition with a special summer series of programs in education, exhibition and entertainment took off this past summer. We had eight different speakers talk about the Port of New York and how it worked in its heyday. Another speech was on the Erie Lackawanna Terminal and still another concerned barges. The museum also sponsored exhibitions by local artists and functioned too as a gallery."

Today visitors are intrigued with the exhibit displayed in the museum of the history of barges and tugs. There's an informative videotape and several impressive photographs that tell the story of New York harbor life.

"We also had a jazz jubilee here and a show by my group, *Serious Foolishness*. Recently we had a *Clearwater Sail* spon-

sored by the **Hoboken Environmental Committee**, and an evening of old-time films sponsored by the **Hoboken Historical Museum**. In September, we were involved with an **Ethnic Food Festival** at Liberty State Park and a **New Jersey Terminal Centennial Festival** in Hoboken, and we're currently looking forward to giving group tours for schools and organizations. The barge is now available for catered events, entertainment parties and tugboat rides, too. In the future we'll sponsor an **Edgewater-to-Hoboken canoe race**. Someday, too, I hope to plan a reunion of tug and barge captains to get them together to share stories and photos."

David Sharps spends a good deal of his time entertaining and doing television commercials. Among his corporate clients is IBM, for whom he helped create an animated production to illustrate new home model computers. All of these projects are exciting and challenging, he says, but nothing he's ever accomplished in his life has meant more to him than the restoration and development of his barge and tug museum project.

Those who have visited this historical site are impressed with his efforts and with this enthusiasm toward art and culture here in our New York/New Jersey area.