



Silver Dollar City Publicity
(417) 338-8210/338-8207
Electronic release/images available:
chedrick@silverdollarcity.com

Showboat Branson Belle Goes Christmas Cruising with ‘Branson Baby Belle’

From Historic Banana Launch to Tugboat Power, Showboat Gets Creative

(Branson, Mo. 10-31-07) In what looks and sounds a lot like a great children’s storybook, Branson’s majestic *Showboat Branson Belle* has a tag-along -- or should we say, a tug-along, in time for Christmas cruises. A tugboat, dubbed the *Branson Baby Belle*, arrived from Florida two weeks ago to assist the largest ship ever built for a land-locked lake during temporary paddlewheel gear repairs.

“Visually, one can’t help but wonder which vessel is helping the other, as it’s the Baby Belle actually pushing the Showboat,” says Showboat General Manager Jim Moeskau. “With the Baby Belle weighing in at 16 tons, and the Showboat weighing 1250 tons -- or 75 times the weight -- it’s quite a ‘little engine that could’ helping the big boat.” Moeskau says one of the massive double paddlewheels that actually propel the boat is in need of a specialty gear piece that could take as long as 6 weeks to replace, so in the meantime, the Showboat crew had to get creative.

“When we learned how long it could take to fix the gear, we immediately began searching for a way to keep the Showboat cruising for our guests who are counting on that lake experience,” Moeskau says. “Tugboats have a history hundreds of years long of being the small vessels that help larger vessels all around the world. They are small but mighty, known for their reliability, efficiency and - first and foremost - maneuverability.”

After consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Showboat received tentative approval for operation via tugboat. “We found a tugboat for sale, bought it and shipped it to Branson. After a facelift and paint job, we launched it at White River Landing, began practice operations and then obtained final Coast Guard approval. Last week the Showboat began cruising again,” Moeskau says.

This is not the first time the Showboat has come up with an out-of-the-box

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solution to a problem. When the newly constructed Showboat was launched from its lakeside shipyard, rather than slide it into the lake on rails greased with oil, the crew used biodegradable mashed bananas.

With gear repairs expected within weeks, the Branson Baby Belle may not be needed for long, but the tugboat-powered cruises are extremely smooth and the Baby Belle is so small that most guests won't notice it at all, Moeskau said.

The 700-seat Showboat Branson Belle presents holiday cruises November 1 – New Year's Eve featuring the holiday *Showstoppers!* show, nationally-acclaimed comedian Todd Oliver and his trio of live talking dogs, an adagio dance team and a live band. Comedic magician Christopher James is featured on noon and Sunday cruises.

For cruise schedules and ticket information, call 800-775-BOAT or visit www.showboatbransonbelle.com.

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For interviews and/or digital images of the Branson Baby Belle, or for information and images on the Christmas cruises, call 417-338-8210/8207 or email chedrick@silverdollarcity.com.