The Friendship

For over 40 years The Friendship and her predecessor, the Melody Ann, have carried passengers on voyages around the Barnett Reservoir.

The boat belongs to Fr. Edward Balser, a Catholic priest who has served parishes in the Jackson area for over 50 years.

Fr. Balser was the priest at St. Jude’s Catholic Church in Pearl when the reservoir opened in the mid-1960’s. He had the idea to start a church ministry at the Barnett Reservoir.

Weekends would find him with a group of children swimming and enjoying the water. The demand soon outgrew the capacity of his small runabout and the idea to build a houseboat was born.

With friends and volunteers he built the Melody Ann, a 24 x 10 houseboat.
The Melody Ann was expanded 8 times to accommodate a growing demand from the church, finally the decision was to build a larger boat.

And a big boat was built, the Friendship I - a triple decker.

The Friendship I served the church and the community well but had a difficult life - it sank 3 times.

One of the episodes occurred when a group of Callaway High School students rushed to one side of the top deck causing it to sink. Weather was responsible for the other incidents. A TRN article about one of the accidents can be seen here.

Later, fire swept through the boat while moored at Main Harbor Marina, it was a total loss.

Fr. Balser promptly made plans for the Friendship II

Pontoons were constructed and moved to the parking lot at Madison Landing where Fr. Balser and a group of volunteers completed the boat.
The boat sits atop two 98' pontoons, it's powered by two 150hp Cummins diesel engines that can power the huge craft at speeds up to 12mph.

The Friendship is busy - about 110 trips a year, it's popular for parties, reunions and church groups.

Captain Danny Doty handles the pilot duties, both Danny and Fr. Balser are U.S. Coast Guard licensed Captains.

The Friendship II is located in Main Harbor and available for charters.

For availability and rate information call 601-862-3569.

Anonymous said...
The article on the "Friendship" brings back memories, had my High School graduation party on the Melody Ann some 40 years ago. So glad Father Balser is doing well.

July 18, 2011 at 6:57 AM

Anonymous said...
I have so many fond memories of the Friendship and Father Balser myself!
I hope he continues to be a light in this community!

July 18, 2011 at 10:03 AM

Lottie said...
ur 2 GOOD!!!We all appreciate all your time makin this REZ NEWS our daily news...lots of work for u. Lots of fun for me!! Keep up the good work! I read it everyday...instead of the Clarion Ledger! thanks, Lottieda
merck said...

ditto on everything Lottieda sed! thanks TRN

July 18, 2011 at 10:15 PM

Anonymous said...

Ah yes, the memories. My fraternity from Millsaps College chartered it around 1976-77 for a party. We had a great time and Father Balser told us never to come back.

March 19, 2012 at 10:35 AM

The Rez News is a private, hyperlocal blog, publishing news about Mississippi towns around the Ross Barnett Reservoir including Flowood, Ridgeland, Jackson, Madison and news from Hinds, Rankin, and Madison Counties in central Mississippi. Please notify us of upcoming events. We will be happy to publish information about them. Our email address can be found in the About Us section.