

MEMORIES

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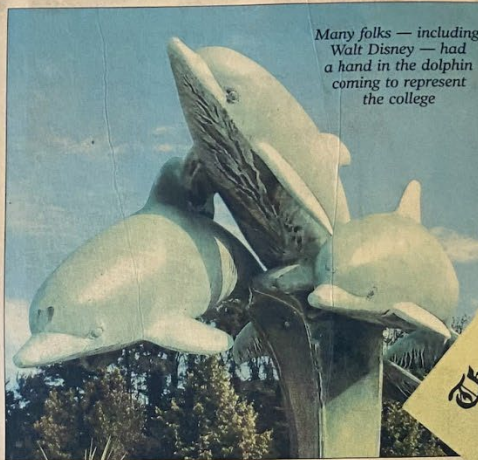
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Dick Boera's original design of the Dolphin, which was chosen as the Staten Island Community College mascot in 1957.



This is what the Dolphin looked like after Walt Disney worked on it. The Disney company gave the college permission to use the design on the condition that there be no association with the Disney name.



Mary folks — including Walt Disney — had a hand in the dolphin coming to represent the college.



What's in a name? The origin of CSI's mascot

You greet a friend, a fellow local sports enthusiast, and you say, "The Dolphins won a close one last night." Chances are your friend knows you're talking about a College of Staten Island team.



MIKE AZGARA

But when did the college adopt the marine creature as its mascot? And why?

It's a question with which we've been wrestling for several weeks. It started when the first publishers of the campus newspaper, established at Staten Island Community College, came across a story in the college publication, *Bridges*. The story, which appeared in 2005, implied that A. Richard Boera, then on the staff of SICC's business office, came up with the name.

In this version, the name was a translation of the Dauphine, the ship on which the Florentine explorer, Giovanni da Verrazzano, explored the eastern seaboard of the United States. In 1524, Verrazzano became the first European known to have entered New York Bay.

Dick Boera and his father, Al, one of Staten Island's top bowlers in the first half of the 20th century, operated the famous Old Mill in Grasmere. After the restaurant/catering hall burned in 1957, Boera joined the staff of college's business office. SICC would merge with Richmond College in 1976 to form the College of Staten Island.

A couple of old friends, Bruno Ripp and his brother Rudy, recalled naming the campus newspaper *The Dolphin*. At first, Bruno thought that was the school's first association with the fish. Later, however, Rudy conducted some research that showed the name was used for the SICC basketball team shortly before the first issue of the paper came out.

The Ripp brothers of the class of 1959 were among several students who created the newspaper in 1957. Some of the others were John Soldini, a retired vice president of the United Federation of Teachers and a past president of the Staten Island Democratic Association; Joe Fenley; John Sakel; Royal Raymond; John Calasibetta; Helen Armitage, and Vincent Esposito.

At the first meeting of the group, it was only natural that the newspaper's name would be discussed. "Not ever having been involved in a creation of this sort," Bruno Ripp said, "the first item on the agenda was, 'What shall we name the paper?'"

"I had been in the Navy as were Rudy Ripp and John Soldini," he continued. "We noted that Staten Island was an island and we thought it would serve our paper to distinguish it with the name of a sea creature who possesses great intelligence. Remembering the dolphins that swam across the bows of the ship when under way, we chose the name Dolphin."

But it now seems that another reason for adopting Dolphin was that it was already out there.

Rudy Ripp, who lives in New Brighton, was the first features editor of *The Dolphin*. "The school opened in September 1956 and I believe we started the paper in February of '57," he said.

"We were given a stipend of \$40 per semester to publish it."

Rudy went on to earn a doctorate from the City University of New York in political science but became a computer expert, editing a couple of computer trade magazines and later doing consulting work among other computer-related positions. He retired from the city Human Resources Administration where he had been a research analyst for 15 years.

Bruno, who lives in Warren, N.J., sent me the front page of the November 1957 (Volume 1, No. 3) edition with the masthead depicting a pair of dolphins flanking the SICC crest above the name, *The Dolphin*. The front page dealt with "the parking problem" (remember the school was in St. George), a recent dance at the Plaza Casino, West Brighton, and a State University bond issue on the upcoming Nov. 5 ballot. The paper urged its readers to vote for the bond issue.

EFFORTS THAT PRODUCED THE MASCOT

The article that appeared in the winter/spring 2005 issue of *Bridges* is an excerpt from a book, "What's In a Nickname: Exploring the Jungle of College Athletic Mascots," by Ray Franks. Franks wrote that it was Boera's "determined efforts" that produced the mascot. Boera, retired dean of business affairs at Lyndon State College in Vermont, was employed at the island school for 13 years, leaving in 1970 to take a position as dean at the New England school.

Franks based his version of the dolphin story on a letter Boera wrote to a friend. The letter is printed as part of the story. In it, Boera said the Student Association adopted school colors and a mascot in the spring of 1957.

"The dolphin was chosen because it was the name of the ship (Dauphine) on which the Italian explorer, Giovanni da Verrazzano, sailed into the Narrows, discovering Staten Island in 1524," he said.

Bruno Ripp was a member of the Student Association and claims it was formed the fall semester of 1957. So it could not have been the Student Association taking any action that spring, he indicated.

In his letter, Boera said he wrote to Walt Disney, recalling that the famous cartoonist had designed insignias for several military units.



Brothers Rudy, left, and Bruno Ripp.



SOLDINI

He asked Disney if he would do the same for the college. He enclosed his drawing of a design. After a good deal of time and negotiation, he reported, the college received permission to use a Disney design on the condition that the Disney name be dissociated from it. Boera doesn't claim credit for choosing the dolphin. "My only claim relates to the origin of the physical embodiment of the mascot in the form of artwork," said Boera, a long-time justice of the peace in Lyndon, where he was named Citizen of the Year in 1989.

He gained the impression that Verrazzano and his ship were the inspirations for the college mascot in conversations with school officers at the time — Walt Willig, president; Jim Fitzpatrick, dean, and Drew Esterly, fiscal officer. None of the three, he noted, "are with us any longer to defend themselves."

"Incidentally, I left the framed original Disney cartoon at the college when I moved to Vermont in 1970," he added. "Apparently it has disappeared — into someone's home! — since then. Even though I have the only actual photograph of the Disney-signed drawing, I sure would like to have the original returned by the current owner."

It's clear that the dolphin was adopted early on, shortly after SICC opened its doors. It was solidified as the school symbol when the Rips, Soldini et al made it the name of the campus newspaper. Boera was responsible for the mascot's design.

When it made its very first appearance and who was responsible for choosing it remains something of a mystery, but I can tell you it was in place in December 1956. I found a story in the *Advance* of Dec. 3, 1956 under the headline: *SICC Dolphins Start Friday*. Friday would have been Dec. 7.

That may have been the first time Dolphins was used publicly because the second paragraph said:

"The St. George team, to be known as the Dolphins, will be coached by Bob Diamond, well known to local sports fans, particularly those acquainted with the Curtis Community Center sports programs."

The first game ever was against the freshman team of St. Peter's College at the latter's home court in Jersey City. The Dolphins had an 11-game schedule that included four "home" games. SICC's home court alternated between New Dorp and Curtis high schools.

On Jan. 23, 1957, the headline on the first sports page read: *DOLPHINS SEEKING FIRST VICTORY*. The team, led by "big Jim Fitzgerald," played Long Island Agricultural and Technical College that night in Farmingdale, L.I. The Dolphins were trounced 76-48, their sixth straight loss.

Cathedral College of Manhattan handed the Islanders — 14 of the 15 SICC players were Islanders, by the way — their seventh straight loss on Jan. 17 at Curtis.

And so, for the moment, the story ends here. If anybody out there recalls who came up with the dolphin idea, let's hear from you.