

# Double duty for Stonington-Watch Hill ferry

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## **Ocean House will mix harbor cruises with Watch Hill-Stonington run**

The rebuilt Ocean House hotel has finalized plans to run a ferry service between Watch Hill and Stonington harbors this summer.

The service aboard the 50-foot Gansett, which resembles a lobster boat and carries 49 passengers, will run from mid-May through the end of October, according to Daniel Hostettler, the managing director of the Ocean House, which is set to reopen in May after a \$140 million reconstruction.

Passengers will be able to board the boat down the street from the Ocean House in Watch Hill Harbor and next to the Dog Watch Cafe at Dodson's Boat Yard in Stonington borough.

The three-day-per-week service will offer Ocean House guests along with Watch Hill visitors and residents a chance to spend part of the day in the borough while Stonington residents and visitors can spend the day in Watch Hill and its beaches without having to look for parking that costs \$20. The service is expected to benefit shops and restaurants in both villages.

"If you go to a New England seaside resort you're first question is 'Where's the boat?' " said Hostettler of the thinking behind the ferry service.

He said the idea for the ferry grew out of discussions about having a harbor cruise for guests. He said expanding the concept to the borough will give people the opportunity to sample restaurants there.

He said the service harkens back to the heyday of the original Victorian-era hotel, when boats and trains carried guests between Watch Hill, Stonington and Mystic. The Ocean House will also use the Gansett for three-day-per-week sunset cruises, a Sunday brunch cruise, a guided harbor and coast tour and trips to Block Island.

Within a month, passengers will be able to buy tickets on the hotel Web site at [www.oceanhouseri.com](http://www.oceanhouseri.com). Tickets will also be available during the summer at businesses in Watch Hill and the borough.

Hostettler said that work on the Ocean House is 80 percent complete and is on schedule for a May 17 opening. Today and next Tuesday, a job fair will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 to 7 p.m. at the Westerly Armory for those wishing to apply for the 200 jobs at the hotel.

Despite the recession, Hostettler said 10 of the 23 private residences in the hotel have either been reserved or are under contract. He said there will be an opportunity to sell more this summer as guests staying at the hotel get their first look at the property.

He said the hotel is taking about 100 reservations a week for the 49 guest rooms. He said that is expected to pick up by the end of April as people begin finalizing their summer plans.