

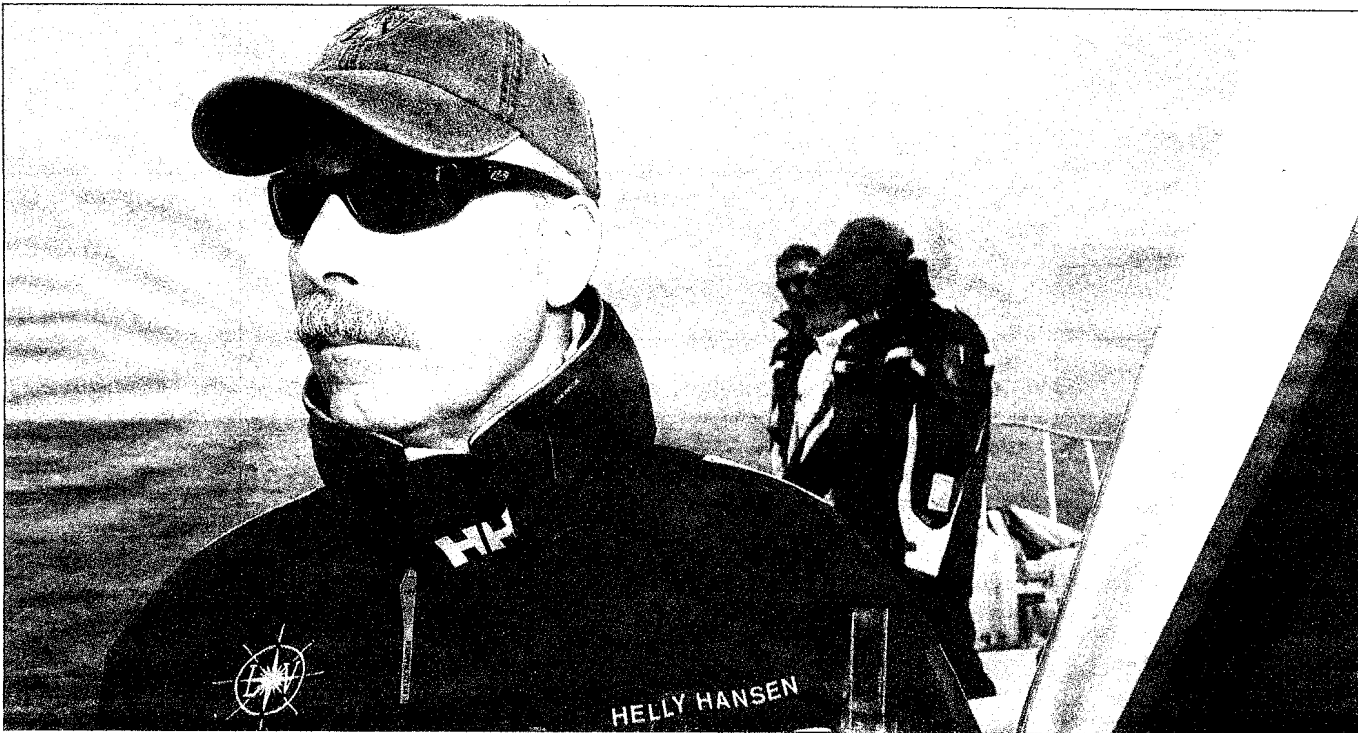
Newport *this week*

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From Newport to the Arctic



JASON EVANS

Newport filmmaker Sprague Theobald looks out across the deck of *Bagan*.

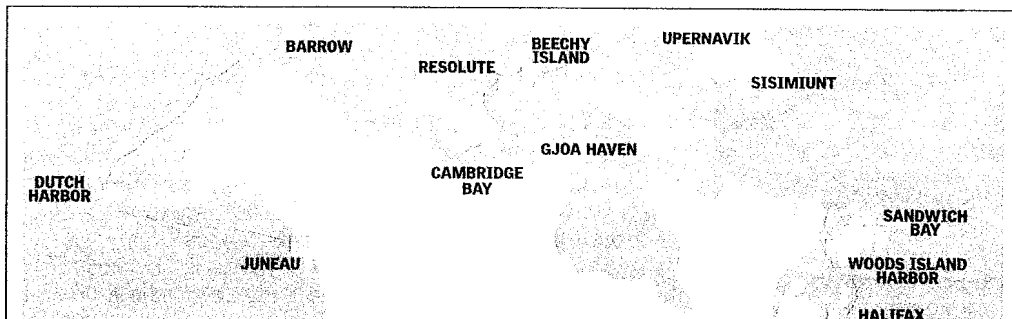
Filmmaker shows off new documentary, prepares for 15,000-mile trek

BY TED HAYES

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GOAT ISLAND — Sprague Theobald's cell phone buzzes nearly constantly, but he pushes it aside as he takes a break from his work and rests in a massive black leather chair on the bridge of his 57-foot Nordhavn yacht *Bagan*, docked on Goat Island.

The 57-year-old filmmaker from Newport, whose recent documentary "58 Harrison Lane" will be shown Sunday, June 7, at the Newport International Film Festival, says his life's been crazy recently, and he's probably not



The Northwest Passage film's route

Sprague Theobald and his crew plan to leave Newport around Monday, June 15, bound for the fabled Northwest Passage. The first stop will be in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and from there it's an all-out push for the Passage, with provisioning stops along the way. Mr. Theobald, who has traveled more than 40,000 nautical miles over the years, hopes to highlight the massive changes taking place in the desolate Passage as nations vie over the future of its abundant resources.

See **FILMMAKER** Page 3

FILMMAKER: Northwest Passage expedition will cover 10 months, 15,000 miles

From Page 1

far off. Apart from the upcoming showing of his film, which tells the story of a Connecticut school for troubled boys, the writer, producer and Emmy Award-winning filmmaker is preparing for his most ambitious documentary expedition yet: Taking *Bagan*, with four crewmates, all the way up through the fabled Northwest Passage, a sea route through the Arctic Ocean via a series of waterways in the Canadian Arctic archipelago that have vexed explorers for centuries. It's a trip that he expects will take a good 10 months and cover 15,000 miles, and he and his small crew plan to leave Newport on Monday, June 15. They'll bring tons of provisions, high-tech camera gear and plan to take a hard look at the Passage, which has become a political hotbed as no fewer than five nations wrangle over its future.

"It's going to be an amazing journey," said Mr. Theobald, who considers himself less a journalist, less a simple writer or filmmaker, than a storyteller.

That ability to tell stories, he said, made its presence known at a young age. Growing up in Virginia, he was dyslexic and was not a good student — "If I got a 'D' I was lucky" — but said he always had the ability to observe and distill words to their essence. It's a gift that served him well when he studied at Roger Williams College in Bristol, set-



JASON EVANS

Sprague Theobald (right) with his crew members aboard *Bagan*.

ted in Newport and California, and went on to become a producer and filmmaker. He won an Emmy for his "The 25th Defense," a look at the America's Cup, and is in post-production with "The Pearl Farmers of Fumaba." Through films, he says he attempts to show the good, and the bad, in the world.

"Something Leonard Bernstein said truly sums up how I feel about my work: 'I'm very humble about whatever gifts I've been given, but I'm not modest about the work that I do.'"

"58 Harrison Lane"

Most of Mr. Theobald's stories have something to do with the water, and he's logged more than

40,000 nautical miles covering stories and exploring the world's oceans.

But "58 Harrison Lane" is a departure. A few years ago, he ran into a friend who told him about a school The Woodhall School in Connecticut, a small secondary school for boys who have not experienced success in traditional educational settings. Most often, they have struggled because of learning differences such as ADD, ADHD, Asperger and Tourette syndrome and Dyslexia. The story struck a chord, he said, as he saw himself in many of the teens who attend the school.

In the 50-minute documentary, students, school administrators and parents discuss the miracles

Theobald sat on the bridge while first mate Dominique Tanton crouched in the aft lounge, rummaging her way through boxes and boxes of provisions. Stacks of equipment and gear were everywhere.

In about a week, *Bagan* will sail out of Newport and head for Halifax, Nova Scotia, where additional provisioning and fueling will take place. From there, it's an all-out push to the Northwest Passage, which is only navigable for a short window every year when the ice thins enough to allow safe passage.

At its heart, the film will explore the political and social challenges facing the Passage, which as a result of global warming has only been truly navigable for about a decade.

"This is truly one of the last great adventures," Mr. Theobald writes on his website. "The ice cap may be shrinking, but the Arctic is always perilous. The film will be a journey for the ages, an unprecedented view into a stark and unforgiving world."

Though Mr. Theobald's main goal is to produce a film on the journey, he'll be reporting regularly on the trip on his blog, which he'll post to from *Bagan*. To learn more on the journey, see www.northwestpassagefilm.com.

To get tickets for the 6 p.m. Sunday, June 7 showing of "58 Harrison Lane" at the Jane Pickens Theatre, stop by the ticket office at Empire Tea and Coffee, 22 Broadway, or go to www.newportfilmfestival.com. Tickets are \$10.

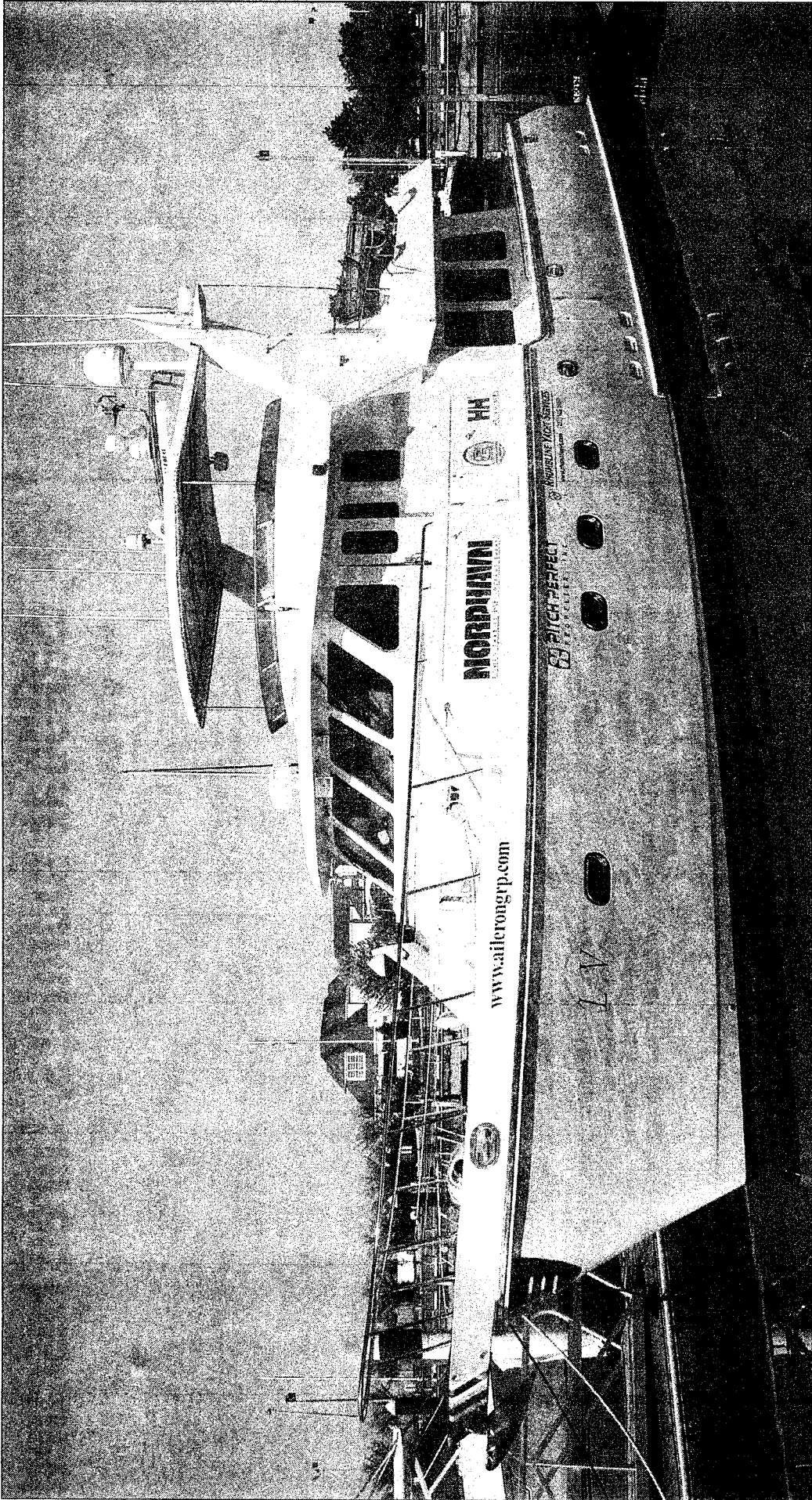
of Woodhall, and how this very special school changed all of their lives forever. Each and every young man brings a tragic history of failure with him to Woodhall, and yet they leave the school with wisdom, self-esteem and hope.

"I'm really excited about the film," he said. "I just wanted people to see this story. Now more people are going to know about their courage and their honesty."

Gearing up

After the showing of "58 Harrison Lane," Mr. Theobald will participate in a discussion on the film and movie making, and then it's back to *Bagan*. There is certainly much to do.

On a recent afternoon, Mr.



Bagan, a 57-foot Nordhavn, is being outfitted for a trip through the Northwest Passage, which is set to begin in less than two weeks and take 10 months to complete. Owner Sprague Theobald will sail with four crewmembers.