



## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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## **MERCURY, CHICAGO'S SKYLINE CRUISELINE**

*Fourth generation comes aboard with unique vision to expand iconic brand*

Mercury, Chicago's Skyline Cruiseline is Chicago's oldest, continuous sightseeing boat company showcasing Chicago's architectural, historical and maritime sights to millions of passengers. What began as a one-boat operation, founded by Portuguese immigrant, Arthur Agra, in the 1930s has now grown to two companies and a fleet of six vessels. Mercury is owned and operated by third-generation owner Bob Agra, Jr and his wife Holly. Bob Agra, III brings a fourth-generation energy and unique vision to the company along with his professional photography, marketing and social media expertise to reinforce and grow the company's strong digital presence in Chicago's competitive tourism marketplace.

Mercury operates from the Riverside Gardens dock at the lower level and southeast corner of the Michigan Avenue Bridge on Chicago's new Riverwalk and just three blocks north of Millennium Park.

The flagship company, Mercury, Chicago's Skyline Cruiseline owns and operates the *Skyline Queen* and the *Skyline Princess* offering daily and nightly commentated river and lake sightseeing cruises as well as specialty cruises.

The sister company, Chicago's First Lady Cruises owns and operates *Chicago's First Lady*, *Chicago's Little Lady*, *Chicago's Fair Lady* and the newest addition, *Chicago's Leading Lady* four custom-designed luxury vessels that are popular venues for small parties and events in the custom cruise market. They also comprise the official fleet for the Chicago Architecture Foundation Architecture River Cruise. The company also operates *Lady Grebe* a 1961-vintage mahogany cruising yacht targeting smaller private cruises of between two and six passengers.

### *Green Mission*

As stewards of Chicago's waterways for more than 75 years, Mercury, Chicago's Skyline Cruiseline recognizes its responsibility to contribute to the protection of the waterways. The *Skyline Queen*, *Skyline Princess*, *Chicago's First Lady*, *Chicago's Leading Lady*, *Chicago's Fair Lady*, *Chicago's Little Lady* and *Lady Grebe* use B11 biodiesel fuel. Mercury recycles used oil, engine batteries, beverage containers cardboard and paper; uses low-flush toilets and environmentally safe cleaning solutions; and promotes the use of public transportation to staff and crew. Mercury's brochures are printed on recycled paper. Additionally the lush Riverside Gardens dock, landscaped with many varieties of native plants, is a tourist destination on Chicago's Riverwalk with its shady shores offering exceptional camera shots of Chicago's famous architecture and annual Monarch Butterfly Garden, and is representative of the "green" initiatives the company has embraced.

### *The Beginning*

Portuguese immigrant Arthur Agra started the original Mercury boat company as a speedboat operation at Navy Pier in the 1930s. Building on that success, he began Chicago's first sightseeing boat tour company at the Michigan Avenue Bridge with a partner in 1941, ultimately establishing his own business with son, Robert, Sr. in 1943. Naming the new boat company after the Roman messenger of the gods, Mercury, Agra started tours with two wooden boats with capacity for forty passengers from a dock at the southwest corner of the Michigan Avenue Bridge. Mercury boat tours increased in popularity, especially in the days before air conditioning for those seeking a cool, lakefront respite from the hot, Chicago summers, as well as a fun and inexpensive summer activity.

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## **MERCURY – BUILDING BEYOND 75 YEARS**

### **add one**

Before long, to accommodate increased business, Agra introduced his first steel-hulled boat, seating 85 passengers. Eventually he added a new 95-passenger steel-huller, and that duo replaced the wooden fleet. In 1956, combining his nautical background with a keen sense of what would make a perfect tour boat; Agra designed the company's new flagship, a steel-hulled, 110-passenger boat that had its maiden voyage as Mercury, April 1956. Agra's son Robert, Sr. and wife Marion expanded their family business in boat tours by beginning Skyline Sightseeing in 1962 at a State Street dock. In 1973 the third generation of the Agra family, Bob, Jr., entered the business and remains as the current owner along with his wife, Holly, co-owner and vice president of marketing. Recently the fourth generation has begun working in the business focusing on the internet and social media division of the company.

### ***The Flagship Fleet***

Mercury, Chicago's Skyline Cruiseline's flagship sightseeing fleet includes the 125-passenger ***Skyline Queen*** and the 105-passenger ***Skyline Princess***, both built by Grebe Boats in Chicago in 1956 and 1959. The steel-hulled, twin-Detroit diesel vessels both feature open-air seating in the bow and enclosed seating in the stern. Art-deco style windows curve overhead in the enclosed area to offer a panoramic view of the city sights and less exposure to the sun. Two crew members, a captain and mate operate the tour and provide the commentary. Each boat has two rest rooms and carries 100% adult and 100% child life preservers.

Mercury is known in the Chicago tourism industry as a creator of unique, one-of-a-kind cruises that complement its 90-minute commentated cruises of the river and lakefront. Its specialty cruises include the Science is Fun Cruise; the Wacky Pirate Cruise, designed for children 3-10 and their families and the Mercury Canine Cruise, Chicago's only cruise for dogs and their companions. Mercury's tour commentators complete extensive training and present lively narration and answer questions throughout the voyage. Points of interest included in these tours are the Site of Ft. Dearborn, Chicago River lock, John Hancock Building, Navy Pier, Willis Tower, the Merchandise Mart, Buckingham Fountain and Chicago's Museum Campus encompassing the Adler Planetarium, Shedd Aquarium and Field Museum.

In 2005, Bob Agra added his dream boat, *Lady Grebe*, to the Mercury fleet. Over the years, Agra had been aware of this handsome, 1961-vintage cruising yacht custom built by the same Chicago-based shipbuilder, Grebe Shipyard that designed and built the ***Skyline Queen***. When the opportunity came, Agra added ***Lady Grebe*** to the fleet and markets the yacht toward high-end private cruises for two to six passengers.

### ***New Name and.... More Boats***

Building on the popularity of the company's daily sightseeing cruises, the Agra's embarked on ambitious growth plans to enter Chicago's competitive special event/party cruise market by offering exquisite floating venues which had Chicago's world-famous skyline as a backdrop. In 1991, they formed Chicago's First Lady Cruises and in that year christened ***Chicago's First Lady***, a \$1.2 million custom-built 225-passenger luxury vessel. ***Chicago's First Lady*** easily met and exceeded business projections within its first year of operation. Another key business strategy was the formation of a long-term collaborative partnership as the official yacht for The Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF) Architecture River Cruise. With the growth and popularity of both the private cruise business and the CAF architecture river cruise, the Agras increased their fleet with the addition of the 100-passenger ***Chicago's Little Lady*** in June 1999 to target smaller groups. The company would expand twice more to meet demand in its private and public businesses: in 2006, with the addition of the 125-passenger ***Chicago's Fair Lady***, and again in 2011, the twentieth anniversary of their partnership with the CAF, with the addition of the 300-passenger ***Chicago's Leading Lady***.

## **MERCURY – BUILDING BEYOND 75 YEARS**

**add two**

All four vessels are reminiscent of the 1920s luxury cruising yachts such as the former Presidential yacht, “Sequoia,” and are very popular with groups seeking unique and exclusive-use venues such as corporate events, weddings and rehearsal dinners. Each vessel provides both seated and reception-style dinners in climate-controlled main deck salons with a full-service bar and prep kitchen, and an open-air upper deck with bar service. All bathrooms are lined in marble and granite. The yachts are decorated in burgundy, slate and brown hues with mahogany-toned and brass sconces and appointments. Comfortable, upholstered chairs at round tables are positioned throughout the carpeted salons. Large, oblong windows encircle the salon providing all passengers with never-ending views of Chicago’s world-famous skyline.

### ***The Partnership - The Critically-Acclaimed Chicago Architecture Foundation Architecture River Cruise***

In 1993 Holly Agra, president of Chicago’s First Lady Cruises, forged what was to become a successful, long-term partnership with The Chicago Architecture Foundation and created the critically-acclaimed architecture river cruise tour which is one of the top tourist attractions in Chicago. The elegant and comfortable luxurious yachts operated by U.S. Coast Guard-certified captain and crew coupled with the expert commentary by the CAF-trained and certified volunteer docents proved to be a winning combination annually attracting visitors from around the world who want to see Chicago’s world-famous architecture and to hear the facts and fascinating stories behind those buildings.

**The Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing public interest and education in architecture and design. The Chicago Architecture Foundation pursues this mission through architecture tours, exhibitions, panel discussions, and youth and adult education programs. Current exhibitions are Chicago Model City and B Like Burnham. The Chicago Architecture Foundation is located at 224 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60604. For further information visit [www.architecture.org](http://www.architecture.org) or call 312.922.3432.

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