

Decades of craftsmanship: Merry Mac sailboat inventor discusses its origins

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DOVER - Ned McIntosh's hands have crafted more boats than he can precisely recall.

At a spry 92, he says he's built well over 1,000 sailing vessels, though even now, McIntosh, who is soon to be honored by the Great Bay Yacht Club he helped found some 50 years ago, isn't looking for the limelight.

Far from it.

"I really don't want anything to do with a news story, especially not if it has to do with me," he quipped, waving both hands as if to push the idea away.

But his impact on sailing in the Great Bay area is undeniable, as many of his vessels - most notably the stable, shallow-drafted Merry Mac vessel - have helped introduce several thousand locals to sailing. The Merry Mac, which was one of his first creations, is 13.5 feet long with a wide, flat bottom and a keel that cuts no more than 4 feet below the surface.

The Dover native has spent the better part of his life working in shipyards from Boston to Panama, and while at home, crafting elegantly simple vessels. He never has sought fame or wealth from his endeavors, often selling his vessels for the cost of building them.

Ask about his favorite boats, though, or how he managed to produce innumerable vessel styles for thousands of customers from a single-room work space in his barn, and his eyes light up.

"Would you like to see the boat we've had the most fun with over the years?" he asked, smiling as he walked into a narrow hallway that abuts his work area. "This is

the Micro Mac. We've had more fun sailing this one than anything else, I should think. I built it for my niece, but I've sailed it, with my legs dangling over the edge and my head out over the back."

Far from his typical boats, which include vessels up to 30 feet and nearly all sizes in between, the Micro Mac is about 4 feet long.

His signature Merry Mac came about after Philbrick Payne - an author and close friend in Dover - pressed him into building two sailboats - one for each of them. That was around 1950.

"He told me 'if you build two boats the same, we'll go out and race,'" Ned said.

"That's really how this whole thing got started." That "whole thing" refers to both Ned's private boat-building career and the start of the Great Bay Yacht Club.

On July 19, which is the 50th anniversary of the organization's incorporation as the Great Bay Yacht Club, some of the original group will join with new members for a celebratory gala and regatta.

McIntosh based the first of the two boats that started it all on a model of a boat a friend from Panama had built after moving to Clearwater, Fla.



"Clark Mills was building these 'Wind Mills' that were 15 feet, 6 inches long," Ned recalled, leaning back and running his hand over his white hair. "I took his basic idea and turned it into something a bit more stable and a bit shorter ... and I could only purchase boards in 14-foot lengths, so a 13-foot boat made financial sense." Things took off from there.

More people wanted boats to sail, and Ned was more than happy to supply them. I figured I'd built a limited life span into these boats. They're basic," he said,

grinning and shaking his head. But it didn't work out that way.

"Here we are today, with people still sailing the ones I made 50 years ago," he said.

Now, more than a half century after building the first of his "Mac" line of vessels, he's hoping to see both the vessels and their owners take to the water for the club's 50th anniversary regatta. "They were meant to be sailed," he said. "I hope everyone who has one in their barn, or garage, will fix them up and come on out for the race."

While it may not need saying, Ned - captaining a Merry Mac of his own - will be there when the starting gun sounds, sails tight and ready to go.

