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LIFESTYLE

Antique boats spend the weekend in Annapolis

By THERESA WINSLOW, Staff Writer

When Lee diPaula first spied his love, she was in bad shape.

See more photos.

Left alone, the 77-year-old boat would have probably sunk if someone tried to put her in the water.

Most other people would have walked away, but Mr. diPaula came running to the rescue.

He saw beauty hidden beneath the faded exterior of the 50-foot cruiser, an elegance that he's worked feverishly over the past nine months to bring to the surface. Mr. diPaula, 60, lives on *Duchess*, which is now docked at Sarles Boatyard and Marina in Eastport.

"When I stepped onboard, I knew (she'd be mine)," he said last week. "She needed someone like me and I knew it. I knew I could do her justice."

Mr. diPaula, an artist and designer, insists there's plenty more to be done, but *Duchess*, so named for her royal quality, gleams and glistens like a museum piece. He updated the engine, electronics and interior, but has tried to restore the exterior to its original condition. "Every day, I worked," he said. "Christmas, New Year's, my birthday. You name it, I worked it."

Mr. diPaula is still working, which is why his boat wasn't on display this weekend. But plenty of other vintage craft could be seen at the Classic Yacht Club of America's Flag Raising Rendezvous. A formal kickoff to boating season, the event at the Annapolis Yacht Basin was expected to attract 15 antique boats and more than 50 club members through today.



Alison Harbaugh — The Capital

Classic Yacht Club members Dick and Erica Lowery of Annapolis discuss antique boats while relaxing with Lee diPaula, right, on 77-year-old *Duchess*, the boat he's been restoring.

"We go all over the bay, but Annapolis is kind of a favorite place," said Chris Ulsaker of Delaware, fleet captain in the club and organizer of the event.

Overall, there are more than 85 boats in the 36-year-old club, generally located on waters all over the Chesapeake Bay. The majority of the owners live in Maryland.

A boat has to be at least 25 years old to be included in the club's roster, but a few are much older, dating back as much as eight decades. Jim Gartley of North East, the club's commodore, said most of the boats are from the '50s to the '70s. The vast majority are powerboats, but there are about a half-dozen sailboats in the club, too, Mr. Gartley said.

Club members are of all ages and backgrounds, but share an affection for antique boats. They tend to speak about their boats in the same way classic cars buffs discuss their rides. In fact, some of the club's members own both kinds of vintage vehicles.

"The boat is like a member of the family," Mr. Gartley said.

Lawrence "Shorty" Franklin, a longtime employee at Sarles, could certainly see why so many people prefer old boats. Last week he was working on *Temma*, a 1928 41-foot Rand & Thompson, and couldn't help but be smitten.

"I haven't seen anything like this in a long time," said Mr. Franklin, of Odenton. "It's beautiful; the way it's made, the way it's kept up. It's neater than a new boat. I'd like to have something like this. It'd be my pride and joy."

It's already the apple of its owners' eyes. Dick and Erica Lowery of Annapolis have had the wooden boat for two years. "She's just tender and nice," Ms. Lowery said. "You feel good in her."

When the Lowerys take *Temma* for a spin, they typically get lots of thumbs-up from other boaters. "Wooden boats are alive," Ms. Lowery explained. "Wooden boats have a soul."

Of course, that soul requires lots of attention. Like classic cars, vintage boats require constant maintenance and loving care. Their owners may have gotten them for a good price, but they've probably spent a good deal on repairs, too.

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Members explained that a new boat of similar size would cost a lot more and not have the same classic lines. At events, members often share the unique traits of their boats and swap helpful hints about maintenance.

"She's as good as any new boat on the market," said Steve Maloy of Annapolis, owner of a 1978 22-foot Chris-Craft named *McBabs*. "She's sweet. She's very nice."

Mr. Maloy and his wife, Anne McKenrick, got the boat about eight years ago. Like Mr. diPaula's boat, *McBabs* was in pretty bad shape when the couple first saw her. And again like Mr. diPaula, they've invested considerable time into its restoration and upkeep. It helps that Mr. Maloy is a marine mechanic.

"If I had to pay me to do this, there'd be no boat here," he said, glancing at *McBabs*, which is docked at the back of his house. "(Classic boats) are an ongoing project."

Mr. Maloy estimates he's put 500 or 600 hours of work into the boat. Most club members do at least some of the work on their boats themselves and have spent many years on the water, he said.

"Upkeep - there's a lot to it," he said. "But that's where the pride comes in."

Bonding with a boat

Miss Natalie and Eric Horst have known each other a long time, but only officially got together 3½ years ago.

Mr. Horst, a yacht broker on Kent Island, first saw the 46-foot Matthews when she was just a year old in 1971. He was 15 at the time, and doesn't remember exactly what captivated him, but the experience definitely left an impression.

Over the years, Mr. Horst owned many boats, but never that particular one. They reunited after he started looking around for a bigger boat. At the time, he had a 42-foot Matthews from 1959, and he'd always liked the manufacturer's designs and quality.

After deciding a 46-footer would be just the right size, he located four such Matthews boats around the country. When he researched their titles, he discovered that one of them was the very one he'd seen as a teenager. He decided to concentrate his efforts there and eventually purchased it.

"She's sort of unique and classic looking," he said. "She has very graceful lines."

But he joked that instead of making him feel young, being on *Miss Natalie* makes him feel old, given their long association.

Club member Gary Mazza of Kent Island has experienced the opposite effect with his classic. He's owned *Top Hatt*, a 1974 53-foot Hatteras, for about four years. "It makes me feel younger," he said.

Mr. Mazza, a tax attorney, admits the boat was "kept magnificently," but he restored it anyway after buying it. "There's never a bottom line that is enough," he said. "You could do more."

Mr. Mazza said he takes *Top Hatt* out at least once a week, provided everything is in working order.

"Absolutely, it's a thrill," Mr. Mazza said. "Finally, your dream has come true. You're in command of something you always wanted."

For more information on the Classic Yacht Club of America, visit the Web site at <http://www.classicyachtclub.org/>.

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