

Gig Harbor BoatShop invites you to become a boat builder for a day

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Behind the walls of the Eddon Boatyard's funky split-level building, the sounds of saws, hammers and drills hint at men busy at work. The smell of sawdust fills the air, and a fire burning in an old-fashioned wood stove in the corner keeps the large space surprisingly toasty from the icy winds that whip along the waterfront.

The Gig Harbor BoatShop's first Boat Builder for a Day class started March 3 under the instruction of Tom Regan, a veteran boat builder and owner of Grapeview Point Boat Works in Allyn.

Regan learned about the project when he participated in a small boat gathering at Eddon Boatyard.

"I thought it was a neat place," he said. "I used to teach these workshops in Grapeview, and this is such a great facility with good people."

Although the boat shop sponsors regular classes geared toward teaching boat-building skills, the Saturday class was the first in a series with a goal of completing a traditional Lake George 15-foot wooden rowboat.

"The idea is that the class will run until mid-September," said Guy Hoppen, Gig Harbor BoatShop president. "We hoped we could get it done and take it to the Wooden Boat Festival in Port Townsend. We realize it's going to take more days than just Saturday, so we've added on an evening class. We'd like to add on more sessions without wearing Tom out."

Dave Lester of Fox Island was on hand Saturday.

"I like building boats," he said. "Any time somebody's building a boat somewhere, I want to get involved."

Gig Harbor's Todd Vanderweyden joined the class, too. He volunteers at the boat shop and wanted to learn how to make a wooden boat.

The course costs \$50 per class, and participants can sign up to take as many classes as they want.

Hoppen said the BoatShop's website will list which stage of the course they will be teaching each week; people can jump on board whenever they want.

"I don't expect to see the same faces every time," he said. "I expect people to say, 'I've never steamed parts before, I want to try it.' It's an example of a new skill they can learn — there's no commitment."

The boat shop encourages visitors to experience the construction of a boat, even if they don't join the class.

"They don't have to participate — they can come watch what stage it's in," Hoppen said. "We're an active boat shop, not a museum."

Hoppen said since the community rallied to save the Eddon Boatyard, the Gig Harbor BoatShop's mission is to perpetuate a working waterfront.

"We want to interpret the building the way it's always been utilized," he said. "Besides the marina, we're the only boat repair shop in the harbor."

"There's still a lot of commercial fishermen around, and there's not a lot of boat builders left."

What sets the Eddon Boatyard apart, Hoppen said, is the fact that it still performs boat building and repair at the same site.

"There's not that many historic structures still being used for what they were originally built for," he said.

"That makes us somewhat unique. There's a lot of different heritage organizations, but they don't have the luxury of being a structure."

On the web

For more information about the Gig Harbor BoatShop's boat-building classes, visit www.gigharborboatshop.org.

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