

UNION NEWS

JOLTIN' JOE

Gone and back again

Local 152 Carpenters finish five-year boat restoration project

By Ryan Knapp

“When I asked him how hard it was going to be, the boat restorer told me that a boat is just a box with a pointed end,” said Rick Aldridge, Local 152 president and spearhead of the *Joltin' Joe* project. “Well, it was a hell of a lot more than a box with a pointed end.”

For the past five years, a team of about six Carpenters and a retired shipwright have been restoring *Joltin' Joe*, the 1947 22-foot Chris Craft Runabout awarded to Joe DiMaggio by New York Yankees fans. Carpenters Local 152 has teamed up for the project with the City of Martinez and the Diablo Chapter of the Sons of Italy. After a half-decade, \$75,000 and countless pre-work breakfasts at the Copper Skillet, the Local 152 volunteers sank the last bronze screw last month, putting an official end to a couple of decades of disrepair.

When asked about the state of *Joltin' Joe* the day they started scraping paint off the wood, Aldridge joked that the boat wasn't worth the \$3 in gas it would take to burn it. But he and the rest of the crew knew it was worth much more, which is why they spent so many Saturdays sawing, sanding, hammering, painting and

scrounging materials.

“In five years we've probably missed five days,” said John Wendt, a member of the Sons of Italy who initiated most of the fundraising.

FROM ROTTING WOOD TO RICHES

The story starts with Joe DiMaggio's birth in Martinez in 1914 to a family of fishermen. But DiMaggio loathed the smell of dead fish, and did whatever he could to avoid the family profession. In most cases, it was baseball. He entered the majors in 1936, and cemented his place in sports history in 1941 with a 56-game hitting streak. He was awarded the boat on Joe DiMaggio Day, October 1, 1949 to recognize his achievements.

“[DiMaggio] brought the boat back and gave it to his relatives. They used it for fishing, then they gave it to the city of Martinez,” Aldridge said. “The City painted it and made it look nice. And in 1992, they put it on a pedestal... out in the elements, where it fell into disrepair.”

Cue the City of Martinez Public Works Director Dave Scola, who had the boat taken out of the weather and stored in a warehouse. Scola then reached out to Don Curtis, a retired shipwright and boat restorer who had the know-how for the project. Originally brought in to oversee the project, Curtis was much more hands-on, Aldridge said, adding, “I can build a house, an apartment or a high rise. But I had no idea how to build a boat.”

The first phase of the project was a flurry of paint scraping and hardware removal; much of the wood was either warped, rotten or both. Next, the crew had to create supports for the



Joltin' Joe won “Most Improved Boat” honors in the Wooden Boat Classic in Tahoe, California this summer.



Among the Carpenters who worked on the *Joltin' Joe* were, from left, Efrain Ramirez, Ruben Hernandez, Marco Gonzalez, Ernie McCary, Alex Colaco, Don Curtis, Greg Clark, Bill Heinrichson, Richard Ortiz, Jaime Estrada, Ron Tapia, Darrin Moravec, Richard Jauretche, Wilbur Peet and Andre Tyson.

boat to rest on, with specific pressure points to warp the hull back into shape. Rebuilding the boat was one thing, but locating original parts was another. The hardware on the boat is entirely original, down to the antique dashboard wiring. And original, Chris-Craft-branded leather was purchased from another boat owner after his boat burned, leaving him nothing but the immaculate upholstery he had stored in his house.

A few heroes worked on the boat longer than anyone, Aldridge said. Among them were Terrel Lee and Ernie McCary, now retired. And at press time, Danny Russell and Richard Lengyel were still working to get the boat ready for the Lake Tahoe Concourse d'Elegance in August.

“It's something that is going to live forever,” Aldridge said.