



MAKING a SPLASH



A new model ship gallery in Marystown is helping preserve the area's shipbuilding heritage, while offering a world-class destination.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LINDA BROWNE







YOU CAN ALMOST TASTE THE SALTY SEA SPRAY

as you step into the Marystown Model Ship Gallery. Scanning the space, the 100-plus models spread out over the approximately 10,000-square-foot showroom inside the Marystown Mall is an impressive sight to behold. But once you take a closer look, that's when the "oohs" and "aahhs" really come out.

While they're much smaller than their real-life counterparts, these tugboats, trawlers, warships, minesweepers, schooners and other vessels are truly works of art. (There's even a remote-controlled replica of the fictional submarine *Nautilus*, complete with a tiny Captain Nemo, from Jules Verne's classic novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.) From stem to stern, the level of detail gone into their creation from master model builders is really remarkable.

"This particular ship here was built to race the *Bluenose*. That was her whole idea of construction. She's

American built and Ben Pine from Belleoram was hired to skipper her... all the schooners had to be fishing commercial schooners before they qualified to race," explains Mike Brennan, pointing to a magnificent model of the two-masted *Gertrude L. Thebaud*, which defeated the legendary *Bluenose* to win the Lipton Cup in 1930 off Gloucester, Massachusetts. As chair of the Marystown Model Ship Gallery and Marystown town councillor, he's just one of the people buoyed by this new addition to the area.

While each model is impressive in its own right, the star attraction of



this vast, approximately \$1.6-million collection is HMS *Hood*. (Known as the largest, heaviest and fastest armoured warship of its time, it was sunk by the German battleship *Bismarck* during the Battle of the Denmark Strait in 1941, killing all but three of the 1,418 crew, including brothers George and Arthur Brewer, 22 and 21 respectively, of Burin, NL.) Rodney Henriksen of West Vancouver, BC, spent 17 years painstakingly building the over 13-foot-long replica, which sits just a stone's throw from the model of its infamous adversary.

There's only one other model of the *Hood* of this size in the world, Mike says, housed at the Glasgow Museum of Transport in Scotland.

"We own 50 per cent of that inventory globally. It's amazing what we have compiled here in such a short time," he says.

The bulk of this world-class collection came from the late Vancouver architect John Keith-King. When he passed away in 2015, his collection, consisting of around 85 model ships, was put into storage and began collecting dust. That is, until one of



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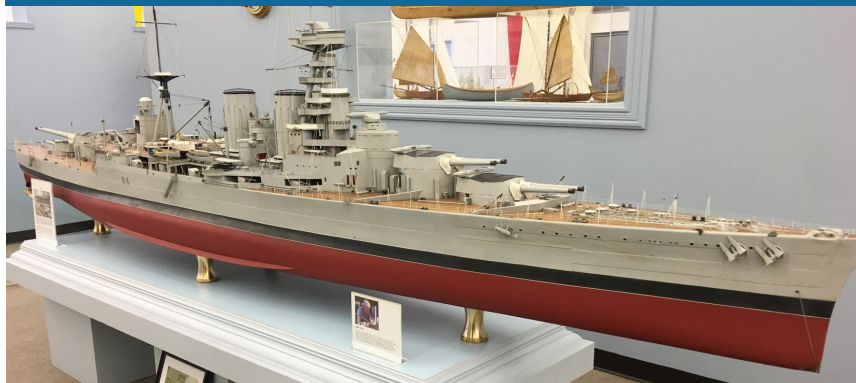
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Jim Miles stands behind the 13-foot replica of HMS Hood.



Keith-King's friends, tasked with finding the models a new home, learned about Marystown.

"The Keith-King family wanted the collection to go to a smaller town, but a town with some connection to the sea and fishing and ship-building, and that sort of thing. And of course, we fit neatly into that category," says Jim Miles, who, along with Kerry Wiscombe, was initially brought on board to help repair some of the models and now works as a tour guide.

"And a little while after that, two tractor trailers show up, crammed with this collection," which has since grown to include model ships loaned and donated from people around the local area and province.

"It has to be one of the very largest collections of model ships in the country," Jim adds.

"It's a singular experience. It's not something you're going to see in every town."

Of course, moving the collection thousands of kilometres across the country wasn't completely smooth sailing. While the models were transported in good condition, with no major damages, there was some meticulous cleaning and repairs required to get them shipshape, which Jim and Kerry, along with retired shipyard worker Art Walsh, dived happily into headfirst.

"He spent 30-odd years building the big ones and now he's having a bunch of fun building the small

ones,” Jim says about Art. “He’s a real sweetheart... but he’s physically a big guy, like he’s six foot two and he’s got this big set of hands. But when you see him crouched over the sewing machine sewing a set of sails or something, he can do the most delicate things.”

And when it comes to handling this collection, Jim says, steady hands are a must.

“We had this particular ship; it’s about two metres long, I guess. And we took off the case and lifted it carefully and laid it on the table, and we’re working at it. And Kerry was flipping through the assessment sheets and he said, ‘Jim? That’s valued at \$50,000.’ So we didn’t look at the sheets after that because your hands were steadier when you didn’t realize how valuable some of these were,” he laughs.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

Just as the gallery was preparing to launch in the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, taking the wind out of everyone’s sails. In May 2021, it finally flung open the doors, welcoming mostly local staycationers before eventually seeing visitors from elsewhere in Atlantic Canada and the rest of the country.

This past summer, Jim and company also repurposed some of the collection’s shipping materials to create wooden ship kits, and hosted classes for local youth at the gallery’s workshop. “Everybody went home dirty and happy,” Jim laughs.

It’s just one of the ways the gallery hopes to extend their reach and involve the wider community. Other potential plans include pairing up wooden-boat builders in the area with veterans around the peninsula



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to pass on these traditional skills, while giving veterans the chance to relax and spend some time together. “A lot of the guys that know how to do this are getting older, and when they go, their skills go with them,” Jim says.

So far, the gallery has received a boatload of support and made connections with other local groups including the Provincial Seamen’s Museum in Grand Bank, where the gallery held an exhibition.

“These days, it’s not about standing alone... so we established some partnerships with some like-minded folks, and we may very well be able to cross-fertilize some ideas,” Jim says.

The gallery also helps anchor the

The museum features samples of boats throughout history, from wooden sailing ships to WWII submarines and even Jules Verne’s fictional *Nautilus*.





The museum also highlights the Burin Peninsula's boat-building heritage. Here Mike Brennan points to the *Penneyhope*, a vessel built in the Marystown Shipyard

area to its shipbuilding heritage, which goes back over a century, starting at Sandy Point and Stapleton's Point before moving on to the Marystown Shipyard (which opened in 1967 and saw the construction of more than 50 vessels). One corner of the gallery is dedicated to some of these locally made ships.

"Marystown is known for building a lot of big ships, and nice ships, too. The *Alberto Wareham* was the biggest schooner probably built," says Mike.

"And that was the biggest schooner, not just in Marystown, but the biggest schooner ever built in Newfoundland," Jim adds. "She was a brute. She was like, literally twice the size of everything else."

As the two swap stories, their enthusiasm and pride in the collection and the area's history is evident. The way they see it, a rising tide lifts all boats, and they hope the gallery – open May to December – will help attract more visitors to the Burin Peninsula.

"For economic opportunities for the region, and for tourism, having this display of model ships is a big drawing card. Because Marystown

has been an industrial town... and it was only in the last number of years we started to realize, hey, we're letting an important component of who we are, as a community, get lost," says Mike, who worked in the Marystown Shipyard as a young man.

As the plan is to eventually rotate some models to keep things fresh and interesting, Jim says, they're always keen to hear from those with a model ship to loan or donate.

"We've ran into... roughly a dozen; and most of these were decent-sized models, anywhere from two feet to four feet... and the situation was almost always the same story: 'My granddad or my dad or my great granddad built this. It's family history. We love it. We love Pop... We don't want to throw it out, we don't want to sell it, but we got no room for it,'" Mike says.

"So here's a chance to get it fixed up and looking good and put on display so people can admire the skill and the time and the love that Granddad put into his work. And it's there if they want to take the kids and [say], 'Look - your granddad did that.'" 📧