



PRESS RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Restored Skipjack donated to Ocracoke Non-Profit, Ocracoke Alive Inc.



Photo by Ocracoke Alive

The Skipjack Wilma Lee, a restored 47 foot, 20 ton, sloop-rigged, centerboard sailboat will soon become a new educational and cultural attraction on Ocracoke Island. The 70 year old boat has been donated to the non-profit organization Ocracoke Alive Inc, which is dedicated to promoting arts and culture on this Outer Banks island.

One of only a few remaining Chesapeake Bay Skipjacks, the Wilma Lee is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The donor and restorer of the boat, Mr. Herb Carden, of Sandy Point, Virginia, had been looking for a new home for his boat for some time when he first opened up a dialogue with Ocracoke Alive last fall.

Carden, along with Master Shipwright John Morganthaler, has completed over twenty boat restoration projects, but the Wilma Lee is the one he shows with the most pride. "My goal for rebuilding the Wilma Lee was to do exactly what I have done. That is to see it donated by Liz [Carden's wife] and me, where it will be used to educate the history of its past," Carden said. "I trust that all of you in control of Wilma Lee will make sure that she is used for educational purposes to all the young and old who might have

the privilege to sail on her," he added. One of Carden's special hopes for the Wilma Lee is that it will inspire young people to learn a love of boats and boating.

Though skipjacks are historically associated with the Chesapeake Bay oystering industry, they eventually made their way south, into the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds. And in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, North Carolina boat builders were copying the famous design. Skipjacks were a single purpose boat, designed and built for oyster dredging, though Carolina watermen also used Skipjacks for harvesting she-crabs, and hauling lumber and cargo. They are hard working boats with massive sails intended to generate the power necessary to drag a heavy dredge and to work in low wind.

Ocracoke Alive president David Tweedie said of the gift, "We are overwhelmed by Mr. Carden's generosity. This is a very valuable gift, but it is also a huge responsibility for Ocracoke Alive."

Ocracoke Alive is an Ocracoke-based non-profit organization that is best known for the production of the Ocracoke Festival and the Ocracoke School. Tweedie said that Ocracoke Alive will do everything possible to carry out Mr. Carden's hopes for his boat, "to make The Wilma Lee's presence in Ocracoke an educational and cultural attraction that will draw tourism to the island and to the Ocracoke waterfront."

According to Ocracoke Alive treasurer Tom Pahl, "It will cost about fifteen to twenty thousand dollars a year just to keep the boat in the water. Plus it will be necessary to plan for repair and maintenance contingencies that will no doubt come up in the future. It is a boat, after all and a wooden boat at that."

Pahl explained that Ocracoke Alive agreed to accept the boat only after an exhaustive study of costs and potential income. "The only way we are able to accept this gift is if the boat can generate its own income," Pahl said.

To that end, Ocracoke Alive will lease the boat to local sailboat captain Rob Temple. Temple has been sailing the passenger schooners Windfall and Windfall II continuously out of Ocracoke for almost twenty years. The lease agreement will require that a percentage of the Wilma Lee's income be returned to Ocracoke Alive to support and promote educational and cultural programming connected to the Wilma Lee as well as other Ocracoke Alive events and programs.

The Wilma Lee's activities will include free programs for the Ocracoke School and off-island school groups, plus a regular schedule of free dockside events, such as historic talks, storytelling and boat tours, allowing curious visitors to learn about the long history of wooden boats and commercial fishing in and around the waters of Ocracoke.

"Our hope is that this boat will draw people of all ages and interests to the waterfront, in much the same way that the Elizabeth II brings folks to Manteo," Tweedie said. "We want this to benefit everyone – we want visitors to have a memorable experience, we want to advance the notion of Ocracoke as a destination for those with a taste for maritime history and we want to bring more people down to the waterfront."

The Wilma Lee was built in 1940 on the Maryland shore. It is one of the younger boats in the fleet of around 32 skipjacks still afloat. Over the years, about 800 of these boats sailed the oyster-laden waters along the Maryland, Virginia and Carolina shores. The last remaining North Carolina-built skipjack was built in Rose Bay (Hyde County) in 1915. Named the Ada Mae, it's now used for educational purposes as part of Carolina Coastal Classrooms in New Bern, NC.

The skipjack Wilma Lee is expected to make its debut entrance into Ocracoke harbor around the Easter holiday. For more information about the Wilma Lee and Ocracoke Alive, go to www.ocracokealive.org.

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