

Florida Maritime Museum celebrates 10 years of preserving the past of Cortez Village | Bradenton Herald

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By Marty Clear
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BRADENTON HERALD

There's little that Dick Estabrook likes better than his volunteer work.

"I love it when people walk through the door," Estabrook said. "Their eyes light up. They say 'I never knew this existed.' You get people coming in from out of the area, even from other countries, and you get to share with them the history of Cortez."

Estabrook has been a volunteer docent at the Florida Maritime Museum in Cortez since it opened. That was almost exactly 10 years ago, on Dec. 8, 2007.

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The museum, on 119th Street in Cortez, is devoted to celebrating and preserving Florida's maritime heritage. Permanent exhibits include an expansive collection of shells from the Gulf of Mexico, scale models of ships that played a role in Florida's history and a library of books on maritime topics.

For its anniversary celebration, the museum is inviting the public to create pieces for a new exhibit.

The idea, supervisor Kristin Sweeting said, is to encourage people to come to the museum and craft a personal piece of art that evokes what the word "maritime" means to them. The museum provides 3-by-3-inch canvas boards, plus some art materials — glue sticks, markers and the like — and invites visitors to express their thoughts on the subject in pretty much any way they think best. Some use words, some use drawing, some use photographs.

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Florida Maritime Museum volunteer Dick Estabrook

The first few creations already showed a lot of variety.

"There's one about sustainable seafood, there's one about family and fishing," Sweeting said. "Someone brought in a photograph of his son fishing. Maybe it's himself fishing when he was a boy fishing, I don't know."

Visitors can share their stories by coming to the museum through Dec. 16. The plan, she said, is to save all the contributions and display them in an exhibition next year.

The museum is in the business of looking back, but a lot of Sweeting and other museum officials are paying a lot of attention to the future right now.

About a year ago, the museum inaugurated its Folk School, which is basically a series of classes aimed at preserving traditional crafts, arts and practices. The classes include everything from building and repairing cast nets to storytelling and memoir-writing.

All we're waiting for is the fire marshal to tell us that it's safe to let people in.

Mike Finney, on the Burton Store building.

Classes are currently held in the museum itself, but the limited space limits the school's potential. Soon the school will move next door to the Burton Store, a recently restored 19th century building that was the general store for Cortez Fishing Village in the 1890s.

The ground floor of the Burton Store will be devoted to the school, which will allow for enhanced programming. The upper floor will be used mostly for storage.

Like the museum building itself, which was originally built as a school, the Burton Store had needed extensive repair. Mike Finney, the board chairman of the Friends of the Florida Maritime Museum, said the repairs are largely completed, and the Burton Store should be welcoming a new class of Folk School students soon.

"The work is done," Finney said. "All we're waiting for is the fire marshal to tell us that it's safe to let people in."

Details: Tuesday-Sunday 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Florida Maritime Museum, 4415 119th St. W., Cortez. Free (donations accepted). [941-708-6120](tel:941-708-6120), floridamaritimemuseum.org.

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