

| Chris Olson

Marc Nugent and Ryan Valerio spend fall, winter and the early part of spring working on boats so they can sail during the warmer months.

Nugent is owner of Manitou Boatworks and Engineering, and Valerio is his "steel specialist." The two-man crew is currently completing its survey of the fish tug Joy at the Northport Bay Boatyard annex on N. Shore Drive in Northport.

"We work as much as we can get during the fall, winter and spring so when sailing season comes we can be out on the water," Valerio said.

When the Fishtown Preservation Society made arrangements to buy Fishtown in Leland from the Carlson family in 2007, the purchase included the two historic fish tugs, Joy and Janice Sue. The Janice Sue celebrated its 50th birthday this year,

while the Joy was built nearly 28 years ago. According to Dan McDavid, a Fishtown Preservation Society board member, the tugs had been inactive and moored at Fishtown for the past four years prior to being moved in October.

"It has always been our intention in preserving Fishtown to keep it as a viable economic force not just for tourism but for commercial fishing as well," said Craig Miller, president of the society. While the group has been successful enough in fundraising to secure a mortgage on the property, Miller said it will always be a bit of a battle raising enough funds to make payments while providing for the maintenance and operation of the historic area.

Last spring, the society began a project to make the two fish tugs safe for fishing on Lake Michigan. Nugent and Valerio were brought in to identify mechanical, electrical, structural and safety issues that needed addressing to make the tugs seaworthy. Once Manitou Boatworks completed the initial survey, McDavid said the society hired a company out of Frankfort, The Boat Doctors, which specializes in on-site marine maintenance and repairs.

"It took most of the summer to get the two vessels seaworthy enough to make the trip and receive appropriate insurance coverage," he said.

The Coast Guard conducted an on-site inspection on Sept. 22 and cleared them for the journey from Leland to Northport Bay Boatyard docks. McDavid said the trip around the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula took 3½ hours in choppy water.

The Joy and Janice Sue have been at the Northport boat repair shop since early October. McDavid said work on the metal-hulled tugs started intermittently since the fall is a busy time at the boatyard. Now, however, Don Thyer, one of the Northport Boatyard owners, and his crew are busy restoring the Janice Sue.

"The hull on the Janice Sue from the waterline down is a quarter-inch thick and when we got her indoors after the sandblasting, you could see how pockmarked the metal was," he said.

McDavid, who chairs the preservation society's boat committee, said Pro-Tech Environmental and Construction Services of Grand Rapids was hired to sandblast metal hulls inside and out. Since paint on the hulls is lead-based, the firm had to construct a temporary, fully contained and environmentally safe structure on which to remove the paint and properly dispose of it. The structure sits outdoors and in thick plastic sheeting attached to two-by-four wood planks.

Miller said workers have to wear plastic bio-hazard suits and respirators over their nose and mouths.

"Not only do they have to bag up all the paint flanks and wear the suits, but when they leave the immediate work area, they have to shower. Imagine having to shower outdoors in weather like this," Miller said.

The shower is set up inside an enclosed area and is the entrance and exit way into the boat work area.

The Janice Sue has already undergone sandblasting. Workers at the Northport boat yard are applying the bottom two coats of epoxy to the outside of the hull. Jerry Palmer, who is working with McDavid and Miller on the boat committee, said Thyer and his crew repaired any damage or rust they found.

David Muller, a 10-year worker at Northport Bay, was busy last week applying a second coat of marine paint to the hull of the Janice Sue. Another coat of epoxy may follow.

"If we had not had this work done, these boats would've lasted about two maybe three years before they would've been beyond repair," Miller said.

The hull inside and out of the Janice Sue will be repaired and refinished and be ready for fishing by mid-spring of 2009. Miller said the wood cabin of the boat won't be restored for another couple of years. "We need to research the kind of wood that was used and make it historically accurate," he said.

Nugent and Valerio are finishing their survey work on the Joy. They have recommended improvements to the existing support structures to make the vessel more sturdy. Once repairs are done, the ship will also undergo sandblasting and be painted and epoxied over the winter.

"We want to have it in the water and fishing by March," McDavid said. The preservation society has a contract with a commercial fisherman based in Escanaba who will operate the fish tugs this spring and summer.

The society is in the process of fundraising to pay for the work with the goal of raising \$175,000.

"Our need is ongoing, as are the needs of a lot of non-profit charities," Miller said.

Anyone interested in donating funds to the project or to the overall goals of the society may send a check made out to the Fishtown Preservation Society to: FPS, P.O. Box 721, Leland, MI 49654.



JERRY PALMER, DON THYER and Craig Miller (bending over) look at the bottom of the hull of the fish tug Joy, one of two historic boats being restored to their former glory as part of the Fishtown Preservation Society's efforts to preserve Fishtown in Leland. Thyer is one of the owners of the Northport Bay Boatyard, where the two metal-hulled vessels will be restored over the winter.