

Floating art works dot Cortez shore

By Cindy Lane

SUN STAFF WRITER
clane@amisun.com

CORTEZ — Balmy weekend breezes filled reddish brown and linen-hued sails, whisking them gracefully around Sarasota Bay during the Fourth Annual Great Florida Gulf Coast Small Craft Festival.

Some were sailing kayaks, whose handmade hulls and paddles sported different shades of wood in geometric patterns. Some had hand-caned seats finer than the dining room chairs in the most prestigious homes of the late 19th century. In others, real hemp rope was precisely

wrapped around gleaming bright-work for a touch of old world authenticity.

All were floating works of art, as evidenced by several painters who stationed themselves on the Cortez docks to capture the fluttering sails on a different sort of canvas.

Many of the boats were built by hand by volunteers in the traditional wooden boatbuilding program at the Florida Maritime Museum at Cortez under the guidance of master boatbuilder Bob Pitt, a straw-hatted Cortez mainstay with a nautical story always at the ready.

Saturday, he explained that a woman's rhinestone-clad, high-heeled, size six shoe with a telephone number on the sole was on display in the hull of the Esperanza as a conversation starter. The red, gold and green boat, with a Cuban flag carved into the tiller, a 1958 Cuban centavo under the mast foot and a past as an authentic Cuban refugee boat hardly needed the prop.

Also popular was the Lizzie G, the pride and joy of craftsmen from the boatshop at Historic Spanish Point in Osprey.

Lilting on the breezes were the strains of sea shanties, the work songs sailors of yore used to set a rhythm for hoisting sails and other tasks, courtesy of the Cortez chorus known as the Main Hatch Motleys.

Some participants who didn't want the weekend to end set off on a post-festival camping trip with no particular destination or schedule, known by the nautical term "messaging about." Watch for them sailing by a shoreline near you.



Leon Frost demonstrated net mending techniques at the Fourth Annual Great Florida Gulf Coast Small Craft Festival last weekend in Cortez. What makes the holes? "Mostly rats," he says.



Jim Meklar, left and Pat Ball hoist the sail on the Lizzie G, a traditional wooden boat they built for Historic Spanish Point in Osprey.



Handmade wooden kayakers are as much works of art as they are recreational boats.

SUN PHOTOS/CINDY LANE



Above: The two-masted Egret attracted attention as one of the largest boats at the festival, which featured traditional wooden sailing and paddle boats, many built by hand by volunteers in the boatbuilding program at the Florida Maritime Museum at Cortez.

Left: Bradenton artist Susan Covert took full advantage of the beautiful weather and the handmade boats on display to create a new painting. The reddish brown sails, known as tan bark, are her particular favorite subject.