

The Lawson Center's Boat Restoration Crew Wins Prestigious President's Choice Award

When Andy Robinson and Tom Calalesina, volunteers at The Lawson Boating Heritage Center on Chautauqua Lake, brought the refinished 1939 Century Sea Maid "Little Dipper" to the 44th Annual Niagara Frontier Antique and Classic Boat Show to display it, little did they know that they would walk away with the Century Club's Sima Award President's Choice Cup. The Annual Boat Show was held September 9th at the Buffalo Launch Club on Grand Island and featured Century Boats for their Century Club's Annual Thoroughbred Round-Up along with displays of other antique and classic restored boats. Since Century boats were the featured boats, Robinson decided to bring along "Little Dipper" which had been refinished during the winter of 2020.



Robinson said they had no intention of being judged. He and Calalesina brought the boat for display only. However, "Little Dipper" caught the eye of Thomas Holmes, President of the Century Boat Club. Even though it was entered into the show as display only, she was awarded the Sima President's Choice Award, which is chosen solely by the president.

Holmes congratulated The Lawson Center on presenting this well-cared-for Century. He selected it for several reasons including age, preservation, maintenance, and the originality of restoration. Robinson remarked it was a complete surprise to receive this prestigious honor.

The Sima Award is named for the Century Boat Club's first president Rich Sima of Indiana who served the club for many years. The award is given annually at the club's Thoroughbred Round Up which was held this year in conjunction with the Niagara Frontier Antique and Classic Boat Show.

The Lawson Center volunteer boat restoration crews have been restoring and refinishing donated boats since the museum opened in 2010. Robinson and Calalesina have been on the museum's boat restoration crew from the very beginning. Robinson estimates that they have restored



more than 10 boats, many of which were on Chautauqua Lake and can be seen on display in the museum. Robinson began restoring and refinishing classic wooden boats for himself in 1976 because he said he couldn't afford a fiberglass boat and the older wooden boats were cheaper since they became less popular and were being replaced by the more affordable and easier-to-maintain fiberglass boats.

"Little Dipper", a 1939 classic antique 16-foot mahogany wooden boat was manufactured by Century Boat Company originally founded in 1926 in Milwaukee, WI, and was later relocated to Manistee, MI in 1928. She was originally owned the family of John & Marjorie Allen Fiedler of Lakewood and was donated to The Lawson Boating Heritage Center in 2020. The boat had not been used in many years but was stored in a garage protected from the weather. Robinson said "Little Dipper" was in excellent structural condition and did not need repair, only a full cosmetic restoration. "Little Dipper" was fairly easy to restore because there wasn't any bad wood and only needed what he termed "mop and glow". This meant the boat shop restoration team of Robinson, Calalesina, and the late John Marsh spent the winter of 2020-21 stripping off the old varnish and then painstakingly refinishing with 10 coats of new varnish to bring the boat back to life. Marsh, a well-known local boat mechanic, rebuilt the carburetor, water, and fuel pumps and completely overhauled the engine. Robinson noted that when they restore an old boat, they also strive to have the engine operational. At the end of the project, the 1936 boat originally meant to last only about 6 years was given a new life. The "Little Dipper"

can be seen on display at The Lawson Center along with dozens of other beautifully restored boats.

The Lawson Boating Heritage Center's motto is "Loving Boats Since 1918." Their mission is to celebrate the history of boating on Chautauqua Lake, to preserve the Lawson Family legacy, and to share Chautauqua Lake's regional history. The museum, located at 73 Lakeshore Dr, Bemus Point, is open weekends from Memorial Day - Labor Day and is available year-round as a unique location for special events. Visit thelawsoncenter.org for more information.