

SUMMER 1987
Sailing Through Summer
By: Cherry Wunderlich

If your son or daughter joins the free summer reading club up at the Kensington Park Library – or if you just stop by for a visit—a special treat is in store. “Sailing Through Summer” is the club’s theme this year. And a special display made by a Kensington neighbor fits this theme perfectly.

When you walk into the Children’s room, you’ll see a bright red and yellow “Maggie Boat.” The sailboat has an 8-foot mast and two dark red sails. The mast reaches the ceiling and Maggie sits on a wooden stand. Children can climb in, sit on the cushion floats (the Coast Guard approved kind), and read books or pretend to sail away.

The Maggie Boat is the design and creation of Eugene Handler, who built it in his back yard in Kensington. The boat’s lines and details reflect Eugene’s experience and expertise in hydrodynamics, gained from his 30-year career in the Navy. There, he worked with seaplanes and high-speed boat design. His career included 13 years at the David Taylor Model Basin.

In fact, Maggie’s lines reflect the shape of an actual float from a World War I seaplane. Her two sides were made from a single sheet of five-eighths inch plywood. For stability there is a “skeg” on each side. These serve the same purpose as a keel or a centerboard on other types of sailboats.

And yes, she’s seaworthy. She’s already been out on the Chesapeake Bay. And Eugene plans to take her out there again when her stint at the library ends in late August. Maggie is also sturdy, holding four adults with no trouble, as the picture shows.

If you look closely you’ll see lots of important details. A dial called an “inclinometer” indicates the boat’s tilt. The sticker, numbers, and letters on the sides are the official Maryland registration numbers required of a boat her type.

Eugene built Maggie “upside down.” He named her after his dog that died this spring at age 16.

Making the boat’s bottom was a particular challenge. It’s a single piece of plywood, but has a definite curve. Producing that curve in a flat piece of wood took care and patience. Eugene used clamps as well as bricks for weight. Periodically he tightened the clamps slightly. He also used wet towels and poured boiling water over the sheet of wood. One day a clamp came loose and bricks spewed upward, “just like Mount Vesuvius.”

The 8-foot mast you’ll see at the library was made especially for the library display. The regular mast is 16 feet long and much too tall for the library.

Maggie is just one of Eugene’s creative projects. He’s in the process of building another sailboat in his backyard. During the last 17 years he’s also enjoyed sailing his other boat on the Chesapeake Bay. And boat building isn’t his only talent. Last summer you may have seen model World War I fighter planes hanging from the ceiling of the children’s room at the library. Eugene made them. And the toy trains he’s made have been on display at the library, too. In all, he has 500 feet of shelving at home for all the trains he’s made. And Kensington neighbors are grateful that he’s sharing these talents for the enjoyment of the whole community.

–C.W.