

'Small' tall ship is coming to Sarnia

By CATHY DOBSON
The Observer

Ahoy Sarnia! We're getting a tall ship!

The "Laura Ellen" is just 37 feet long, but she has the majesty of the original Bluenose.

In fact, the schooner belonging to Sarnian Allan Aylard was designed by W.J. Roue, the designer of the Bluenose and Bluenose II. He wanted to duplicate her with a junior version and four are believed to have been built in the late 1930s.

Sarnia is about to become home to one.

"I've always thought Sarnia needs a tall ship because we have such a long maritime history," said Aylard, a Nova employee who grew up here enjoying the water.

"I've sailed since I was a lad and I've owned a 25-foot Fiberglass production boat. This is



Submitted photo

The Laura Ellen, a 36-foot long Bluenose replica will call Sarnia home.

certainly a different breed."

Years ago, Aylard began his search for a boat "with some pedigree to it."

It wasn't until he logged onto EBay in 2003 that he found the



Aylard

Hurricane Isabel went through and needed extensive restoration due to "iron sickness."

According to Aylard, that's a problem that inflicts wooden boats built using ungalvanized screws, as many schooners were in the 1930s.

He spent about \$40,000 to buy her and estimates it will cost another \$40,000 by the time a full restoration is complete.

Extensive work was done in 2004 at the Sarnia Yacht Club and this year the exterior is

Laura Ellen.

She was in the Annapolis Maryland area, being used as someone's private residence.

She'd sustained some minor damage when



Wade

complete the rebuild.

Then, he says, he'll focus on a permanent home for his Laura Ellen.

Talks have already started with Coun. Joe Murray about the possibility of mooring the schooner at Port Sarnia.

Murray is hoping to create a heritage village on the Point Lands near the federal docks and loves the idea of a tall ship on the waterfront.

"It's a perfect fit," he said.

Aylard is also interested in offering his ship to the local

being replaced at Done-Right Restoration in Port Lambton.

Aylard intends to "get his hands dirty" along with Done-Right owner Ron Wade to

sea cadets for training.

"My hope is to sail it under the Port Sarnia banner," he said.

While the Laura Ellen will never be outfitted for commercial cruises, she could be used as a training vessel requiring a captain and three crew members.

If the Port Sarnia project falls through, Aylard said he has a berth for her at the Sarnia Yacht Club and intends to offer crew positions to local youth, just as the Pathfinder tall ship does in Toronto or the Niagara II does out of Kingston, only on a smaller scale.

"I also want to take her on the tall ship circuit, going to all the festivals and drawing attention to Sarnia and Port Sarnia," he said.

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