

# William de Rouville, Sr.

by German Georgieff

Bill de Rouville's destiny was set early in life. He grew up in Brick and his father, Matthew, was an avid boater. As early as Bill can remember, he was sanding, painting or otherwise working on boats. Most of his childhood memories were filled with sailing and fishing on the northern end of the bay or going out the Manasquan Inlet to catch bluefish.

He always seemed to have a boat of his own under some stage of repair or restoration. Some of them would have been considered basket cases, but he enjoyed the work and the challenge. He'd often spend the summer working on a boat and only have it ready to go into the water by Labor Day, just in time for him to go back to school. One boat was a 25 foot sailboat he bought from Beaton's Boat Yard. It was in such bad shape when he got it that it was close to being busted up and discarded. He worked on it for about two years, finally getting it into the water. He had a lot of fun sailing it and learned quite a deal during the restoration project.

Around the time Bill graduated from high school he approached Lochlan "Lolly" Beaton for a job but they didn't need any help at the time. A friend told him of a man in Toms River who was looking for workers. So he came down to the Toms River Boat Works and met Lance Chambeau, who hired him. He was attending University of Rhode Island at the time, following in his father's footsteps studying engineering. But after several summers working at the boatworks, he decided that was the career path he wanted to follow, rather than one in engineering. He has never regretted that decision.

After working for him for a number of years, Chambeau gave Bill the opportunity to lease the repair shop from him, which he established as his own business about 1987. However, the boat works was eventually sold to some local businessmen, who had other plans for the property. So in 1997 he moved his business, setting up shop in Lanoka Harbor, again under a lease arrangement. He was at that location for about seven years, doing a lot of restoration work. It was here where he built the *Witch* in 2002, one of the new A-Cat boats. Unlike Beaton's, however, which has had a long family tradition of boat building, it has never been a major part of Bill's work. His focus has been more on the repair and restoration end of the business.



*Photo Credit: Awardee's Family*

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Bill stated that leased shops have always been a risky proposition. Owners' plans change and properties are sold, and that is exactly what happened to the Lanoka Harbor shop. So in 2004, he moved back to the Toms River, obtaining a long-term lease at his present location in Bayville. His business has thrived there for 19 years now. Like most businesses, Bill has had to adapt to changing times. As recent as 10-15 years ago, a large part of his work was major restoration on wooden boats, such as reframing, replanking, rebuilding cabins, etc. But now it's more minor repairs and maintenance work, such as painting and varnishing, but still mostly on wooden or traditional boats. His is one of the few yards still doing that work. The biggest part of his work has been on the A-Cats. They are still regularly raced, and raced hard, often requiring a repair after a collision or other mishap.

One especially satisfying aspect of the job is working with owners of the Cats, tweaking them for faster speed or better handling, all within the rules and guidelines of the class. And since the races take place virtually within sight of Bill's shop, he enjoys viewing how they perform after any modifications.

One of his favorite restoration projects was on the *Whitecap*, for Tuckerton Seaport. *Whitecap* is a 33-foot sloop built by Morton Johnson in Point Pleasant in 1924, which was damaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The restoration was exacting, as it involved several historic organizations which were involved in setting up the guidelines, requiring it to be restored to its exact original appearance. He found it an extremely satisfying project.

Bill says that while business is still good, it is sometimes challenging to get an owner onboard with the actual amount of work a boat brought to him may require. Another challenge has been the increasingly unfriendly business environment in the state. The work can also be physically demanding, and sometimes even dangerous. Once, a large boat fell on him, breaking his back, leg and several ribs. As soon as he left the hospital, six days later, he was back at the boatyard checking on things. So, after 48 years in the business, he is getting closer to retiring. Despite that, the business isn't expected to end with him. Bill's son, Bill Jr., works on the boats with him, and his niece Sherri manages the office. So while building and working on wooden boats may be a dying tradition, it's not dead quite yet.