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The journey home

by Sherry Hamilton - Posted on Nov 22, 2016 - 02:31 PM



The Freya, a vessel built by Gilbert Klingel, will be coming back to Mathews.



Leading the effort to bring the Freya home and to raise funds for a film about her builder, Gilbert Klingel are, from left, Mathews Maritime Foundation members Tom Robinson and Marcy Benouameur (Klingel's daughter); Captain John Bonner, who will be sailing the Freya back to Mathews; filmmaker Dave Miller; and yachtsman Sam Forrest, who was a friend of Klingel's. Photo by Sherry Hamilton



Gilbert Klingel in his heyday.

The Freya, a steel-hulled sloop built by the late Gwynn's Island explorer, boatbuilder, inventor, naturalist, researcher and author Gilbert Klingel, will be coming home to Mathews in the spring, and filmmaker Dave

Miller of Aylett plans to include her journey back in a film he's making titled "Gilbert Klingel: Man of Steel."

Miller, whose film projects about the Chesapeake Bay including "Journey on the Chesapeake" and "Oyster Boats and Men," have been well-received, said his new film will be a two-hour documentary taking a wide view of Klingel's life and many accomplishments.

Born in Baltimore in 1908, Klingel was a self-educated Renaissance man whose accomplishments earned him an international reputation. He died on Gwynn's Island in 1983.

Miller said he will use a drone to film Freya's journey home, while a computer class at Mathews High School is helping to develop a Facebook page that will use GPS tracking to follow her as she travels up the Intracoastal Waterway to Mathews.

The independent film project will be released in 2017 to public television outlets in Virginia, after which Miller expects it to be taken up nationally by PBS. An Indiegogo fundraising campaign will be underway shortly to help finance production of the film.

Built by Klingel at his Gwynn's Island boatyard in the mid-1950s, the Freya is currently docked in St. Augustine, Florida. Tom Robinson of Moon heard the boat was for sale and contacted her owner, Tim Loncarich, who agreed to donate her to the Mathews Maritime Foundation for use as an educational vessel. She was previously used for that purpose by a high school in Canada.

Robinson said the Freya will be docked at the foundation's boat shop on Gwynn's Island and that plans are in the works to have it designated a Virginia Maritime Historic Landmark. The Mathews Economic Development Authority awarded the maritime foundation a \$4,400 grant to fund repairs and outfitting for the boat and to pay for a Virginia Department of Historic Resources road marker to denote the location where the boat will be berthed, said Robinson.

The boat shop is the very site where Klingel built the Freya in the mid-1950s, said his daughter, Marcy Benouameur of Onemo. She described her father as a humble, kind person who didn't talk much about himself and was "always out giving." He would often do metal repair work on local watermen's workboats on the barter system, she said, exchanging a welding job for seafood or vegetables.

Sam Forrest, who grew up on Put-In Creek in Mathews and sailed solo across the Atlantic in a 28-foot boat in the late 1970s and early 1980s, said that he had a 54-foot steel boat at one time that he spent a year restoring while it was docked at Callis Wharf. He and Klingel both attended Christ Church, and he would ask the boatbuilder for advice about things "that were simple for him but impossible for me." Klingel was always kind and always willing to help, said Forrest.

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P.O. Box 2060, Gloucester, VA 23061 - phone: 804-693-3101