

The Wedding Boat

How a Bad Decision Can Lead to a Good Outcome

by Brad Fisher

It turns out wooden canoes are having a moment as props at weddings. I attribute this to the bottomless hunger of social media for images that give viral potential to relatively ordinary events. You know, like the “gender reveal” pyrotechnics that set the back pasture ablaze.

What the kids are doing with canoes at weddings tends to be along the lines of turning them into flowerpots or beer coolers, things they can post on Pinterest and Instagram for a viral buzz.

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How do I know this? My last restoration project (also my first), a 1924 Old Town double ender that I finished last spring, caught the eye of a summer neighbor in Chautauqua, NY, who was planning a daughter’s wedding



February 2, in the antique barn: It *looked* salvageable.

for the fall. Even before the paint dried, she wondered if she could borrow it to fill with ice and beer at the reception.

The Answer Was “No”

Instinctively, reflexively, and politely, I turned her down. Although the boat could probably handle the task, my double ender and I just weren’t ready. I hadn’t even launched it.

“What I will do instead,” I said, “is find you another one

that we can fix up just for beer.” And we were off.

Three Bad Options

We found a wreck in an antique barn just down the road, a 1967 Old Town OTCA, and it was cheap. Once we got it down off the wall and into the shop, we discovered why. What looked like simple fixes to the tips turned out to be anything but. The planks were rotten through and through. And the whole thing had been rebuilt with glue and

August 25: Taking some shortcuts.

August 28: Whiskey plank!

September 10: Canvassing with Andy Hutyera. Thanks, Andy.

sticky adhesive. I had to decide whether to throw a coat of paint on it and hope for the best, or to go all in and make it lake worthy.

I should have offered a third decision: use it to stage a Viking funeral, burn it to the waterline, and go back to offering my double ender for the party. But the family were intrigued. They waxed enthusiastic. They wanted a boat they could paddle.

WCHA Angels

So of course I went for the restoration. I gave hundreds of hours, and the family gave hundreds of dollars, to bring the Wedding Boat to water-tight, glossy varnished, shiny-painted wedding trim. In the process, I had wonderful conversations with WCHA restoration gurus

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Craig Johnson, Andy Hutyera, and others to get me through the trickiest parts. Andy donated his time to help me get planks, canvas the boat, and fabricate new outwales. The wedding





September 1: Stamping the wedding date onto the thwart: a gutsy move, pandemic-wise.



October 17: Way cooler than a beer cooler.

family found a sign painter in Western N.Y. who does pinstripes and custom lettering. And voila.

Too Cool to Be a Cooler

By Columbus Day 2020 (way too close to the wedding date), we

had stumbled our way to a beautiful dinner decoration that looked great on Instagram. The family decided it was too good to use for a beer cooler; they just displayed it as a boat. And then the bride and groom paddled off into the sunset.

Apparently, we created way more than a beer cooler: We created a family of wooden canoe enthusiasts as well.

My deepest thanks to WCHA for its support, especially Andy. Couldn't have done it without you! 🍷



The Wedding Boat: 1967 OTCA by Old Town.

Much Ahead in 2021

Now that we are nearing the end of another paddling season, it is time to plan our activities for next year in the hopes that we can return to some semblance of normal. To that end, the board held a Zoom meeting recently and came up with a first draft of a schedule for next year. **But before we get to that . . .**

. . . Dues Are Due

Our treasurer, Fred Capenos, has asked me to remind folks that dues are \$20 a year.

Please make your check payable to Three Rivers Chapter, WCHA, and send payment to:

Fred Capenos
P.O. Box 227
Chalk Hill, PA 15421

Now for the tentative schedule. It was decided that until the pandemic is under control, indoor in-person meetings will be avoided. Here is what the board has come up with so far:

Tentative Schedule of Events, 2021

✦ **January 23, 2021:** Nick Dennis of the U.K. has graciously agreed to do a Zoom presentation. The topic is still under discussion. Nick is one of the leading lights of the U.K. chapter and has done extensive restoration work. He also has some great photos of

their chapter outings on many of the lovely English waterways. The time for his virtual gathering will be 3 p.m. so as to allow for the 5-hour time difference. When plans are solidified, you will receive an invitation with a link to join the meeting online.

- ✦ **February 2021:** Another meeting via Zoom. Program to be announced.
- ✦ **March 2021:** Another meeting via Zoom. Program to be announced.
- ✦ **April 24, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.:** We will again gather at Moraine State Park. Fred and Lee have again reserved a cabin, which will be our gathering place.
- ✦ **May 21, 2021 at 10 a.m.:** Silk-screening tee shirts at Tony Stanton and Ann Mertz's home. Bring your own tee shirts in whatever color strikes your fancy.
- ✦ **June 4–6, 2021:** The Western Pennsylvania Solo Rendezvous at Coopers Lake Campground near Portersville, Pa. We will set up a display of our canoes. There will be lots of canoes and canoe vendors present. This is a great opportunity to visit with other canoe lovers and to try out some of the latest designs.
- ✦ **June 25–26 at 10 a.m.:** Big Run Park in Maryland. Hosts will be Mark and Ruth Zalonis. Camping is available on a first-come, first-served basis so it pays to come early. The campground where we meet is rather small. It

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only has a state-park-style pit toilet and no showers or drinking water available. It has excellent lake access and is a great place to paddle. Nearby Grantsville has motel and hotel accommodations if you prefer.

- ✦ **July 13–18, 2021:** Assembly at Paul Smiths College in the New York Adirondacks.
- ✦ **August 14, 2021 at 10 a.m.:** Craig Johnson will be hosting another paddle on Salt Fork Lake near Cambridge, Ohio. More details will be provided.
- ✦ **September 18 or 19, 2021 at 2 p.m. (depending on the Steeler Schedule):** Annual meeting and election of board members at Sylvan Canoe Club in Verona, Pa.
- ✦ **October 8–10, 2021:** Mini-assembly of four chapters at Gifford Pinchot State Park near Harrisburg, Pa.

2021 Newsletter Writing Assignments

At the meeting, the board also discussed writing assignments for the newsletter. Your editor needs fodder for the mill, and thus we are asking each of the following to write an article for the newsletter on any topic of their own choice.

Here are the assignments for the year:

- ⊕ **January:** Millie Sass
- ⊕ **February:** Bob and Martha Ball
- ⊕ **March:** Tony Stanton
- ⊕ **April:** Craig and Dianne Johnson
- ⊕ **May:** Fred Capenos and Lee Grubish
- ⊕ **June:** Jackie and Andy Hutyera
- ⊕ **July:** Assembly recap by various attendees
- ⊕ **August:** Scott Johnson
- ⊕ **September:** Anita and Bruce Kemp
- ⊕ **October:** Brad Fisher
- ⊕ **November:** Dave and Johanna Arisumi

Chapter Information

- ⊕ **Head:** Millie Sass
- ⊕ **Treasurer:** Fred Capenos
- ⊕ **At large:** Bob Ball, Craig Johnson
- ⊕ **Newsletter:** Andy Hutyera and Ann Mertz
- ⊕ **Librarian:** Mark Zalonis

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- ⊕ <http://www.wcha.org/>