

By BECKY BURKERT
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SOUTH HAVEN — A one-of-a-kind, 96-foot-long, wooden yacht turned more than a few heads this past week as it sailed into South Haven's harbor.

The 78-year-old fantail Canim, owned by Marty and Lisa Sutter of Harbor Springs, spent two days at the city-owned transient dock before sailing to St. Joseph, where Marty grew up in neighboring Coloma.

"It's a very unusual yacht, made of all wood," said its captain, Luther Hall. The Canim was designed by the late Ted Geary, a naval architect, as one of four 96-footers, built at Lake Union Dry-docks in Seattle, Wash. in 1929 and 1930.

"She's one of a kind," Hall said, elaborating that the four ships are all designed differently, but have enough similarities that they are considered as "sister" ships. "One of them was owned by (the late actor) John Barrymore," Hall said.

"She's made with seven-inch wood beams, and the hull is 9-inches thick. There's not another like it," Hall said. Yellow cedar, Douglas fir, and red cedar woods were used to create the ship's frame. All framing and planking is clear, quarter sawn and original, according to the ship's website. Teak and mahogany were used to create the interior, which looks brand new.

A crew of three women plus Hall are diligent in keeping the ship looking like new. The cruising yacht provides comfort for its passengers with a salon and lounge area, dining room, cabin and recreation area, while underneath, two 850 cubic inch, 325-horsepower Cummins engines keep it moving steadily along.

"The yacht was owned at one time by (Clessie) Cummins (of the Cummins diesel engine company). So it's not a surprise to see these engines. They're actually truck diesel engines." Cummins, who purchased the Canim in 1958, was one of many owners the ship has had over the years.

It was originally built for Col. C. B. Blethen, publisher of the Seattle Times. The ship was an immediate head turner. Its name comes from the Chinook Indian tribe of the Northwest and means Big Chief canoe. But in 1932, during the Depression, Blethen sold the ship.

It went through a succession of owners, including Natalie Keaton, wife of actor Buster Keaton, Richard Lowe Jr., and the American Can Company, that commissioned the boat into service with the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Along with the Canim, the other three ships are also still in service and are called the Blue Peter in Seattle, Wash.; the Electra, in Newport Beach, Calif.; and the Principia, in Newport, RI. Actress Julie Andrews was a regular guest on the boat when it was owned by Pacific Factors and used as a charter ship from Seattle to Juneau, Alaska during the 1970s.

Finally, in 1983, Canim was purchased by Norton Charters which spent several million dollars in restoring the yacht, which was highlighted in an article published by Visions, the magazine of the Smithsonian. In 2000 more restoration work was completed by Philbrook's Boatyard in Sydney, British Columbia, where workers used photos from the 1930s, 1950s and 1980s to restore various elements to the style and character of the period.

The Sutters became interested in the Canim while cruising the British Virgin Islands in 2004. As guests aboard the yacht in Martha's Vineyard in 2006, the Sutters negotiated a sale with the owner of the ship and then moved the ship to the British Virgin Islands where additional renovations were made to the boat.

One of the current owners' personal touches was the creation of a Burmese teak sole in the main and forward salons with an inlaid compass rose created by Erik Groenenberg of E&S Yacht Maintenance. The compass rose is made of eight exotic hardwoods, including Zebra wood.

For more information about the Canim's history, visit the website, www.canim-yacht.com