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### History comes alive in Cortez

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CORTEZ -- The grand opening of the new Florida Maritime Museum at Cortez on Saturday only begins what will become an evolving, growing showcase of living history.

Residents of the historic fishing village donated some of the items on display - large oars, bailers, fishing nets and military uniforms. Bill Booth, a well-known history teacher and model maker, created two models of Spanish ships featured in the main exhibit.

Photographs tracing the genealogy of some of the major Cortez families show the ancestors of some current village residents.

At the entrance, framed pictures of students who attended the Cortez Schoolhouse, the now renovated building where the museum is housed, are posted. When locals recognize someone in the picture, their name gets put in a notebook.

"Our goal is to get everyone's name," said Roger Allen, Cortez Historic Sites manager. "And we will."

His determination, along with the spirit of Cortez residents, has helped the new museum come to life.

The main room of the exhibit has tall windows, one draped with a fishing net, and the floor is long leaf yellow pine, a wood often used for building boats because of its durability and resistance to rot.

The first third of the room details early maritime culture along Florida's Gulf Coast. A glass case holds remnants of a shell midden, a pile of material discarded by Florida's native peoples. On display is a fishing hook made of bone and shells with holes drilled through them. The shells were fashioned into hammers, Allen said, with sticks stuck through the holes. The shells were also used as fishing-net weights.

Maps detail the settlement of Hunter's Point, the first name given to what is now Cortez. Spaniards coming from Cuba first settled in the area, using it for commercial fishing, the industry that became and continues to be the strongest part of the village's identity.

"This is to show other communities they can preserve their community the way Cortez has worked so hard to do," Allen said.

A boat-building section showcases tools used by builders - slicks and adzes - that are often made by the boat builder because their tools need to be specific to the boat they're building. A model of a sharpie schooner sits in a glass case in the center of the exhibit. The boat is an example of what was commonly used in and around Cortez because it could navigate shallow waters.

The final third of the exhibit traces the advent of commercial fishing in Cortez, which waned after a net ban in the 1990s.

"It's done from the perspective of the villagers of Cortez, which gives it a real human perspective," Allen said.

The 18-month renovation of the schoolhouse took \$750,000.

The museum will be available for public and private functions. A large room in the center of the building will hold changing exhibits and plans are to keep it as a continuing catalog of life in Cortez - from the days of hollowed out canoes to the present.

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