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## Taylor Boatworks: The granddaddy of Cortez museums



SUN PHOTOS/CINDY LANE

Alcee Taylor lives above the N.E. Taylor Boatworks, where historic artifacts include hand tools used by his father and brothers to build and repair boats. The rustic boatworks building is ornamented with maritime artifacts inside and out.

**By Cindy Lane**  
sun staff writer

**CORTEZ** – From his kitchen table, Alcee Taylor watches the boat traffic at Longboat Pass through the frame of an old boatlift.

It's part of a dock leading into his father's boatworks under the house, where he has stored hand tools, fishing artifacts and boats in a nautical museum that predates the new Florida Maritime Museum at Cortez by decades.

Taylor, who turns 84 this week, attended school at the 1912 Cortez schoolhouse, which has been restored and converted into the Florida Maritime Museum. You can't go in there barefoot anymore, as some pupils once did.

"The best place in the world to ever grow up was right here," Taylor says.

When school was over, he'd have a snack of his mother's homemade sea grape jelly and bread and go to work downstairs in the N.E. Taylor Boatworks with his two oldest brothers, Leo and N.E. Jr. (short for Neriah Elijah).

Sure, it was dangerous, but nobody worried about it back then, he says. One of his jobs was making putty out of white lead and beeswax to seal holes in boat hulls. Cortez fishermen put lead fishing weights in their teeth, too, without giving it a second thought.

His father built the boatworks at 12304 46th Ave. W. from lumber that washed ashore after the hurricane of 1921, an era before hurricanes had names. The schoolhouse was the fishing village's unofficial hurricane shelter, and a building recently relocated behind the schoolhouse/museum, the Burton/Bratton store, was the only Cortez waterfront building that survived the storm.

Some of the rest of the hurricane debris wound up in the boatworks. The

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original lapped siding is visible outside on the ground floor, although the second floor exterior has been covered with tar paper. Some beams were reinforced by a movie company that used the building in the filming of "Great Expectations" in 1996. Other than that, it's pretty much the original structure, Taylor says.

He worked with his family there, building wooden boats that were often powered by tractor or car motors ("They were cheaper," he says), then went to work as a fisherman, crabber, seafood trucker and a seabee in the Navy construction brigade stationed in the Pacific during World War II.

Retired now, Taylor occasionally takes schoolchildren on tours of the boatworks, which is open only if someone rings the ship's bell hanging outside the screen door, or calls first.

Taylor's wife, Plum, says the museum will be passed on like a family heirloom. Their granddaughter comes in and cleans up now and then, and seems to have saltwater in her veins, so maybe she'll take over one day, she says.

But if you want a tour from the original curator, call Taylor at 794-2582.

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