

Boat builder showed innovation in construction of sailing vessels

Raymond P. Greene, a pioneering Toledo boat builder credited with helping to change yachting from an exclusive sport of the rich to a leisure pursuit for the middle class, died of natural causes Friday at his home in Indianapolis. He was 88.

"He's a legend," said Thomas Lowry, a multiple winner of the Toledo Yacht Club's Mills Trophy race and long-time Great Lakes sailor.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., Mr. Greene's father, a British national from Canada's Newfoundland province, moved the family to Toledo in 1919 when he took a job as a chemist. The family often traveled to a cottage near Traverse City, Mich., where Mr. Greene learned to sail. He built his first boat when he was 12.

As an Ohio State University engineering student in the 1930s, Mr. Greene wrote papers about boat construction and experimented with plastics. By 1941, he was making boat models with fiber glass-reinforced plastic. Seven years later, he was in mass production as Ray Greene and Co., turning out the Rebel, a 16-foot fiber-glass sloop that still is raced throughout the United States.

He worked in his family garage but eventually owned a boat shop in the 500 block of Byrne Road, where he also researched design and construction under a Navy Bureau of Ships contract. He also built aviation rescue boats for the U.S. Navy and buildings for use in the 1964 World's Fair in New York and developed and constructed airboats used by the Toledo Area Sanitary District to spray for mosquitoes in marshes.

An accomplished sailor who eventually gave up the sport on the water to build the crafts on land, Mr. Greene is best known for one of his first productions.

"The Rebel boat was his pride and joy," said Bill Blaine, a past commodore of the Rebel class who lives in suburban Chicago. "It's a good boat. It's a comfortable boat. It's big enough."

Pan American Games Gold Medalist Bruce Goldsmith, now a stockbroker in Jackson, Mich., knew Mr. Greene during the 1950s sailing on Devil's Lake near Adrian.

"At that time, there weren't very many boats around, and Ray Greene was the guy who built boats for this area. We all bought boats from Ray," he said.

Mr. Goldsmith, who still sails regularly out of North Cape Yacht Club in Monroe, Mich., sailed Nippers, a wooden boat Mr. Greene



BLADE PHOTO

Greene: He owned a boat shop on Byrne Road.

built before his most famous craft, the Rebel.

The Rebel, introduced in 1948, was one of the first types of small fiber-glass boats that began to replace larger, more expensive, wooden yachts popular during the first half of the 20th century. More resilient to damage from collisions, easier to maintain, and lighter weight, fiber-glass boats grew in popularity until they were the norm for sailboat construction by the end of the century.

Mr. Greene was one of the first to develop them, said Dan Spurr, author of *Heart of Glass*, a book published last year chronicling the history of fiber-glass boats.

Mr. Spurr's research showed that Mr. Greene was the first builder of polyester fiber-glass boats, he said.

"There were other plastic boats before Ray's, but his was a combination of polyester resin and fiber glass as a reinforcing fiber that was unique, that was responsible for the whole explosion in the boat building business. It just revolutionized the whole industry," Mr. Spurr said from his Portsmouth, R.I., office.

Only three men, including Mr. Greene, receive their own chapters in Mr. Spurr's book.

"I remember his sense of humor," Mr. Spurr said, recalling interviews with Mr. Greene during the 1990s while he researched the book. "He liked to tell anecdotes. Stories of things that went wrong. He would kind of laugh at them. He was just very charming."

A fire at the Byrne Road facility caused by a chemical explosion in

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Jackson, Mich., businessman

1950 destroyed Mr. Greene's Quonset hut-type boat shop, "devouring sailboat parts" and "collapsing the 200-by-40-foot shell," according to newspaper accounts at the time. Hulls for 20 boats and parts for 100 others were ruined in the fire, Mr. Greene said at the time.

But just a month later, Mr. Greene and his staff of eight men and one woman nearly had finished building 10 more boats that were shipped throughout the United States.

In all, about 5,000 Rebels were built at the Toledo factory.

G. Parks "Bud" McNaull of Perrysburg owned a few of them. A lifelong sailor, Mr. McNaull, now 80, credited Mr. Greene with getting him and many others interested in the sport with the Nippers.

As many as 40 of the small boats would race on Wednesday evenings near the Toledo Yacht Club, Mr. McNaull said.

Mr. Greene often won the races, but he would prove to the other sailors the secret was in the tactics, not differences in the boats.

"He would take your boat and let you have his boat and he'd show that it was a matter of how you maneuver the boat as to whether you would win. That was very encouraging," Mr. McNaull said. "He was always encouraging to young sailors."

Mr. Greene also was encouraging to other inventors. He once had a visitor who wanted Mr. Greene's opinion about a design to change the shading ability of a car roof by pumping oil in and out of a frame — Mr. Greene later said he didn't think that would work. He and the late Paul Block Jr., former publisher of *The Blade*, were close friends and often the only team in Toledo able to fix early models of televisions, Mr. McNaull said.

Mr. Greene's oldest daughter, Kathy Greene, remembered her father meeting hundreds of people like Mr. McNaull through sailing and traces some of her longest friendships to crewmates and competitors she had in the sport.

He won the Rebel class in many events, including the Inter-Lake Yachting Association Regatta at Put-In-Bay.

Ms. Greene said her father not

only built the boats but also the replacement parts for them and traveled to boat shows caring for his customers.

One potential customer was actor John Wayne, who was aboard Mr. Greene's *New Horizon*, which he began building in 1961 from a design by Sparkman and Stephens, a renowned design team.

"John Wayne was aboard the *New Horizon* at the New York boat show, and he was talking about how nice it was to almost be able to stand up [in the cabin] on the boat," she said.

Long-time CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite, himself an accomplished sailor, hosted a television broadcast from one of Mr. Greene's boats, Ms. Greene said.

"If it hadn't been for the sailing or my father's manufacturing company, we never would have known them," she said.

Mr. Greene began negotiating to sell the company in the early 1960s, eventually selling it on a land contract for not much profit. Later he said he was disappointed when the firm failed but understood the sometimes fickle nature of the marine business. "Things have to grow, get mature, and die," he later said.

Rebels still are made near Fenton, Mich.

Mr. Greene retired in 1972, spending much of his time near Glen Lake, Mich.

He remained active into his 70s. At 73, he bought a sailboard, continued to water ski and play tennis and soccer, and took up metal detecting.

Surviving are his sister, Marjorie Peters, of Indian Hills, Fla.; son, Lance Greene, of Holland; daughters, Kathy Greene, of Richmond, Ind., and Tina Kauffman; of Indianapolis; three grandchildren and one great grandson.

Memorial services will be at 2 p.m. Feb. 12, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 310 Elizabeth St., in Maumee.

The family requests tributes to the Western Lake Erie Historical Society; Sigma Chi's Ohio State University chapter; the American Heart Association; or a charity of choice.









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Toledo
Vertical File

Toledo Boat Builder's Boast Made Good as Craft Wins Race

Times 10/3/37



EDUCATED BOAT BUILDER.

That's Ray Greene, 1434 Lincoln avenue, who builds small sailboats, applying some of the knowledge he acquired at Ohio State university from which he graduated last June with two engineering degrees. Greene is shown riveting a boat hull and sailing one which won a snipe class race a week ago.

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