

The James B. Richardson Foundation, Inc.

WHO WE ARE: The James B. Richardson Foundation, Inc., is the parent organization to the **Richardson Maritime Museum** at 401 High Street in the heart of Cambridge, **The Ruark Boatworks** and **The Brannock Education and Research Center** at 100 Maryland Avenue, on Cambridge Creek.

The James B. Richardson Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, founded in 1992. Except for one part-time paid employee, the organization's activities are accomplished by volunteers. In 2007, more than 95% of our operating income came from contributions from individuals and private foundations.

OUR MISSION: The Museum was founded in memory of Capt. James B. Richardson, a prominent local boatbuilder. "Mr. Jim's" dedication to the traditional wooden boatbuilding skills and to passing on those skills to new generations of boatwrights inspired the founders of the Museum to establish an organization dedicated not just to preserving his memory, but to continuing his efforts at keeping the art of wooden boatbuilding alive.

In pursuing these efforts and in researching the history of boatbuilding in Dorchester County and the Eastern Shore, it has become increasingly clear that the area has had far-reaching influence on the design of ships and on Chesapeake Bay maritime history.

Our **Mission Statement** reads: "Create a Maritime Complex dedicated to preserving and promoting the boat building heritage of Dorchester County and the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland, including its influence on U. S. maritime history through research, preservation and exhibition of artifacts and archives, and the promotion of the wooden boat building industry and related skills. The Maritime Complex shall include, but not be limited to, the Richardson Maritime Museum, the Ruark Boatworks and the Brannock Education and Research Center.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The Eastern Shore has developed its unique way of life largely because of its long-isolated locale, accessible for generations primarily by the water trails that weave through much of the area. Dorchester County, especially, has extensive creeks, inlets, bays and waterways that spawned hundreds of boatyards, ranging from large operations to one-man shops, throughout the county.

These boatyards produced a wide variety of vessels, meeting an equally wide variety of needs. Log canoes, crabbing skiffs, skipjacks, bugeyes and pungys all evolved to answer individual needs of local working watermen. However, these yards also produced Naval military vessels to fulfill far-ranging needs. The resources of skilled local shipwrights, abundant shipbuilding materials and that the city of Cambridge is the second deepest port in Maryland all combined to make this area a major center of shipbuilding activity for the Chesapeake Bay.

However, the last of these skilled boatwrights and shipbuilders are disappearing. Most of the boatyards are gone. Fewer and fewer watermen work the waters each year. The wooden boats are disappearing through age and neglect.

As Cambridge Creek loses more and more of its waterfront to commercial development, the heritage that created the Eastern Shore way of life is in danger of being lost to history. The Richardson Maritime Museum, the Ruark Boatworks and the Brannock Education and Research Center's purpose is to make sure that heritage is kept alive and passed on to new generations. Not just by preserving the artifacts, but by teaching the skills and keeping the traditional boats alive and working. Our goal is to "*Put History On The Water.*"

WHERE WE ARE: The James B. Richardson Foundation, Inc. is at a critical turning point in the growth of the organization. We have been making great strides in changing from what was basically a social organization into a professional one. Administrative upgrades and professional procedures have been put in place and continue to be implemented as a foundation on which to build.

At the Richardson Maritime Museum, exhibit design is being upgraded. Docent training is being developed and more information is necessary to provide both volunteers and visitors a more rewarding experience.

At the Ruark Boatworks, our new Build-A-Boat Program is giving groups of children the opportunity to build their own boat and models, learning about the maritime heritage while learning the art and skills that contributed to it. Classic wooden boats are being restored and returned to their destiny - *being on the water*. The skills of these events are being passed on to volunteers and members of the community.

At the Brannock Education and Research Center there is the opportunity for serious researchers as well as school groups of all ages to review and better understand the overall history of the Chesapeake Bay area and its influence on the history of the United States from colonial times through the present.

Now we need to take the next steps to build on this extraordinary progress and create a sustainable cultural asset for the community.

WHERE WE ARE GOING?:

The future of the Richardson Maritime Heritage Center, to be built on four acres of environmentally clean land on Maryland Avenue. With 200 feet of waterfront, the site is one of the few remaining undeveloped properties on Cambridge Creek.

Our commitment is to keeping open visual and physical access to the water in our plan of the new facility. Designed by local architect, Jay Corvan, it was inspired by the areas manufacturing architectural heritage. The finished facility will include an expanded Ruark Boatworks, Museum space, auditorium and classrooms, and a Maritime Education and Research Center, as well as an outdoor amphitheatre and café.

A facility this ambitious and extensive needs to be approached in phases. With our current museum adequate for our immediate exhibition needs, we are focusing Phase One on the expanded Ruark Boatworks facility allowing us to concentrate on our all-important goal of *“Putting History on the Water”*. Included in Phase One will be renovation of the bulkhead, construction of a marine railway, and the beginning of the Wooden Boat Center of Excellence, where the best practices of wooden boat construction, restoration and care will be researched and promoted.

Not only will Phase One allow an expansion of our education programs for children and boat restoration projects, but it will also enable us to take on visually exciting projects such as the construction of large replica vessels. Two already under consideration are the bugeye *Brown Smith Jones*, built in 1894 at George T. Johnson & Sons shipyard in Cambridge for the Maryland Oyster Police; and the privateer *High Flyer*, built by Noah Richardson at Church Creek in 1811 and a highly prized vessel used by both sides in the Chesapeake campaign during the War of 1812. Our centrally located property will make a stunning stage for building boats such as these in a very public setting.

The timeframe for this and subsequent phases of construction of the Richardson Maritime Heritage Center will hinge on the support received from the community and beyond. When completed, however, this cultural gem on Cambridge Creek will welcome residents, tourists and both casual and serious scholars for an extraordinary experience of maritime heritage in action.