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THE LEGEND LIVES ON

World-class model of Edmund Fitzgerald drops anchor in Ashland

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Paul Wickman heard plenty about the Edmund Fitzgerald as he was growing up in Ashland. His godmother was Mary Louko, the daughter of John Simmons, one of the famous ship's wheelsman — the guys who steer Great Lakes ore haulers. Louko's mother's walls were covered with photos of life on the water; her coffee table laden with books memorializing one of the world's most famous shipwrecks and her husband, one of five Bay-Area men who died aboard her.

"I'd hear (family members) talk about it when I was young because it had only sunk a few years before then," Wickman, 48, said. "I was aware of the family connection. But I had nothing to do with shipping. The closest I ever got was when my dad and I were fishing on the bay and we'd go alongside

one of the ore boats. I was always afraid one would tip over on us, they were so big."

Fast forward 30-some years as Wickman, now living near Madison, was scrolling through social media classified ads when he stumbled upon something truly remarkable — an 8-foot-long, meticulously detailed scale model of the Fitzgerald being offered for sale by a craftsman in Ohio. He immediately was struck by its intricacy — and an idea: Could the model be used as memorial to the local people who died and help the entire city of Ashland in the process?

That was the beginning of an eight-year journey for Wickman, during which he learned even more about the ship, got to know the family that created the model and dedicated himself to bringing it to Ashland as both a local historical artifact and a tourist attraction.

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Paul Wickman, second from right, hands over the model to museum representatives at a local restaurant.

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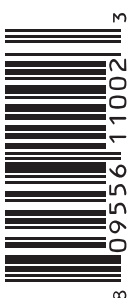
IF YOU GO

Local artists Harvey Hadland and Sam Armstrong have crafted ore boat models that can be seen along with the Edmund Fitzgerald at the Ashland Historical Society Museum. The museum also is seeking donations to help build a display case for the Fitzgerald model. Donate or learn more at ashlandwishhistory.com.

A photo of the fully loaded Edmund Fitzgerald as she plied the waters of the Great Lakes in the early 1970s. Contributed photo by Greenmars via Creative Commons.



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