



Meet Vern Aro.

When Vern Aro was a young boy growing up in Sointula, his grandfather told him to become a bookkeeper. Instead, he became a fisherman. Like his Finnish-born grandfather, Vern opted for a life of the sea, following three generations of Aro fishermen before him. But unlike his grandfather, and unlike many of the other young boys and girls growing up in this small northern coastal community in the 1950s, Vern was not a boat builder.

"I just didn't have the artistic talent of my grandfather," says Vern about the man who built the original Sturgeon I gillnet wooden fishing boat in 1948, a year before he was born. "I can't even believe they built so many boats back in those days. These are skills that very few people have today."

When the idea of restoring the original Sturgeon I first started evolving within Sointula's community, Vern wasn't even aware that it was his grandfather's boat. After some historical sleuthing, he learned that the same man who did the face make-up for the town plays and carved tiny wooden home decorations was also the mastermind behind, what will soon be, Malcolm Island's newest cultural heritage draw for both visitors and locals.

"It's my hope that the Sturgeon I project helps keep the fishing part of our community alive. Its been a part of us for over 70 years and hopefully the pavilion will help educate people on this history," says Vern.

Over the last few years, Sointula has seen a rise in the number of visitors as more people are drawn to the rugged landscape and versatile outdoor activities on offer on the North Island and in the Broughton Archipelago. This bodes well for many of the smaller, resource-based Island communities, like Sointula, whose economies have suffered over the last few decades with the downturn in the fishing industry.

"We know this project will be popular with visitors," says Vern, who also sits on the Museum Board and serves as the Town's (unofficial) historian. "Already we get lots of questions about the past – people are sympathetic about our loss. This will help future generations keep our heritage."

A Community Story from Sointula

Preserving Unique Cultural Heritage on Malcolm Island