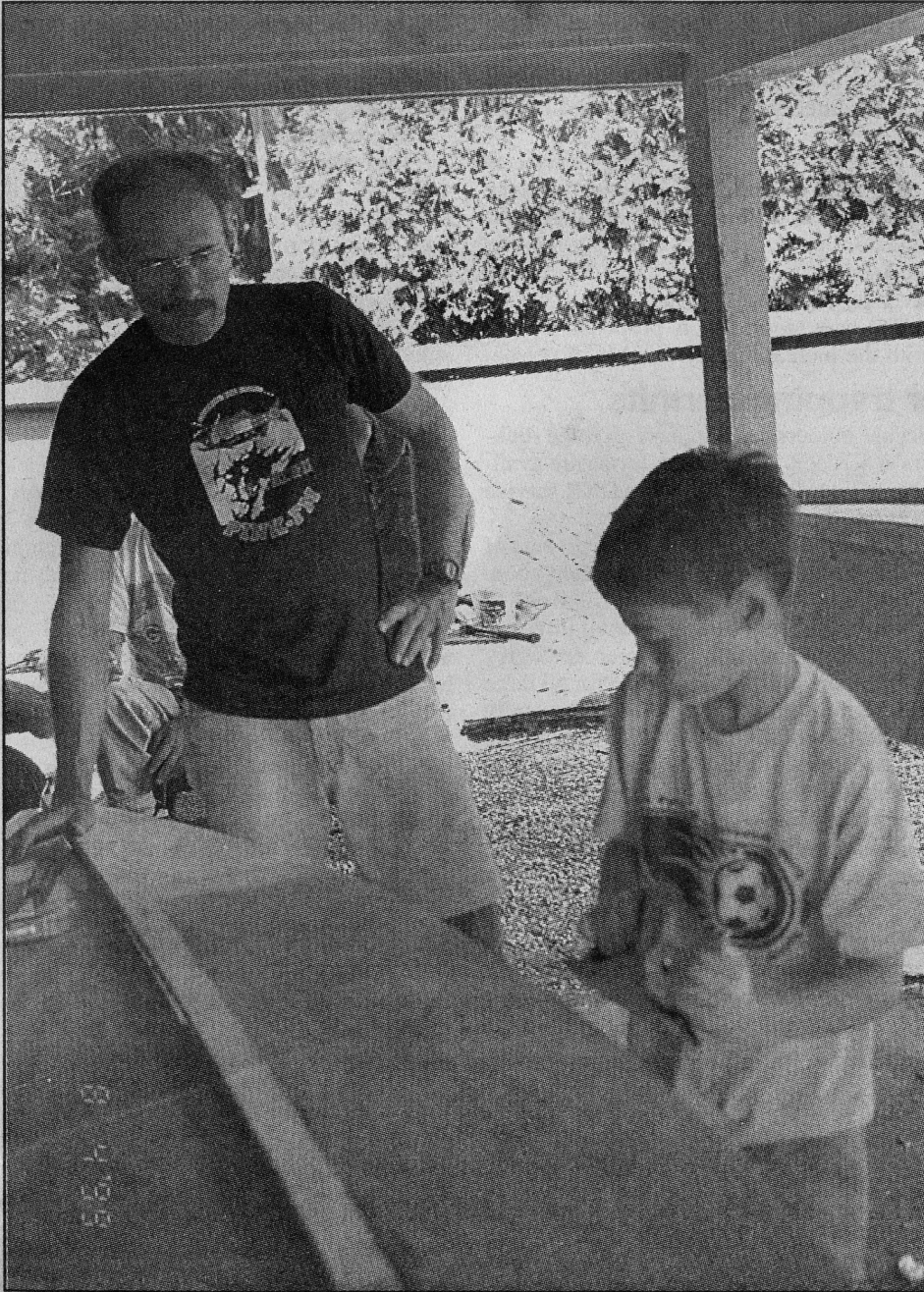


Wooden boats a kid can build... with a little help

By SANDY HEIDEL
of the Courier staff



Joe Funk planes the bottom edges of his boat. At 8 years of age, Joe is an experienced boat builder and needs only occasional guidance from his dad, Fritz Funk, who watches

Fritz Funk and his son Joe returned home to Brice Prairie from Alaska this summer, as they do every summer, to visit family and friends. But, this year they brought with them their passion for building wooden boats.

Fritz is working on a design and process for a kid-sized watercraft built almost entirely by the kids themselves.

Joe and Ben Tippetts, of Brice Prairie, worked this week to build two of the craft in the yard of Joe's grandparents, Fred and Mim Funk. Joe has experience building the Wacky Lassie, having completed one at his home in Juneau. Ben sought the assistance of his siblings Issac and Annie.

Fritz says the boat is a simple design, is easy to build and inexpensive as well. Materials used to build the boat can be purchased at any local building center. The boat is built using plywood, luan underlayment to be exact, and 1 by 2's along with a variety of non-toxic glues and basic household paint. Adult help is needed in the cutting and, when epoxy is used, some joints are fiberglassed as well. Fritz tries to keep the "adult only" aspects of the process to a minimum.

"With kids, it is important to do two things," Fritz says. "Keep the methodology

simple and go for instant gratification." Getting the boat from the cutting stage to the water can happen in less than a week.

He talks as much about the social aspects of boat building as he does the technical ones. "There is a whole movement out there geared toward family boat-building workshops," he said, "an activity that families can do together."

Fritz designed the Wacky Lassie from scratch, drawing on the work of others and boats he had built previously, and hopes to do workshops with groups of kids someday soon, maybe a Cub Scout group or small school group. He feels kids benefit in many ways when they work with wood to build a boat of their own.

Joe plans to use his for summer paddles when he visits Lake Onalaska. Ben plans to paint his olive green for duck hunting and use it to hunt the backwaters this fall.

The boatyard also includes an important feature, the "moaning chair." Fritz says the chair is a standard in most boat building workshops and is used when the builder makes a mistake and needs to sit and think of a solution.

Plans for the Wacky Lassie and other boats can be found on his website at http://www.alaska.net/~fritzf/Boats/Wacky_Lassie/Wacky_Lassie.htm