

THE ROYAL SUN

NEWPORT BEACH COUNTRY CLUB MEMBER ED RUSSO RECENTLY DONATED ONE OF HIS ORNATE MODEL SHIPS TO THE CLUB FOR ALL TO ENJOY.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Back in 1997, member Ed Russo and his wife were looking to move west, but hadn't quite decided where. "We were living in New York and my wife and I were looking for a place to live," Russo says. They decided to settle in Newport Beach and while in the area, Russo paid a visit to a few different clubs, including the Newport Beach Country Club. He was impressed with the friendly nature of two members who were leaving as he was entering—and, in one day, he was sold.

Now, 20 years later, Russo is still enjoying time spent there. While he notes that he loves the new clubhouse and the courteous and efficient staff, the course remains the real attraction.

But another hobby—model shipbuilding—has recently worked its way into his passion for the club.

THE CALM AFTER THE STORM

The Russos lived in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s, and Ed was working in the banking industry. As he rode the train to work, he read *The Wall Street Journal*, one day spotting an advertisement targeting those who were seeking a hobby to divert their attention away from the monotony of their jobs.

Within the ad was a form for a \$29.95 model shipbuilding kit, which he readily sent away for. The kit arrived, with all of the materials necessary to complete a 12-inch model.

"I was always a Type A person," Russo explains. "But as soon as I began working on it, calm came over me."

Since that initial boat arrived, Russo says he has built more than 30 model ships. Working out of a small shop in his garage that has all of the tools he needs, he is able to relax while listening to music or watching television as he works. Though he has always enjoyed woodworking, Russo has thoroughly enjoyed the more than three decades he has spent working on these ships—in San Francisco, New York and now Newport Beach.

In addition to ships, he has crafted other small vessels out of wood as well, noting that he has built a few carriages and model cars in addition to a speedboat he just finished for his daughter.

Though he has created many of these objects, Russo says they're not quick to build. "It takes a fair amount of work to get the proportions and dimensions right," he explains. "I think the final product has an artistic quality."

Still, he has never sold one of these works of art, uninterested in hearing critiques of his pieces. Instead, he gifts them to friends and family, including at least three other members from the Newport Beach Country Club. And now, one will be permanently on display within the walls of the club itself.

AN ICONIC MODEL

Crafted from 1999 to 2001, the model ship that Russo donated to the Newport Beach Country Club is a small-scale replica of the *Soleil Royal*, a French ship from the 1600s. The original was the largest ship in the world at the time, created to honor King Louis XIV, the Sun King.

According to Russo, the *Soleil Royal* was badly damaged during a battle and taken to Cherbourg Bay in France to be repaired. Bombarded over night, a fire started in the stern of the boat, causing it to explode and sink in the bay.

The model that is now on display at the country club took Russo an impressive 2,000 hours to build. Made from an Italian Mantua Model kit, the ship is 40 inches in length. He says the hardest parts were bending the wood and tying the roughly 3,000 knots in the rigging. The statues and ornamentation that adorned the original ship, in order to impress the king, were replicated on Russo's model in brass while deep blue paint decorates the replica's deck.



Ed Russo with his granddaughter, Lucy Ann Hamilton

Though he'd held on to the model for many years, it was too large for him to keep and he wasn't sure where to put it. Russo eventually contacted Casey Kaut, the general manager of the club, and asked him if he could donate it.

The Newport Beach Country Club had a table built for the *Soleil Royal* replica, and it was placed in the lobby this summer, just in time for the club's annual regatta. It will soon be moved to its permanent location, the men's grill.

"I was hoping it would find a place where people could enjoy it long after I'm gone," he says.

Russo is now working on another model that he says he may be willing to donate in a couple of years. Whether he does or he doesn't, the *Soleil Royal* is sure to bring smiles to the faces of members for decades to come.