

Elaine interviewing Paul Bonnel and Nathalie Presles of Association Thalie de Nantes à Brest

Elaine:

Well I'm in Gouarec at an enormous hanger down by the canal and I can see what is the huge skeleton of the hull of a boat, although at this point some if it now is beginning to get some skin on it. I'm talking to Paul and Nathalie about what is going on here and why.

Paul:

Oh Hello, so today we are building a rowing boat, a wooden boat to go on the canal. She's 9 metres long, 3 metres wide, and 2 tons of wood, and we intend to build this boat to have a revival on the canal because the canal is nearly dead today, just a few boats are on the canal and we intend to have a few boats and have a good animation.

Nathalie:

Yes this is the first boat, so this project is part of all the association projects. The association also organises events, so we're gonna be on the same time of having wonderful wooden boats on the canal we're going to be organising events around that, mostly music, art exhibits, conference. So the name of our association is "Thalie de Nantes à Brest".

Elaine:

So when did the construction on this craft start?

Paul:

Well, in fact, last winter I was here and I started drawing on a small scale and then at the end of March I went to the yard and drew in full size the boat with a pupil from a wooden school and we spent 3 weeks drawings and I get the templates for all the pieces of the boat and ehh, we order the wood in February, then we started the boat at the middle of March and we are working on her between 2 or 3 days a week and we will be finished at the end of the year.

Elaine:

So where is the wood sourced from? is it local, or do you have to have it imported in from another part of France?

Paul:

We use 2 type of wood, for the floors, for the frames. We use oak, but the oak is not coming from Brittany because it is too weak. We need a strong boat, and it's come from the far west. I mean sometimes it may be near Paris. It's a kind of wood, really stronger, and the pine, we choose a pine from Scandinavia, so this type of wood grows very slowly and gets stronger you know.

Elaine:

So you've got some coming in from the other side of Paris and some coming in from Scandinavia. The coordination must be quite difficult.

Paul:

I've been managing a ship yard during 35 years So I know where to find the right wood.

Elaine:

So do you have volunteers helping you out?

Nathalie:

Yes actually we do have . We are very, very happy about that. Between 5 and 6 people you know, turning around and coming to work at least 2 days a week and it's wonderful because we have many people from many different countries. That's what I love about Kreiz Breizh too you know, we've got English people, from Belgium, from Scotland and also people from Gouarec are very, very interested and very attached to that project and it's just wonderful because this boat is really made to be a boat of an association, for the people to enjoy it and to use it. And so yes it definitely works. People are getting along very well together. There is a really fine spirit in all of this and we are very happy about that. We've been created the association now umm, a year and a half ago and we are today 110 members.

Elaine:

So it's going to, you're looking at the end of the year maybe for the launch date.

Paul:

We intend to launch about the first of April and err, I don't know if we told you, but this boat has a great name. It's called Gwareg, the old name of Gouarec. That means curve in Breton.

Elaine:

That's a great choice. So it will have, well perhaps you can describe it, it will have a deck, is it?

Paul:

It not a deck. It's a bateau creux, without deck. They're six seats, six rowers, Nathalie at the helm, and 12 people allowed you know, to go in and we cut the bench so that 3 peoples with rolling chair you say?

Elaine:

wheelchair

Paul:

Yeah, that they can come with us to discover the canal.

Elaine:

That's a very important factor to consider now in anything that you want to attract people... that there is wheelchair access.

Paul & Nathalie:

Really, really, yes yes

Elaine:

So how far will it go down the canal. It will go from Gouarec to....?

Paul:

Haa... Today, today you can use the locks from the Lac de Guerlédan des Forges to Plélauff. In the next 2 years they will repair 4 more locks so then you can go to a wonderful place called La Pitié. And in La Pitié there is a special lock, it's a double lock we say called Coat-Natous, and then you have to turn back, back to the Canal de Guerlédan, to the Lac de Guerlédan.

Nathalie:

Yes, it's a very very wonderful part. Actually it's really enough to enjoy that part of the canal, fully really. It's so, so gorgeous.

Paul:

And that's why there won't be an engine in the boat. So 3 way to go - rowing, the horse

Elaine:

You're going to have a horse?

Paul:

Yeh, a horse that pull the boat and then the brico l'associative.

Nathalie:

It's people pulling the boat, it is people.

Elaine:

Ah right!

Paul: So, if you have not enough money to buy a horse you ask to the benevols, to the volunteers to pull....

Elaine:

Ah right..manpower, manpower.

Paul: Yes, manpower.

Elaine:

Manpower. And also, I meant to ask...how is it you are getting any funding?

Paul:

aaaam, Well in fact umm, we ask to the Departement, we ask to the CCKB, we ask to the commune and we get a third of the price of the cost of the boat. Err...We intend to have events with a bar and selling beers and meal but because of the covid , that's the second year that we have to cancel the event and so for the moment all the boat is not paid, but next week, next



year, we will have 3 events and I think they will go well. Next week I have to send a file to the Banque Populaire. They told us that they would like to help us, you know it's a foundation and I hope it will go, but we are very, very well helped by the commune of Gouarec. We have a shed we have a ?...bureau. They gave us a "pension".

Elaine:
help...

Nathalie:
...financial help

Paul:
yeh ...of 500 euros

Elaine:
Well it's a superb enterprise because you are putting back something that was there, then disappeared and so it's putting Gouarec on the map, so it is to their interest to support such an event, such a proposition.

Nathalie:
And they understood it very well, very fastly. We are very well surrounded. Actually I would just like to mention one thing about this boat err, that it's also going to be a stage, because, umm, the projects we have with the few boats Paul is gonna build, I mean it's 3 boats actually but part of it is to make a stage out of it. Like this we can produce on them concerts, you know. And so starting next year we're gonna be already starting to programs and events on the boat. Because the main thing also is to build events with people from here. With local people, you know, because we are so rich, so many talents..and then we can also be working in tim with Christian, with trains and you know and organise events relying to you know boats and all trains, all boats. We,you know there is, there is a feel to organise many wonderful things really.

Elaine:
Well I think it's absolutely brilliant and I will be following your progress. So I wish you the very best of luck and I think it's tremendous and congratulations on coming up with such an enterprising scheme.

Nathalie:
Thank you so much for receiving us. Really.