

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS
HISTORY
CENTER

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SAUGATUCK'S HISTORIC DEMEREST SHANTY OPENS

May 27, 2021 – The Saugatuck-Douglas History Center celebrated the opening of its permanent exhibit on commercial fishing in a restored waterfront fishing shanty.

The May 26 ribbon cutting event was attended by nearly 100 History Center representatives, donors, and members as well as descendants of area commercial fishing families. Included among those families were the children of Marvin “Demmy” Demerest, David Demerest and Marilyn Hebert, descendants of the last commercial fisherman to own the shanty. Demmy passed away in April of 2020. According to the History Center’s Executive Director, Eric Gollanek, the event commemorated the realization of a year-long project to save one of the last commercial fishing shanties in Saugatuck and repurpose it to tell the story of the rise and fall of commercial fishing in Saugatuck-Douglas. “Today we come together to dedicate the Historic Demerest Fishing Shanty. It’s survival and preservation stands as a tribute to the countless men and women and families who gave life to Saugatuck’s working waterfront and risked their lives every day,” said Gollanek.

Under a partnership brokered by the History Center, Retro Boat Rentals and the Harrington family--owners of the boat rental site--restored the shanty and placed it on the site adjacent to the existing Old Boat House at 730 Water Street. The History Center then developed and installed an exhibit of interpretive story panels, photographs, fishing artifacts, and a video montage. The exhibit materials are placed inside and around the exterior of the shanty, now called Saugatuck’s Historic Demerest Shanty. Inside the shanty, the exhibit will share space with a fresh and smoked fish market to be run by Fish Lads Saugatuck. Exterior story panels will be open for public viewing 24/7, while the interior exhibit will be accessible from 10 am to 8 pm starting in early June.

The story of commercial fishing in Saugatuck-Douglas interpreted at the Shanty extended over 100 years. From the 1860s through the 1960s and into the early 1970s, commercial fishing operators employed hundreds of people and produced tons of fish for local and regional markets. This came to an end when invasive species, pollution, overfishing, and state regulations favoring recreational fishing all took their toll here and

throughout the Great Lakes. The story is told by the Demerest Shanty exhibit, and in more detail in a book published by the History Center to coincide with the exhibit. The book, "Bounty & Bust: Commercial Fishing in Saugatuck-Douglas, 1860-1970," is available for purchase at the Retro Boat Rentals boathouse as well as at the History Center's two locations at 735 Park Street in Saugatuck and 130 Center Street in Douglas.

To support the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center, or for more information about the Center and its two Museum locations and Saugatuck's Historic Demerest Shanty, please visit www.MySDHistory.org.

