

"This is different than building roads or buildings. The tradesmen here just love boats and are really fond of the work. Everything they do is different," said Kelly. "There is that romance of the water."

Many challenges await Wenonah II's creators.

Under the watchful eye of master boat builder Gerry Van Heuvelan, huge spans of steel will have to be painstakingly cut, crafted and welded to exact measurements in order to satisfy strict Canadian Coast Guard and CSA standards.

When the major pieces of the hull are assembled in Gravenhurst, the superstructure will also have to be fitted aboard, as will two 370-horsepower diesel engines which will power the craft along at 11 knots.

Kelly said a dummy steam funnel will be affixed to the top deck to give the Wenonah II the yesteryear appearance of a time when coal-fired steam engines pushed their host vessels through the water.

Russ Brown, general manager of Muskoka Classic Cruises, said the Muskoka community is excited about the new

"We're trying to keep as much history as possible," said Brown. "We feel this is the time to expand. Toronto is getting closer and closer every year. We were 89 per cent full in the 1999 season. From July to August, we're 100 per cent full."

In Muskoka, the word ostentatious is often a byword when building a summer home. And that helps the boat tour business. Passengers marvel at the extravagance some cottagers exhibit with their monstrous decks, docks, boathouses and homes of several thousand square feet.

Sights inside the ship will also thrill passengers, said Brown.

"This will be like a small ocean liner. It will be the Muskoka's 'Loveboat.'"

