

NATCHEZ ON THE WATERFRONT **SO YOU WANT TO BE A MARINA OPERATOR - OY VEY!**

Getting fed up with the rat race, tired of the long and arduous commutes, looking for a different way of life – why not become a marina operator and get to work in the sun, on the water and with the peaceful tranquility of boating Well, maybe not so peaceful.

There is no question that there is the waterfront aroma, fresh air, the sun, the view of all these boats that bring pleasure to those who partake. It's a good feeling. But then there is another side that requires hard, contentious and tireless energy without the plush offices and endless staff. It's clearly not for the 9 to 5 approach. But it is for those who are keen on messin' around with boats while being able to exercise their entrepreneurial spirit.

The lure of the water and boating has long been a beacon to those who have grown tired of their previous lives. Likewise, there are those who have been raised on the water who don't want to grow up and spend their days away from their mistress under the fluorescent suns that illuminate so many traditional offices. But the romance aside, the life of a marina operator or manager is much different than many other careers one may identify with or have had exposure to.

Regardless of how small or large the operation is, a good marina manager finds him or herself being a jack of all trades – part public relations: in dealing with and promoting the marina with its clientele; being the ambassador with the neighboring community and prospective clients; being a lobbyist with local, state and federal regulators to prevent adverse laws and regulations upon the marina; - part Mr. Fix It: in terms of working through problems and issues with both clients and staff in diagnosing and undertaking repairs to boats, engines, docks, bulkheads, showers, toilets, forklifts, etc; ordering and insuring adequate supplies of needed parts and relations with suppliers; – part planner: in trying to think of additional and new ways to create value, profit centers and revenue streams; making the facility more efficient; - part psychologist in dealing with problems of the respective employees and clients; - and part student in continuing to learn from others in the industry. And in one's spare time one gets to go boating. Yikes, where is the spare time?!

Actually, I suppose the typical marina operator/manager in many ways is no different than many other small business operators, except the setting is a bit different and the issues probably a tad more diverse.

For those striving to be a marina operator or manager, the programs that the professional associations put on are more than desirable, and in many cases are almost a must. Where else can one get the benefit of some of the best experts in their field on a concentrated basis as well as network and be expose to approaches and solutions to problems one had no idea either existed or how to go about solving.

The era of a marina operator sitting outside all day and basking in the sun has long since gone by the boards (if it ever really existed). Today's marina operators are extremely professional, with the quality continuing to be increased due to the many education and certification programs such as those put on by the ICOMIA Marinas Committee (IMC), the Association of Marina Industries (AMI - formerly the International Marina Institute and the Marine Operators Association of America) and the American Boat Builders and Repairers Association (ABBRA). In fact, there are now both national and international

associations the world over dedicated to promoting and improving the quality of boating, marinas and the entire recreational marine industry, including:

Aseanarean Marinas Association
Arab Marine Industries Association (AMIA), www.amiaweb.com
Instituto De Marinas Do Brasil
Fédération Française Des Ports De Plaisance (FFPP), www.ffports-plaisance.com
Unionenazionle Cantieri E Industrie Nautiche Affini (UCINA), www.ucina.net
Japan Marina & Beach Association (JM&BA), www.jmba.or.jp
Dutch Marine Industry Association (HISWA), www.hiswa.nl
Euromarina, www.euromarina.org
Turkish Marine Environment Protection Association (Turmepa), www.turmepa.org.tr
Turkish Chamber Of Shipping, www.chamber-of-shipping.org.tr
The Yacht Harbour Association (TYHA), www.yachtharbourassociation.com
International Council Of Marine Industry Associations (Icomia) www.icomia.com
National Marine Manufactures Association (Nmma) www.nmma.org
Recreational Navigation Commission (PIANC) www.pianc-aipcn.org
New Zealand Marina Operators Association, www.nzmarinas.com
European Boating Association (EBA) <http://eba.sida.nu>
European Congress Of Municipalities With Marina/Yachting Harbor (AEMA)
Mexican Marinas Association
States Organization For Boating Access (SOBA), www.sobaus.org
International Harbour Masters' Association, www.harbourmaster.org
Boating Industries Association Of New Zealand, www.nzmarine.com
Australian Marine Industries Federation (AMIF), www.amif.asn.au
Marina Association Of Australia (MAA) www.marinas.net.au

Professional associations have programs for those in junior management positions to intermediate management positions to advanced marina management training. And there are specific educational courses run on such technical topics as operating travelifts, bottom painting and fiberglassing. For the more adventurous, the world is seeking quality managers on almost every continent and in every region, and many associations offer free placement opportunities.

AMI, through its International Marina Institute programs, offers some of the most intense training, with courses offered in the United States, Europe and Australia. AMI and ABBRA are partnering in the US for intensive hands-on one and two-day short courses of specific operations. These as well as other trade associations put on one day to multiple day seminars on various topics of local interest. AMI and ABBRA's programs and offerings can be found at www.marinaassociation.org and www.abbra.org respectively.

ICOMIA's Marinas Committee (IMC) organizes a three-day international marina conference once every three years. The last was in 2005 in San Diego with over 541 participants from over 26 countries. The next conference is on the Flemish coast off the North Sea in Ostend, Belgium, May 25-28, 2008 and information can be found at www.imc2008.com

Most importantly, these types of forums provide a framework as well as network of whom to call to talk about problems and get advice from others.

The issues that face marinas today are getting more and more complex, and usually have to be handled with less or the same staff. They range from technical questions on fuel injection in motors, to facility-wide issues such as pollution control, to the fine print issues of contracts, insurance and the like.

What does one do to prepare for hurricanes? Should the fuel dock personnel hold the nozzle or pass it to the boat operator during fueling operations? What type of emergency preparedness plans should one have? How does one attract and keep quality mechanics? These are just some of the many other issues that the marina operator/manager must face.

One of the better qualities of a good marina operator is knowing that one does not necessarily know all, and not being afraid to ask others for their ideas, experience and assistance. Some of the greatest leaders in the world have said it is not necessarily knowing the answers but knowing where to go to get the best answers.

In addition to the professional associations, there are some outstanding industry consultants that are available to help explore and guide one through the various mazes on a meaningful, cost-effective basis. One of the benefits of consultants is their wealth of knowledge and ability to apply it to a particular facility on the most meaningful basis. They can also help you deal with any number of issues that may be the cause of your most recent headache.

Speaking of headaches, some years ago we did a Top Ten List which somehow seems appropriate (and perhaps a little 'inappropriate' at the same time):

DSN&A's Top Ten Marina Operator Headaches:

10. "Free Willy" falls in love with a customer's Bayliner.
 9. Pesky government regulators that you'd like to use as shark bait.
 8. Gilligan and the Skipper sailed off without paying last month's bill.
 7. Seagulls! Those flying rats.
 6. Those annoying "Love Boat" cast members asking around for jobs.
 5. Other customers inconvenienced when Madonna shows up with the Seventh Fleet.
 4. Those "Little Mermaid" character are tough to scrape off propellers.
 3. Sailors swear like...well, sailors.
 2. The shredded toilet paper all over the men's room whenever Captain Hook is in town.
- And the number one marina operator headache:
1. Crabs!

But seriously, when all is said and done, the headaches subside, calm waters return and the sun sets over the dazzling array of boats, there is nothing quite like the inner satisfaction, pride and joy that only a marina operator understands.

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