

SAIL AMERICA NEWS

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WAYPOINTS COVER STORY



Jim Frye is currently Vice-President of Business Development for Westrec Marinas, the group behind such facilities as Harbour Towne Marina in Dania Beach, FL, and Sunrise Harbor Marina in Fort Lauderdale, FL. He is also the industry liaison for Cruzin, a peer-to-peer boating rental operation based in Fort Lauderdale, FL, with partnerships across the United States. President Emeritus and past-Chair of the Association of Marina Industries (AMI), Jim was NMMA's Director for Marinas and Boating Access and is the former Managing Director for Marina Bay, a marina turned recreational destination and condo community in Quincy, MA. Sail America caught up with Jim at the International Marina & Boatyard Conference (IMBC) to hear about some trends, to learn what we can

expect from the marina industry, and to get a fresh perspective on sailing and the industry as a whole.

Sail America: You have a degree in psychology, correct? How did you get involved in the boating industry? Did you grow up on the water?

Jim Frye: Yes, to the degree in psychology, I might suggest that I still use a little of it every day, especially in navigating the boating industry. I literally started working in the marina industry on my 16th birthday! My dad didn't want me to miss even one day of a lifetime of work and so drove me to the Boston Harbor Marina (that later became Marina Bay) on my birthday. I worked my way through high school and college at the marina.

SA: Marina Bay in Quincy, MA, started to see major changes in the 1980s; I'm assuming it was under your direction. What was the catalyst for that and how did you envision the future of the industry at that time?

JF: I was just 23 years old when I returned to Marina Bay working for the developer that was transforming the former naval air base into a residential and retail development. My role was to preserve and expand the marina as a part of the development, which proved challenging from time to time. Competing for space to preserve important marina functions like hauling, launching, and storing boats was difficult when comparing those marginal profit centers to the boom from developing

the land. Fighting for parking space for boaters and maintaining some proximity to the water was a regular exercise. So I don't know that it's fair to talk about my vision of the future of the industry. I was busy trying to preserve the past but I guess in doing so I helped to create what is now a successful development that has integrated a very productive marina operation into a vibrant residential, commercial, and retail community.

SA: Has your vision for the marina industry shifted since the late '80s with the advent of new technology or boater habits?

JF: Most marinas have evolved beyond the traditional boat storage facilities into destinations that play host to the boater's experience. Marina operators have learned that much if not most of the boating experience is happening at the dock and have made that "dock" as interesting as possible. Marinas are vibrant communities of families recreating both on and off the boat. Our challenge as an industry is to get the future generations off the phones and tablets and interacting with each other and the great outdoors. Boating is one of the few places that those things are still happening.

SA: You have been involved with marina associations since the days of the Marina Operators Association of America (MOAA), which merged with the International Marina Institute (IMI) in 2005 to become the Association of Marina Industries (AMI). What are some changes you've seen over the years, in terms of marina development, training demands, and demographics? [Ed note: IMI remains as the training subsidiary of AMI]

JF: We've seen a trend toward increasing professionalism in the marina industry. We continue to certify more marina managers. The old MOAA was principally made up of marina owners that came together around their interest in battling with the regulatory community. IMI was more of a "think tank" whose members were senior level marina employees (professional managers) and consultants, engineers, and designers. This was the group that created marina manager certification and all of the training programs that support it. In merging these two associations we added strength to each agenda and in many ways the current offering of the AMI and especially the IMBC [International Marina & Boatyard Conference] are evidence of the strength in bringing these groups together. The industry is now leading, or at least in step with, the regulatory community in creating things like Clean Marinas and Best Management Practices.

SA: It's pretty well agreed that boating access is both a necessity to grow boating and a challenge for many who don't go boating. What are some of the challenges you've seen and what are some of the obstacles you've overcome?

JF: I was for a number of years the professional staff for the industry's efforts to preserve and expand boating access. The challenges to access included waterfront development, moving away from water-dependent uses to water-enhanced uses like the development at Marina Bay. Additionally, the regulatory community was working to preserve water quality by trying to move marinas away from the water. There are ongoing arguments over whether or not marinas are providing or

prohibiting public access to the nation's waterways. We have recently joked about solving the boating access crisis; all it took was a recession! Supply suddenly matched demand, problem solved. We'll continue to see challenges to boating access and it will again be a limiting factor for boat sales. Efforts to move smaller boats into drystack storage will be helpful preserving space in the water for larger boats and of course sailboats that can't be stored this way.

SA: What are some amenities Westrec offers for sailors and what are some things sailors look for, in your experience?

JF: Sailors are looking for those things that support and enhance their time on the water, away from the dock. Sailors are looking for provisions, safe harbors, and amenities like great restrooms to balance the time on the water. Westrec offers our sailing communities a respite and safe harbor as well as supporting events like regattas, races, and transient travels.

SA: What are some design challenges you've encountered with sailboats that come into marinas that you have either acquired or managed?

JF: Adequate draft is probably the number one challenge when trying to accommodate and build a sailing marina. The next is designing marina berths to properly secure sailboats; they are shaped a little different than most powerboats. It's also important that fairways, entryways, and exits are designed for the slightly less maneuverable sailboats operating under power. Space is important and of course at a premium in most marinas.

SA: In what ways do you think about sailboats when you acquire a new marina?

JF: Sailors are more active than most powerboaters and an active sailing community can be really healthy for a marina. Youth sailing programs bring young people to the marina. Racing teams and regattas bring activity to the marina. And a transient sailor makes the marina more vibrant helping to promote the marina in their travels as well as bringing and sharing some of the experiences they have had in other places. This can add value to a marina. Finding a marina with a sailing component can make a marina more attractive for acquisition.

SA: What can the sailing industry do to further interest in sailing? Should there be more collaboration within the industry?

JF: Collaboration is a good thing in most cases. It's easier to see our differences when we don't have to look at each other. I think that the sailing industry has done and continues to do a good job working throughout the marine industry promoting its products and lifestyle. That work needs to continue, especially in the marina segment. Too many marina operators would look at sailors as a group more frugal and less inclined to invest in their boating experience but I believe in many cases that the opposite is true. Sailors are much more passionate and more heavily invested in pursuing that passion.

SA: This past spring, you got involved as Industry Liaison for Cruzin. What made you get involved with that group?

JF: In my opinion Cruzin is bringing a current trend in social interaction to the boating industry. For some time now, consumers have been participating in “collaborative consumption,” purchasing things from each other rather than from retailers. Cruzin is bringing an Internet platform that boaters can use to rent their boats to other qualified boaters. This brings more value to boating and increases access to boating. Those are two things that I have been working on for most of my career in the boating industry. Supporting Cruzin in delivering their product and meeting these goals makes a lot of sense to me.

SA: What does Industry Liaison mean? What are your goals in that capacity?

JF: As Industry Liaison I’m simply introducing them to as many folks in the recreational boating industry as possible and helping them to learn what they need to know about that marketplace. There are some pretty specific ways to navigate the boating space and I’m trying to help them stay on course and not suffer too much “the wind and tide.”

SA: What are some of the messages you’re trying to bring to the industry and how can this lead to boat sales?

JF: I’m hoping that the industry can embrace Cruzin as an expansion of how we’re doing business and not see it as a threat to boat sales. We know from extensive research that the best way to get people interested in boating is to get them out on the water. Cruzin and this kind of collaborative consumption is providing a new and inexpensive way to get more people in boats and out on the water.

SA: How is the concept of peer-to-peer boat rental being received within the industry and within the consumer world?

JF: The world gets it! Some in the industry are willing to embrace it as an opportunity; some others are change adverse and at the very least remain more skeptical. For the most part it’s an education process. Once people take the time to get over the initial “I don’t know how that works so it can’t be a good idea” they begin to look for ways to make it work for them. We’re seeing more and more of that and the concept is getting traction.

SA: With Cruzin, do you see more powerboats or sailboats? Do you actively market to either sector more, and why?

JF: The answer is both; neither segment is really dominating just yet. Obviously, Cruzin is attracting powerboaters because they can get involved with a little less experience and sailboaters that see the value in getting access to a boat with which they are familiar or one that they would like to try out. Anyone passionate about boating will see the benefit of getting more out of their boat and/or getting access to a boat they may not be able to purchase today but hope to soon.

SA: Through Discover Sailing, new boaters can go sailing with experienced skippers or potential buyers can take a boat donated through a manufacturer (such as J Boats) for a sea trial. If peer-to-peer boat rental can lead to sales, what can the sailing industry do to make itself more accessible to that concept?

JF: The peer-to-peer platform is an excellent place for sailboat manufacturers and dealers to get experienced sailors on board and using their new and used products. Sites like Cruzin allow manufacturers and dealers to list their boats and Cruzin even offers an incentive to those that list more than one boat so a manufacturer can include their whole product line and earn a little rental income but more importantly get sailors using and appreciating their particular products. It makes sense that one will buy a boat that they have tried out and are confident that it's a good fit for them.

SA: Is Cruzin or are you doing anything to get people more involved in boating, e.g., boat handling classes or courses on navigation and/or rules of the road?

JF: I just enrolled in the new "Marina Pro" training that is being offered by the National Safe Boating Council in cooperation with AMI, sponsored by a grant from the US Coast Guard. The idea is to train "trainers" at marinas that can assist boaters in getting more and better experience running their boats and so get more enjoyment out of those boats. The NSBC developed the program a couple of years ago and AMI is helping them reach marina operators. My goal is to get the certification so I can help get marina operators (or their designees) trained and working with their marina customers. It will be an easy expansion to begin offering training to brand new or "want to be" boaters at marinas too.

Peer-to-peer boat rental will be addressed at the [Sail America Industry Conference](#), June 9–11, 2014, in Charleston, SC, in a seminar called "Sailboat Rental: A Brave New World." The panel will include representatives from Cruzin, SailTime, and Boatbound.