



Southwest Florida offers some of the best sailing waters in the country.

HOOKED ON BOATING

We live in a boater's paradise. Let's chart your course.

BY HANNAH WALLACE

From all corners of the globe, boaters are drawn here not only by the beauty of the Gulf and inland waterways but by favorable currents and steady winds that make this one of the best boating environments anywhere. Our boating lifestyle attracts people of all ages and backgrounds, from international yachters and competitive sailors to seagoing kayakers and Sunday fishermen. We ask some why they love their brand of boating, and what adventures keep them hooked. We also scout out cool marine gadgets, visit a wooden-boat building shop with an ambitious new project and ask an instructor for tips for beginning cruisers.

Welcome aboard!



“You can sail your whole life and you’re always learning.”—MICHELLE LEE

GREAT GEAR Cool new tools and toys for boaters.



For When You Discover Your Honey Hole: HD GPS Anchor+ motor

With a push of a button, this trolling motor will compensate for wind, waves and current to keep the bow of your boat within a few feet of that precise spot. rhodanmarine.com



For When the Fun Goes Past Sundown: LED under-boat lights

Spot the fish—or be spotted yourself—with colorful, bright and long-lasting LEDs that light up the water as you float across it. oceanled.com



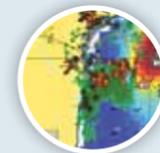
For Staying Put in Shallow Flats: Power-Pole

This motorized anchoring system secures your boat faster and more stealthily than chucking a traditional anchor into the water. power-pole.com



For Finding the Fish and Finding Your Way: GPSMAP

Computers are everywhere these days, and boats are no exception. This combination chartplotter/sonar lets you see where you’re going and what’s underneath you. garmin.com



For Staying Ahead of the Storm: WM-3 Sirius XM Satellite

This weather and radio module gives real-time reports and forecasts, even tracking storm cells on your chart screen, via Sirius satellite. simrad-yaching.com



For When Fido Comes Along: Paws Aboard

This special set of stairs attaches to your boat’s existing ladder, letting four-legged swimmers climb up out of the water with ease. pawsaboard.com

LOCALLY, WEST MARINE CARRIES THESE PRODUCTS, OR THEY CAN BE SPECIAL-ORDERED AT OTHER MARINE SUPPLIERS.



MARINERS' TALES

Local boaters on the siren call of the sea.

Michelle Lee | 21-FOOT VIPER 640 SAILBOAT

NAME: *Coming in Hot*, after Lee's tendency as a learner to sail full-speed into the dock

DOCKED: On a trailer at City Island's Sarasota Sailing Squadron

FEATURES: As a “one-design” class racing sailboat, the Viper can't be altered for competition (when everyone's racing the exact same boat, the sailor's skills are the defining factor) and has just enough room for a four-man crew.

BOATING HISTORY: “I grew up in Sarasota, but I didn't learn as a child,” says Lee. She and her husband lived elsewhere for a while, but when they returned in 2007, “the first thing I did was learn to sail.”

THE LIFESTYLE: Lee has two weekly sailing dates: a fun excursion with the all-women Luffing Lassies, and a Sunday race, during which she competes, usually with a team of girlfriends, against primarily male teams—which has led to a few dents and scratches on her boat. “The men are encouraging, but for a long time they gave me a wide berth at races,” she says. “Now it's actually a compliment that they're jostling me.” She and her husband and two sons will soon take the boat to races on the east coast.

THE CAMARADERIE: After racing, people gather at the squadron or sail to Marina Jack for dinner. And Lee has found kindred spirits among the independent, fun-loving Luffing Lassies.

WHY BOATING?: “The water, the wind—it's never the same twice. You can sail your whole life, and you're always learning.”

THE DOCKMASTER

In 2001, dockmaster Sam Chavers oversaw 109 slips at downtown's Marina Jack. Now, after \$10 million in capital investments, Chavers is responsible for 316 slips, plus a mooring field for 50 more boats, with another 59 slips planned. In fact, Marina Jack has become the area's No. 1 generator of visitor traffic (when taking into account Bayfront Park's popularity, too).

Chavers and his staff of 15 are also responsible for Marina Jack's busy fuel station, two ship stores, boater amenities like showers and laundry, as well as a service station that does everything from cleaning to major repairs. “We're like a landlord for all the boats,” he says.

On any given day, Chavers might be greeting local jetskiers in for a refuel or a wealthy Wisconsin couple docking their 130-foot luxury yacht for the weekend.

“We just have to be flexible,” says the Florida native.

The point, he says, is to give as many people as possible access to the water. After all, the marina is city property, and in addition to the private boats, Chavers serves commercial fishermen and charter operations, rental companies and even the Coast Guard. “We're always asking, ‘How we can we be a mechanism for people to get out there?’” he says. “Even [for] people who don't have the ability to purchase boats.” To that end, Chavers' next project will be enhancing the marina's watersports activities, like kayaking, paddleboarding and jetski rentals.

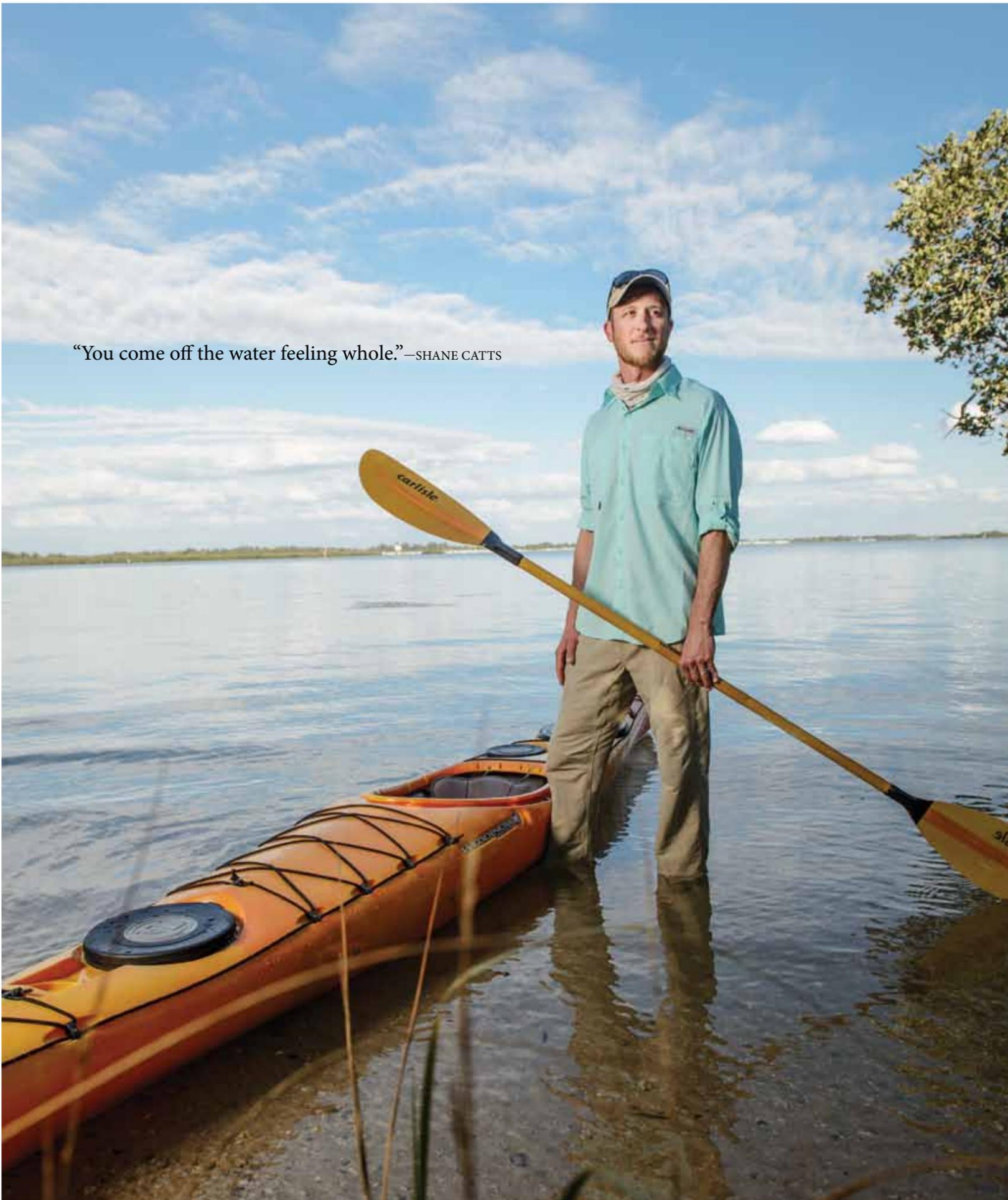
Chavers says he loves his job, especially the people, from fishermen he sees every day to international travelers he may meet only once. Many people return year after year, with ever enhanced boats and stories from around the world.



Sam Chavers

“It's different than if you were, say, a bill collector,” he says. “It's a great atmosphere all the time.”

“You come off the water feeling whole.”—SHANE CATTS



RENT-A-RIDE

Fun and unusual watercraft for hire.

Sitting sturdy on its eponymous cylinders, the **pontoon boat** has a broad, flat deck that's perfect for hosting up to 14 people for smooth cruises, barbecues, you name it. It's the ultimate party boat—especially on the calm waters of Sarasota Bay and the Intracoastal—and available from many local companies. Starting at \$199 for four hours; check out CB's Outfitters for a selection. cbsoutfitters.com/boat-rentals

Eighteen-foot-long electric **Duffy boats** come with room for eight people, a canopy shade, and a clear conscience—no gas emissions here. And they're as quiet as the wind. Find them at Venice's Crow's Nest Marina. Starting at \$80 for an hour, or \$210 for three. crowsnest-venice.com/marina/duffy-electric-boat-rentals

No, you can't drive it yourself, but an **air boat** is inland Florida's quintessential watercraft—the giant “fan” for propulsion lets it zig and zag over shoreline grasslands as easily as the water. Climb aboard as a passenger with an expert-piloted tour of the Peace River. Starting at \$43 an hour; most tours are for four or fewer people. peacrivercharters.com

Book a night or a week aboard an air-conditioned **luxury houseboat**. This is as close as you can get to enjoying a boat owner's brand of freedom—sailing to local beaches or marinas, anchoring and hanging out on your own schedule. Englewood's Gulf Island Tours even offers limousine service within a 30-mile radius; yachts starting at \$225 a night or \$1,200 a week. thegulfview.com

MARINER'S TALE Shane Catts

16.5-FOOT WILDERNESS SYSTEMS “TEMPEST” SEA KAYAK

DOCKED: on Catts' 16-boat trailer

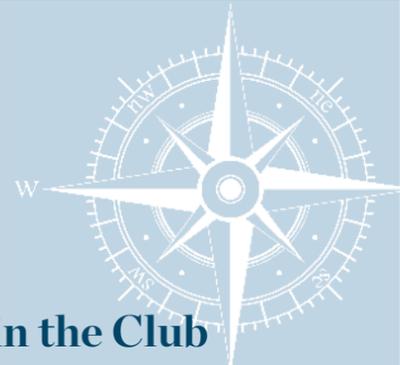
FEATURES: After trying out “every single other” brand, Catts prefers the Wilderness Systems' balance of speed, comfort and stability. His Tempest model includes a moderately chined hull, which allows him to maneuver in rougher conditions, plus a low deck and bow, for speed and smoothness, as well as retractable skeg system that helps the boat adjust to wind and current conditions.

BOATING HISTORY: “I've been [kayaking] my whole life,” he says. “My grandmother lived on Longboat Key, and my little brothers and I grew up exploring Sarasota Bay.”

THE LIFESTYLE: Catts appreciates the solitude of paddling recreationally, calling it a meditative equivalent to a long hike in the woods. Kayaks can maneuver in places most boats can't go, which allows for idyllic isolation. “My favorite spot is Longboat Pass,” he says. “The sandbars—the water's so clear, it's a great spot to see dolphins and search for conch shells.” He also takes advantage of rough, windy days to “surf” the waves in his kayak.

THE CAMARADERIE: Catts' passion for paddling led him to open Happy Paddler Eco-Tours, where he meets a lot of out-of-town visitors ready to relax and enjoy themselves. “It's like being on vacation all the time,” he says. “Nobody's in a bad mood when they come to my job.”

WHY BOATING? “It's like yoga: your breath is part of it, you're stretching, you're getting full-body exercise, you're healthy and happy. You come off the water feeling whole.”



Join the Club

Yacht clubs are a great way to connect with other boaters and to enjoy all sorts of events and social activities both on and off the water. Here's a sampling.

BIRD KEY YACHT CLUB

Private club that offers a beautiful view of the downtown Sarasota skyline.
301 Bird Key Drive, Sarasota
(941) 953-4455
birdkeyycc.com

REGATTA POINTE MARINA

On the northern shore of the Manatee River, with 350 slips for vessels up to 120 feet.
1005 Riverside Drive, Palmetto
(941) 729-6021
regattapointemarina.com

BRADENTON YACHT CLUB

Private, family-oriented club with 550-plus members with diverse boating skills.
4307 Snead Island Road, Palmetto
(941) 722-5936
bradentonyachtclub.com

SARASOTA SAILING SQUADRON

Member-owned sailing club adjacent to Mote Marine Laboratory in Ken Thompson Park.
1717 Ken Thompson Parkway, Sarasota
(941) 388-2355
sarasotasailingsquadron.org

THE FIELD CLUB

Exclusive private club in a historic setting on the Intracoastal Waterway on Roberts Bay.
1400 Field Road, Sarasota
(941) 924-1201
thefieldclub.com

SARASOTA YACHT CLUB

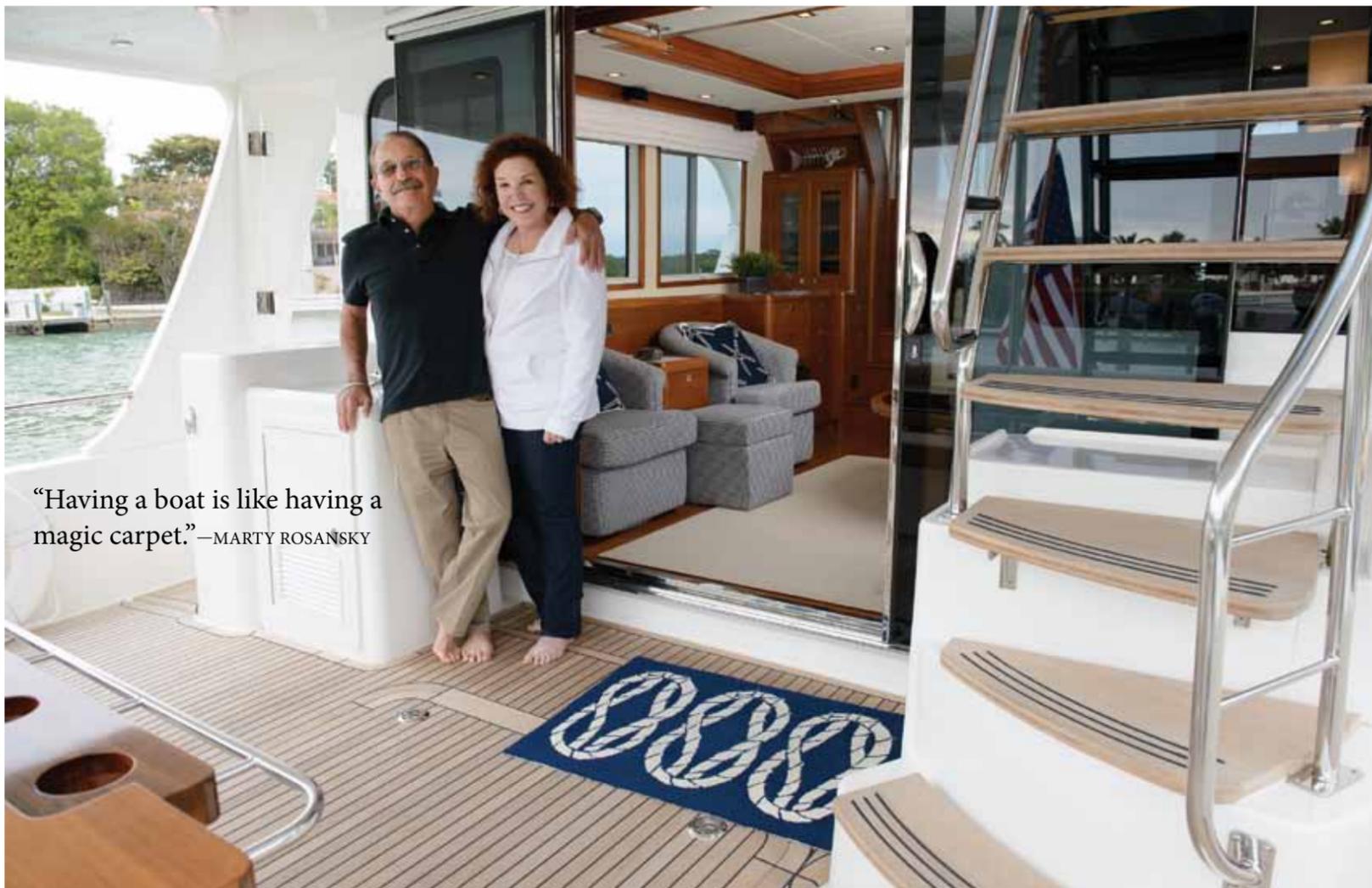
Private club with a full range of activities for members.
1100 John Ringling Blvd., Sarasota
(941) 365-4191
sarasotayachtclub.org

LONGBOAT KEY CLUB MOORINGS

Full-service, 291-slip marina with long-term and short-term rentals available.
2630 Harbourside Drive Longboat Key, FL
(941) 383-8383
longboatkeymarina.com

VENICE YACHT CLUB

Private club with broad range of boating and other organized events.
1330 Tarpon Center Drive, Venice
(941) 488-7708
veniceyachtclub.com



“Having a boat is like having a magic carpet.” —MARTY ROSANSKY



MARINER'S TALE

Marty and Diana Rosansky

55-FOOT GRAND BANKS ALEUTIAN 55RP, HULL NO. 2, THE FIRST OF ITS MODEL IN THE U.S.

NAME: *Dragon*, for its Malaysian manufacturing site, which the Rosanskys visited while it was being constructed

DOCKED: At the couple's canal-front, Lido Key home

FEATURES: The elevated flybridge, which helps when navigating shallow waters, was a big selling point, as was the modern interior with solid teak flooring. There's a full galley, several refrigerators, a wine cooler, electric grill, utility room with washer/dryer, and a living room-like “salon” with a pop-up, 40-inch television, plus TVs in each of the three below-deck staterooms (which have cedar-lined closets).

BOATING HISTORY: “We're boating now for about 30 years,” says Marty. “We had sailboats, then started out with a small power boat, then got one a little bigger, then a little bigger. We're not going to get one any bigger than this. When you get bigger than 55 feet, you need a full-time captain.”

THE LIFESTYLE: The Rosanskys enjoy the Sarasota Yacht Club's weekend cruises, which include potluck dinners and “a lot of camaraderie,” to destinations like Boca Grande, St. Petersburg and Key West. Day trips might include lunch at Venice's Crow's Nest. In June, a captain will sail the boat to Nantucket, where they'll take over, stopping at various destinations en route to their summer home in Maine.

WHY BOATING? “Having a boat is like a magic carpet,” says Marty. “It takes you to places you wouldn't ordinarily go.”



MARINER'S TALE

Kim and Steve Kildahl

21-FOOT PARAMOUNT CENTER CONSOLE MOTORBOAT

NAME: *Super Fisherman*, though they jokingly refer to it as The Fish Boat

DOCKED: At the couple's floating dock behind their Sarasota home

FEATURES: A 225-horsepower Evinrude E-tec motor, reaching top speeds of 60 mph. Several storage compartments for coolers, life vests, towels and other on-the-water essentials.

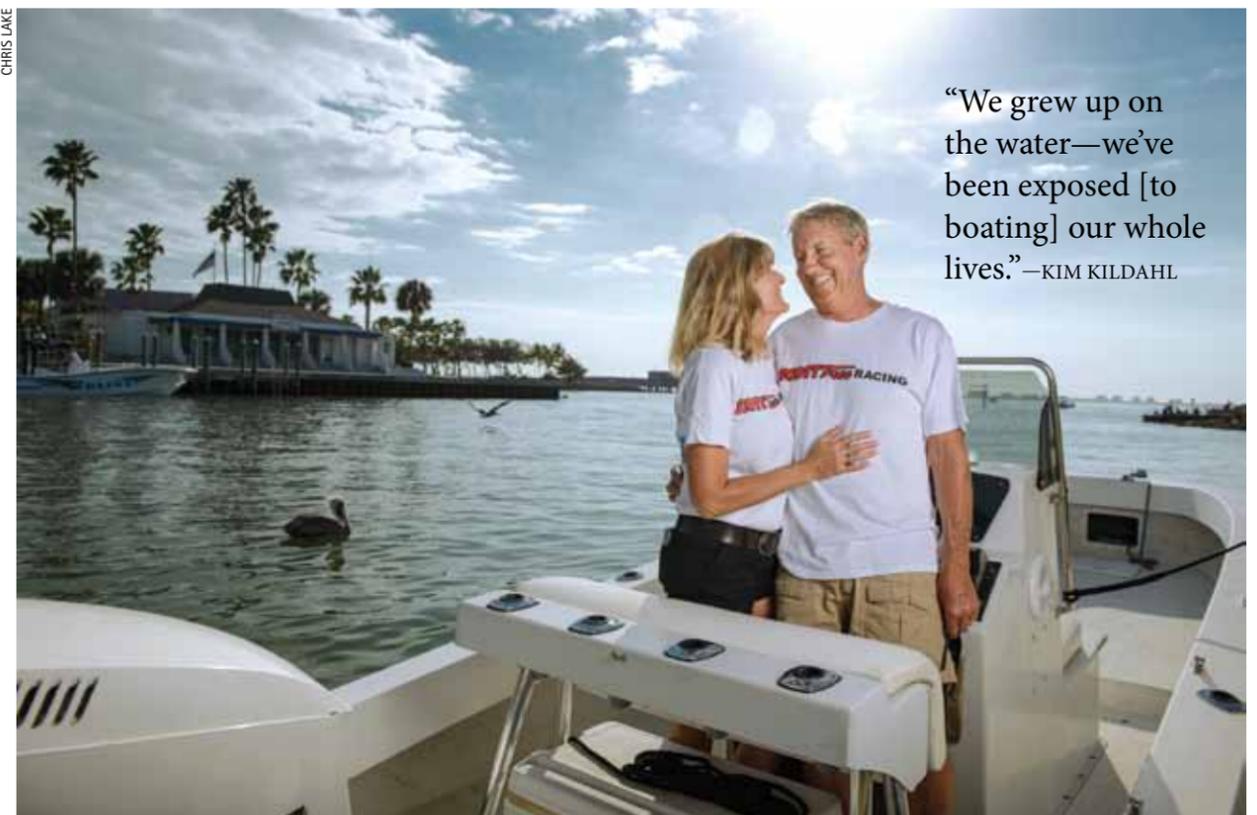
BOATING HISTORY: “We're both Sarasota natives, which is rare,” Kim says. “We grew up on the water; we've have been exposed [to boating] our entire lives.”

THE LIFESTYLE: “We are high-energy people and tend to be on the move,” Kim says, so boating serves a dual purpose. Some days they go out at the end of a busy work day to relax and de-stress; other days, the two take turns pulling each other on kneeboards, skis and surfboards. They used to go fishing, but now they're too impatient to wait for a bite. Kim admits some of the attraction is “the thrill of going fast!”

THE CAMARADERIE: “We work with boats [Steve owns and operates Central Marine Services of Sarasota], so there's an overlap [between] work and pleasure, and even in our clients,” she says [Kim is a CPA]. They often join their friends for a day on the water, cruising to South Lido and Longboat Pass or stopping for lunch at New Pass or Marina Jack.

WHY BOATING? “What part of our lives *isn't* affected by boating?” Kim asks. “The animals—manatees and dolphins—and being outside—we just love being on the water.”

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” — MARK TWAIN



“We grew up on the water—we've been exposed [to boating] our whole lives.” —KIM KILDAHL



Stewart aboard the BoatWorks' new restoration project: the 19th-century Italian schooner *San Francesco*.

TO SAVE A SCHOOONER

A Cortez group of wooden boat restorers takes on its biggest project yet.

IN A WORLD OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE, high-tech vessels, some people still consider a wooden boat the ultimate expression of marine artistry. That's true at F.I.S.H. BoatWorks (part of the Cortez-based Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage), where manager Rick Stewart and his volunteers devote themselves to restoring historic wooden boats, from fishing skiffs and sailboats to a replica of a Spanish longboat like those used by early explorers.

"Nobody else is doing what we are doing here," says Herman Kruegle, a Longboat Key retiree who volunteers full-time at BoatWorks and shares Stewart's passion for preserving the fast-vanishing art of wooden boat building.

And now they've accepted their biggest challenge to date: the *San Francesco*, a 19th-century Italian schooner. Towed by tugboat from Clearwater late this past December and currently moored at the Seafood Shack in Cortez, the *San Francesco* was built in 1870 and sailed around the world. Originally built to transport Italian marble, it was restored in the late 1960s as a pleasure sailing yacht, but later sank, destroying the electrical and diesel systems. Today the ship boasts most of her original teak woodwork, but it is going to take a lot of love—and about \$2.5 million—to restore her to her former glory.

The first step will be hauling the *San Francesco* out of the water and towing her to F.I.S.H. This short trip will cost nearly \$15,000, and Stewart says time is of the essence—the longer the boat is in the water, the more the integrity of her wood is compromised. "I need the public's help," he says. "We are going to

arrange [a] foundation, but it takes time and this boat needs to be moved now."

Stewart and Kruegle believe a restored *San Francesco* will attract visitors to Cortez, one of the last working fishing villages in Florida, and heighten interest in wooden boats. "Anybody who has a business here will prosper: restaurants, gift shops, lodging," Stewart says. "Everyone will benefit from the ship being here."

Interested? Call (941) 254-4972 or email Rick at teakwoodisgood@gmail.com. —BOBBILYNN HOLLIFIELD



Rick Stewart



“[Fishing] is therapeutic. You can think about what’s important to you—or just think about nothing.”

—MATT MATTHEWS



MARINER'S TALE

Matt Matthews

24-FOOT AVENGER CUSTOM FISHING BOAT

NAME: *Glory Days*

DOCKED: At Snead Island Boat Works, which has been owned by his wife's family for 80 years

FEATURES: On top of the Avenger hull and Mercury Optimax 225 engine, the consoles, aluminum tower (for spotting fish), 70-gallon live well and other features were all custom-built.

BOATING HISTORY: “I've lived here [in Palmetto] my whole life and I've had my own boat since I was 12,” says Matthews.

THE LIFESTYLE: An avid snook fisherman, Matthews frequents Long Bar Pointe in Sarasota Bay and Terra Ceia Bay, sometimes standing stock-still for hours trying to lure his prize. “It's therapeutic,” he says. “You can think about what's important to you—or just think about nothing.” Other times, he simply drops a line in the water en route to boat races or other gatherings. And many Sundays after church, the father of four takes his family to Egmont Key for a picnic. “The water's emerald green; you can see down 15 feet,” he says. “It's beautiful.”

THE CAMARADERIE: Matthews spends time at the Bradenton Yacht Club. During holidays and offshore races, it's not unusual to have 10 or 15 boats tied together in a giant, floating party. “Almost everything in this area revolves around the water,” he says.

WHY BOATING? “I have fished all over the United States, from Maine to the Keys to Montana and Alaska. We absolutely live in paradise. This is the best fishing in the world; there's something special about these waters.”

Ready to Buy?

Get up close and personal with hundreds of the finest vessels on the market at the 32nd Suncoast Boat Show, April 17-19, at downtown Sarasota's Marina Jack. The show draws enthusiasts from all over the Southeast to compare the many featured models and check out the latest in marine electronics and accessories.

Friday and Saturday,
10 a.m.–7 p.m.

Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Info and tickets: showmanagement.com/suncoast_boat_show/event

BOATING BASICS

Barb Hansen of the Florida Sailing and Cruising School offers tips for beginners.

BECOMING A BOATER IS A LOT LIKE TAKING A SPOUSE. As in finding that special someone, taking up boating can bring with it a lifetime of joy and excitement.

Boating is the ultimate in quality time together. No matter if your vessel is small or large, everything seems to look, feel, taste and smell better on a boat. Dolphins swimming in your wake put on a show better than anything you'd see on Broadway. A dinghy ride leads you and your crew to adventures and natural wonders. Watching the sun rise or set while at anchor is like having a front row seat for Mother Nature's masterpiece. At night, the sounds of fish jumping and waves lapping against the hull, not the sound of the TV or traffic, will lull you to sleep.

And just as in marriage, your boat will encounter calm waters and rough seas, and will need to be used and cared for. And, of course, after the honeymoon, the excitement can wear off.

So how do you keep the magic going?

I always recommend that people get as much training as possible. Books and the Internet are great resources, but there is no substitute for doing it. Classroom courses offered by both the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadron are a good start. At our school, where we teach live-aboard sailing and power boating courses on vessels from day sailors to large motor yachts, we operate by the old Chinese proverb: “Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand.”

There are no gender-specific roles in any good boating school. Students learn all aspects of operation from docking and anchoring to checking the engine oil and lighting the stove. I'm not saying that everyone needs to know how to do everything. However, it's nice to know that one spouse can get the boat back in the event the other one is ill or injured.

As yacht brokers, we often counsel people about boat buying. I use a formula that reads like a mystery novel: Who? What? When? Where? Why? And how?

WHO will be using the boat? Does the crew have any experience or will the captain be going solo? Identifying whether you are a couple or family group helps determine the size and complexity of the vessel you purchase.

WHAT kind of boat is going to be practical for the kind of boating you plan to do? Do you want a long-range cruiser or a deck boat? Consider things like your own health and fitness. How much work are you able to do on board and how much do you depend on others?

WHEN will you be ready to commit to boat ownership? Often the size and type of vessel changes with family and life changes as well.

WHERE do you plan to cruise? Is this the trawler for the Great Loop, which is the cruise around the eastern third of the country—up the East Coast, across the Great Lakes and down

the Mississippi? Are you planning to run offshore or will you be limited to inland cruising?

WHY do you want a boat? Sometimes the answer is as simple as, “We want to have fun.” It's all good.

HOW do you plan to care for the boat? Yachts require maintenance. Maintenance means either a lot of work for you or a lot of check writing to others.

Perhaps if many couples went through as thoughtful a process before getting married as we recommend they do before buying a boat the divorce rate would plummet.

But it's worth remembering, as in choosing a spouse, there is no such thing as the perfect boat. If one boat fails to meet your relationship needs, there's always another out there that will keep your romance with the boating lifestyle going strong.

Barb Hansen and her husband, Vic, own Fort Myers' Southwest Florida Yachts and the Florida Sailing & Cruising School. To learn more, visit swfyachts.com. •