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Strong Start, Strong Finish at 22nd Annual Providence Boat Show

RIMTA's Second Running of Show Produced Qualified Buyers, High-Quality Events and Organization

January 26, 2015 — The 22nd Annual Providence Boat Show, which was held at the Rhode Island Convention Center January 23-25, was marked by a strong start and strong finish. On Friday, crowds were up by 15%, and several powerboat dealers sold at least one boat on opening day. But a winter storm that brought snow, sleet and freezing rain on Saturday morning thinned the crowd, and overall attendance saw a slight drop of 7%. Despite the weather, boat dealers and manufacturers left the show with sales contracts in hand, knowing this Rhode Island boat show is now a magnet for qualified boat buyers from as far away as New Jersey and Maine.

“Going into the show, we had high expectations for a significant growth in attendance,” said Show Director Jonathan Banks. “Advance ticket sales were tracking well ahead of last year and finished up 79%, and social media chatter reached an all-time high. The weather clearly affected attendance on Saturday and Sunday afternoon but did little to dampen the enthusiasm or the positive reports from exhibitors.”

RIMTA purchased the Providence show in fall 2013, and this was the second year the organization has run the event. In 2014, organizers added special events and brought in a stronger sail component. This year, organizers took those ideas a step farther with new features, a strong sponsor lineup to fuel more special events, an expanded marketing effort, dedicated areas for sailors and fishing enthusiasts, and an expanded seminar program.

For Rudy Mutter, whose Twin City Marine made several sales from the 11-boat fleet they brought to the show, the proof of RIMTA's efforts was clear: “The quality of the showgoer was much better this year,” said Mutter. “I came away from this year's show more encouraged than I was last year.” Among the other dealers who reported sales at the show's end were Ocean House Marina, Twin Hull Boats, Zim Sailing, McShane Yacht Sales, Inland Marine, Maritime Solutions, and Allied Boat Works.

Bluenose Yacht Sales brought a fleet of sailboats to the show including the Jeanneau 409, the largest boat in the show. “We measure a show by the number of quality leads we get,” said Glenn Walters of Bluenose. “During the three days [of the Providence show] we got more quality leads than we have gotten at other shows.” Walters and the Bluenose boats were perched above the show’s Sailing Center, a new area that grouped sailing exhibitors into one section of the show.

According to Wendy Mackie—CEO of the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association (RIMTA), which owns and produces the show—many exhibitors have already vowed they will return next year and stay committed to this show as it continues to evolve.

“The Providence Boat Show is an event run by the industry, for the industry,” said Mackie. A committee of marine business owners work with staff to steer the direction of the event. “There is a true spirit of collaboration behind this show: we all pool our ideas to mount a united effort to showcase all we have to offer boaters in and around the Ocean State.”

Among this year’s popular changes was the addition of Reel Island—a new area for fishing enthusiasts with seminars, a fishing simulator, exhibitors, and celebrity fishing personalities. The Washington Trust Show Pavilion was a busy hub with ongoing special events—including popular sea-to-table demos with local chefs, author visits, a fashion show of technical boating apparel organized by Team One Newport, and a panel for new sailors. A new gallery of nautical-themed art called ArtSEA drew local artists, such as world-renown marine photographer Onne van der Wal. Celebrity guests appeared in person and virtually—including an appearance by New England Boating TV cohosts Tom Richardson and Parker Kelley, and a live video link with the Volvo Ocean Race crews on Team Alvimedica and Team SCA, who were interviewed by world-class sailor and commentator Andy Green as they raced toward Sanya, China.

This year, show organizers devised a creative way to encourage yacht clubs to show up en masse with the Yacht Club Challenge, sponsored by Keel Vodka. The Challenge’s new carbon-fiber perpetual trophy, designed by Clear Carbon & Components, went to the Edgewood Yacht Club and the 67 members who came to the show together. Eleven yacht clubs participated in the Challenge.

The Providence show opened with a press conference on “Launching into the Future: Growing Rhode Island’s Marine and Composites Industries.” Rhode Island dignitaries including Governor Gina Raimondo, Congressman David Cicilline and Representative Kenneth Marshall (with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and Senator Jack Reed joining by video) attended the event to speak in support of a new funding initiative for the Rhode Island Composites Alliance (RICA) and to honor the John H. Chafee Boater of the Year Bart Dunbar, chair of the Oliver Hazard Perry Rhode Island. At the end of the conference, Governor Raimondo officially opened the boat show by ringing the opening bell at 10 AM.

The 22nd Annual Providence Boat showcased 175 boats and was sponsored by The Washington Trust Company, New England Boating, Tasca Automotive Group, Safe/Sea, Starkweather & Shepley, Helly Hansen, Coastal Angler magazine Rhode Island, and Verizon.

The 23rd Annual Providence Boat Show will be held February 5-7, 2016 at the Rhode Island Convention Center.

For more information, visit www.providenceboatshow.com.