



# NFL

**ON THE** WATER

**MARINE INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH FLORIDA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PHIL PURCELL LIKES TO COMPARE BOATING TO THE NFL AND THE FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW TO THE SUPER BOWL – AND HE’S GOT THE FINANCIAL NUMBERS TO BACK THAT UP. LIKE THE NFL, HE WANTS TO MAKE SURE HIS INDUSTRY KEEPS GROWING AND MOVING FORWARD. *by* DORI ZINN →**

## NFL ON THE WATER

**THERE IS NO “OFF-SEASON”** when it comes to boating in South Florida. It’s always boating weather. South Florida is the yachting capital of the world, and it’s not even close. Just ask Phil Purcell, the executive director of the Marine Industries Association of South Florida.

“At the end of the day, if you’re a boater, you love boating,” Purcell says. “Unless you have a tropical storm or hurricane, you go boating.”

He’s right. There are nearly 900,000 registered boats in Florida and unlike many other coastal areas, South Florida is always in-season. Purcell knows a little bit about the industry: he’s been the executive director for MIA SF for two years, but he’s been part of the industry for decades. He had stake in Westport Shipyard near Seattle in the mid-1990s but sold his shares a few years ago. He always had a home in South Florida and has been a longtime member of MIA SF. In 2014, he made the move here full-time. In the month of the 56th Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, Purcell says South Florida, and Broward County in particular, is a thriving marine industry – and it’s still growing.

## “WE’RE THE NFL OF BOATING”

→ THE National Football League is above and beyond the biggest sport in the world when it comes to revenue. Last year it pulled in \$13 billion. To compare, Major League Baseball made \$9.5 billion and across the pond, England’s Premier League, the

world’s richest soccer league, made \$5.3 billion. In television deals alone, the NFL made \$3 billion – almost as much as the entire National Hockey League made last year.

“Nationally, the marine industry is \$33 billion. In South Florida, it’s \$11.5 billion,” Purcell says. “Just in Broward County, it’s an \$8.8 billion industry. We’re the NFL of boating.”

Last year, the boat show made \$500 million in direct sales. More than half of the attendees were from outside Florida, and roughly 10 percent were from outside the United States. South Florida accounts for one-third of the marine industry’s revenue. It’s quite literally the biggest and best player in the sport.

“It’s really not fair,” Purcell laughs. “It’s like saying, ‘How does an NFL team compare to a high school team?’”

There are dozens of other businesses built around this industry. Doug West is the president of Lauderdale Marine Center, where he’s been for nearly a year. Before that he was at Rybovich in West Palm Beach for seven years. He knows Purcell from when they were both at different companies. Purcell asked him to join MIA SF earlier this year; he’s now a board member.

West says the Lauderdale Marine Center has seen business increase just because of how conveniently located South Florida is.

**FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW BY THE NUMBERS**

**3**  
**MILLION**  
SQ. FT. OF EXHIBITION SPACE

**\$857M**  
**ECONOMIC IMPACT**  
(BIGGER THAN A SUPER BOWL)

**508M**  
**TOTAL SALES DURING THE SHOW**

**100k**  
VISITORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**54%**  
FROM OUTSIDE OF FLORIDA

**35**  
COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

**40%**  
OF ATTENDEES ARE C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES OR BUSINESS OWNERS

“It helps that we’re surrounded by water,” he jokes. “Because of our location between the Caribbean and New England and even Europe, we’re part of a natural migration pattern. It’s a great place for the boats to come in and get serviced while some will hang out for the boat show.”

Both West and Purcell say our biggest differentiator from places like New England is our year-round good weather.

“New England is very seasonal,” West says. “There’s no reason to stay up there. All the resources are here.”

It makes sense. From 2013 Census data has Florida as the fourth-largest state in the nation. When the boat show comes to town, the state makes more than \$857 million in economic output. The tri-county area alone is 62 percent of that. But the show isn’t just about boats and yachts. Purcell says there are so many moving parts to this industry.

“It takes a village,” he says. “It takes the Florida yacht brokers, young professionals, the greater Fort Lauderdale alliance and politicians. Restaurants and taxis all play a role, too.”

Because the show impacts more than just boaters, there’s a slew of influence that ripples in the community: A five-day hotel stay, three meals a day, shopping at local stores and ground transportation surge during the show. According to the 2015 executive summary, the show sold 100,000 attendee tickets last year, up from nearly 65,000 almost 30 years ago. Hotels and restaurants got a collective 54 percent boost from the show’s presence. Retail purchases went up 20 percent.

So if the boat show is thriving, what’s left to make it better?



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# “IF YOU STAND STILL, YOU DIE”

→ THERE’S no question that South Florida reigns supreme in the marine industry. If it were a human, Broward County would serve as the heart while Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties would be limbs. But they all need each other to work. And Purcell says even when we’re on top, we should try to be better.

“We always need to improve,” he says. “We need to grow our expertise and invest in ourselves.” And that can start in many different places. Purcell says our elected officials should know how important the industry is to the local community and economy. Doug West says the industry needs better training and professionalism to prove how well its workers do their jobs. There are many different ways to get better, and they’re all the right way.

When it comes to educating our community, politicians – from local city officials to county representatives and even state politicians up in Tallahassee – need to understand what the marine industry offers.

“We bring the entrepreneurs to our boat show. [People] shouldn’t look at it as ‘a white boat with a wealthy person in it,’ but rather, a large boat that employs five to 30 people that live here locally,” Purcell says. “That floating vessel employs people.”

**“WE BRING THE ENTREPRENEURS TO OUR BOAT SHOW. [PEOPLE] SHOULDN’T LOOK AT IT AS ‘A WHITE BOAT WITH A WEALTHY PERSON IN IT,’ BUT RATHER, A LARGE BOAT THAT EMPLOYS FIVE TO 30 PEOPLE THAT LIVE HERE LOCALLY.”**

It’s not just on those boats, either. West says people need a place to keep their boats, whether they’re small or large. Well-maintained marinas and good repair facilities play a large part in boat maintenance.

“There are hundreds of different services that these vessels need,” he says. “There’s a need for support services, like brokerage, naval architecture and insurance.”

For his part, West and his company are looking to improve the customer experience. Boat owners should get the same level of professionalism and expertise that other service industries offer.

“One of the things we’ve been focusing on is trying to ensure a good customer experience when going to the boating facility,” he says. “If you take your car to a dealership to get it serviced, those people have certifications, dress professionally and act professionally. In the marina industry, there isn’t really a similar protocol.”

West admits he’s been in this industry for only a decade, but the level of experience a customer gets was one of the first things he noticed when he joined. Being better in this area can have a huge impact locally.

“There’s no investment in training, the technicians aren’t custom-

**MARINE INDUSTRY IN SOUTH FLORIDA**

**4**

**BILLION**

**DOLLARS IN WAGES**

**HOST OF THE FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW FOR**

**57**

**YEARS**

**28%**

**HIGHER WAGES THAN STATE AVG.**

**\$11.5**

**BILLION**

**IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC IMPACT**

**5**

**OCEANOGRAPHIC RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS**

**72%**

**BOAT OWNER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES UNDER \$100,000**

er-friendly and they don’t dress professionally,” he says. “If we can raise the professionalism bar, we will attract more potential customers to the market.”

West wasn’t the only one to think of other transportation comparisons to yachting. Purcell notes how other cities have failed when they were on top.

“Detroit was a manufacturing hub,” he says. “Now, ‘Motor City’ is in Tennessee, Alabama and South Carolina. If you don’t create awareness and thoughtfully do the right things in life, it’s yours to lose. We need to do the right things to ensure we’re always here.”

To Purcell, that continues with thoughtfully engaging our elected officials and other community members. Don’t look at a boat and see an expense; look at it and think jobs.

# “WE’RE THE SILICON VALLEY OF MARINE RESEARCH”

→ EMPLOYMENT doesn’t end with the boats. The majority of the Earth’s surface is covered in water, and even more than that, 96 percent of all of Earth’s water is in oceans. Purcell says the marine industry isn’t just about yachting. There is so much more to water than boats.

“Years ago, Warren Buffet challenged all billionaires to give away

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## NFL ON THE WATER

half their wealth,” he says. “In (the state of) Washington, there’s Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos. How do we engage with them that we’re the Silicon Valley of marine research?”

South Florida has the third-largest reef system in the world. Richard Dodge, dean of the Halmos College of Natural Sciences and Oceanography at Nova Southeastern University, says most people don’t understand the value or even the economic influence of coral reefs in South Florida. “The reefs extend all the way through South Florida, from Miami-Dade through Martin County,” Dodge says. “Six billion dollars comes in annually from coral reefs. Everyone thought coral reefs ended in Miami.”

Broward relies on reefs. Dodge says in the county alone, there are 36,000 jobs and \$2 billion a year coming in from reefs. A study from 2001 says there is one boat for every 25 people and recreational activities – like fishing, snorkeling and scuba diving – bring in \$270 million in revenue every year. And those numbers are 16 years old, from when the last extensive study on the economic impact of coral reefs was conducted, according to Dodge.

Purcell notes that representatives of four local universities – Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern – are speaking at the boat show this year on monetizing their marine and oceanography research.

“These universities are working on solutions, not scare tactics,” Purcell says. “We can help foster solutions for the whole world through connectivity at our show.”

For his part, Dodge and his college try to understand genomics and genetics while applying microbiology to human health.

“One way to address what’s going on with humans is to study humans but also other organisms that exist and how that can be applied to human health,” Dodge says. “We’re looking at marine organisms and their relationship to humans.”

He says coral skeletons have similarities to bones in things like composition and structure, and some researchers have been able to use the skeletons, or “bones,” in human

### **PURCELL NOTES THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF FOUR LOCAL UNIVERSITIES – FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI AND NOVA SOUTHEASTERN – ARE SPEAKING AT THE BOAT SHOW THIS YEAR ON MONETIZING THEIR MARINE AND OCEANOGRAPHY RESEARCH.**

bone growth. For instance, an oncologist would be interested in how applications from other fields, like corals, can apply to bone cancer patients.

Over at FAU, researchers are using sea sponges to fight pancreatic cancer. Earlier this year, school scientists discovered a marine sponge off of Fort Lauderdale’s coast that had leiodermatolide – a natural product that prevents cancer cell growth. Because of the similarities in sponge genomes and human genetics, researchers have been able to reduce pancreatic tumors in cancer patients.

Almost 75 percent of pancreatic cancer patients die within the first year of diagnosis, and survival within five years is only seven percent. But leiodermatolide also stops can-

cer growth in lymphoma, colon cancer and metastatic melanoma, according to FAU.

Without researchers, we wouldn’t have these huge strides in marine study. Dodge says all of these moving parts – from boating to environmental studies – are in need of each other. “The yachting industry is a tremendous economic driver, and it’s important to understand that the environment is also an economic driver,” he says. “People come here with yachts for clean water and the great ecosystem. It’s all mixed in together – this thriving industry relies on clean, healthy water and a good ecosystem.”

In 1999, Nova Southeastern named its new research facility the Guy Harvey Research Institute after the marine wildlife artist donated to the university. Harvey was a professor until 30 years ago, when he debuted his artwork at the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show.

Dodge says it was then Harvey realized he could make more money selling pictures of fish than actually studying fish. However, he always kept his love of research and education by giving back to the academic community. His center sits right on the water in Fort Lauderdale. Last year, Harvey furthered his investment in Nova Southeastern by establishing the Guy Harvey Oceanographic Center as well as an endowed scholarship.

“We have about 40 grad students and 100 undergrads coming in for marine science,” Dodge says. “We’re fortunate because we can teach classes straight on the water.”

In Fort Lauderdale, they’ll have plenty of boating help around town if they run into any issues getting out there. ●

