

Memories of the National Powerboat Associatio at the Ossining Boat & Canoe Club

by **John H. Vargo, Publisher**

The Ossining Boat and Canoe Club was one of 5 “stops” for the prestigious New York City Powerboat Poker Run which was put on once year from 1998 to 2009 by Billy Frenz, President of the National Power Boat Association.

I will never forget going to the OBCC and seeing 150 Outerlimits, Chief, Atlantis, Cigarette, Formula, MTI, Fountain, Sutphen, Eliminator, Sonic, Skater, Eliminator, Hustler, Powerquest, Sea Ray, Baja, Spectre, Force, Phantom, Velocity, Sunseeker, Nor-Tech, Black Thunder, Advantage, and more slowly idling to the floating dock in front of the club and watching members of the OBCC with long poles with clips on the end holding a playing card, which was deftly handed to the outstretched hands on the passing boats. I was dumbfounded by the noise, smoke, helicopters, and cheering going on as the boats idled by.

Billy Frinz of the National Powerboat Association created this unbelievable spectacle out of not being allowed to race the big boats on the Hudson River. So, instead he called it, “The New York City Powerboat Poker Run”. Headquarters was initially at Lincoln Harbor Marina then moved to Liberty Landing Marina in Liberty State Park, in Jersey City, New Jersey, with breathtaking views of Lower Manhattan’s Financial District, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. The expanded facility provided room for many boating concessions, a Powerboat Show, land displays, as well as dock space.

I never went to any of the other four poker run “stops” but was so impressed by what the OBCC did, I went home to my wife and insisted that she come the following year to see this awesome event. (She did and just shook her

head at the hullabaloo.)

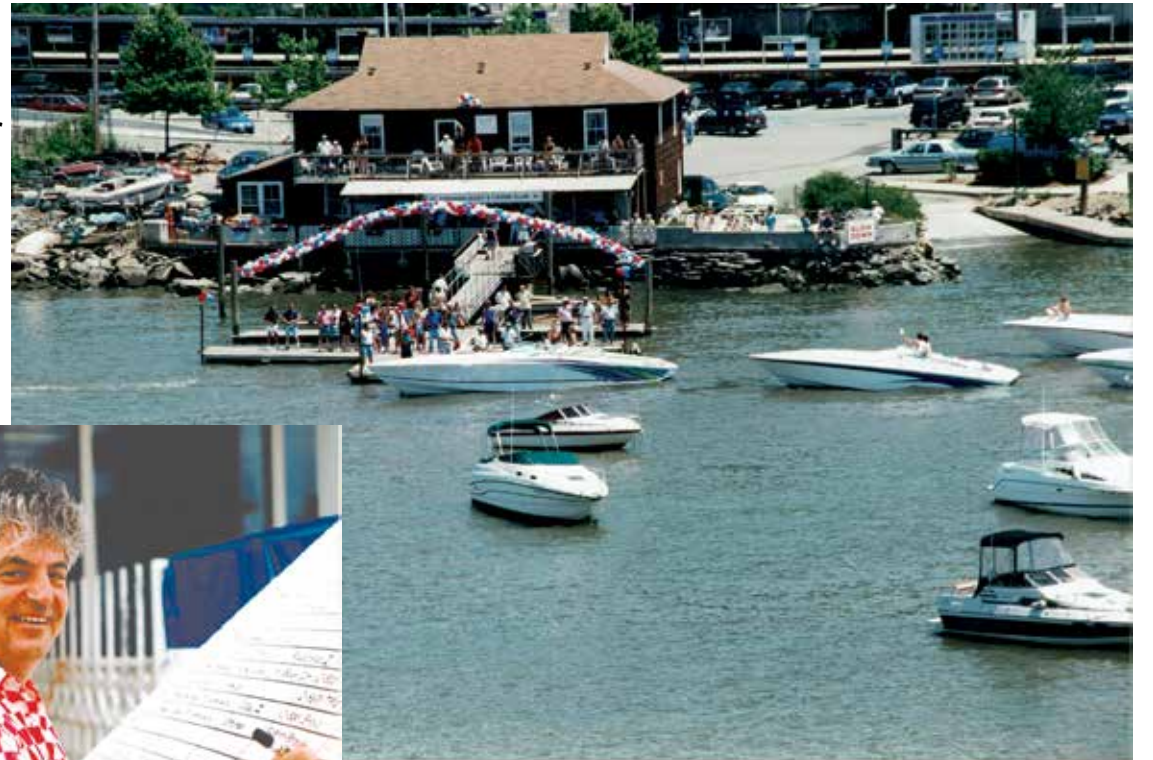
Billy Frenz told me how the OBCC came to be one of the stops. He casually mentioned it to some of the long time members Like JJ, John and others who immediately said, “We can help you.” The OBCC members went out of their way to make the Ossining stop the best on of them all. Hundreds of blue and white balloons were tied together all across the deck and docks, A channel marked with red barrels guided the idling boats to the main dock. This, in itself was interesting as the high speed boats capable of up to 150 mph have a very hard time idling. The engines overheat immediately. To counteract this the boats would open their hatch covers an then take the boat in and out of gear so they could rev up the engine and keep the water pumps on the engines circulating water through the engine blocks.

This just added to the excitement as it was encouraged by the members of the OBCC who just cheered them on. While they were told “Do not race your boats!” Up to seven categories of boats put the foot to the peddle, especially between the George Washington Bridge and the Tappan Zee Bridge. (You can get a good feel for what I am describing by going to Youtube and typing in New York City Poker Run.)

The most interesting power boat and by far and the fastest was one 40 footer that had twin GE turbine jet engines and between them a 100 hp Yamaha outboard that controlled the boat at idling. This was usually the first boat to come into the OBCC docks with a helicopter circling overhead, the GE Boat being encouraged to let out a blast of flame while idling, and all the OBCC members cheering the entire turmoil on.

I probably should not describe this event that I personally was responsible for but what the hell...one year a very close and personal friend of mine the famous photographer Jonathan Atkin had an assignment to shoot photographs of the event. He, being who he is, needed to land his helicopter somewhere close to the OBCC club, get out and get in one of the boats coming up to the OBCC docks. Jonathan called me and said, “John I cannot get a permit to land anywhere near the club house, it is not allowed. I said “Oh really, I have an idea”! After checking the tides for the event day which was always held in early June, I said this is what we are going to do! There is a sand bar right in front of the OBCC club house, only there at low tide. You’re going to come across the water at 100 feet, come down on the sandbar, keeping the skids of the helicopter just barely touching by keeping the helicopter in flight mode, you jump out and I will pick you up in the club dingy and bring you the 100 feet or so to the docks. Jonathan said, “John, you sure we could do this” I said, “no worries, we will do it!” An that is exactly what we did, there was so much noise from the other two helicopters hovering

Ossining Boat and Canoe Club 1999 NYC Powerboat Poker Run Checkpoint Number 1



Billy Frenz, Director, NPA

over the club house, the roaring engines at idle, the cheering OBCC members that this little event was not even noticed by the people looking directly at it! Jonathan and I laugh about this and a few other stunts over the years all the time.

Truly one of the most fascinating individuals whom I met and loved dearly, was Henry Gourdine, last of the commercial fisherman!

Whenever I visited OBCC and Henry was sitting on the black leather couch, on the front porch I knew I was in for some great stories. Henry was extremely smart, well educated, yet had a down to earth quality that made him likable to everyone who met him.

At the OBCC he was the star in their orbit.

Long live the OBCC!



“Two cats that swallowed the Canary” Jonathan Atkin, photographer and John H. Vargo, Publisher