

Boating Industry

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WOMEN making WAVES

30 Women Making Waves as nominated by the industry and selected by *Boating Industry*



INDUSTRY VOICES

THE WOMEN BEHIND *BOATING INDUSTRY*

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

Ann Baldree

Senior Vice President, Chaparral & Robalo Boats

As we celebrate and honor the many “Women Making Waves” this issue, it’s fitting to profile one of the most celebrated female executives to make a name for herself in the marine industry. Ann



By Wanda Kenton Smith

Baldree is the highly respected senior vice president of Chaparral and Robalo Boats. Hers is a story of true Southern grit, hard work and an indomitable spirit that has won over many friends and fans over an illustrious 40-year industry career.

Ann wasn’t raised in a boating family. Her introduction to the boating business came via business connection with Chaparral President Jim Lane in her rural hometown of Nashville, GA. Ann was working at an attorney’s office when Lane no doubt spotted a bright young woman with plenty of smarts, talent and enthusiasm. He lured her away to join the boat builder in 1981, offering a lateral career opportunity that paid a whopping \$4.44 an hour.

Years later, Lane would publicly state hiring Ann Baldree was “the best investment I ever made.”

From her initial role as receptionist and AP clerk, Ann continued to rise within the ranks, taking on new challenges and opportunities with gusto. Today, she serves on a four-member executive management team with primary responsibilities for internal and external sales, strategic planning and customer service.

Outside of the workplace, she serves on both the NMMA and BMD boards as well as on her local chamber of commerce and credit union charity boards.

Ann has been honored for her outstanding contributions and achievements including recognition as the Darlene Briggs Marine Woman of the Year in 2008 and a member of the Women Making Waves inaugural class. Plus, she was one of two of the first women recipients of the prestigious manufacturer STEP awards in 2015,

alongside another stellar female executive, Joan Maxwell, president of Regulator Marine. One of her most memorable moments was ringing the bell on the New York Stock Exchange.

Boating Industry (BI): Who were your early supporters in the marine industry who encouraged your professional development and growth?

Ann Baldree (AB): Jim Lane, our company president and Buck Pegg, the founder of Chaparral, were both great mentors for me. Early on, they saw an energy and eagerness in me to learn and they supported my ideas and strategies. The first time I was asked to host our annual awards banquet at our dealer conference I was extremely nervous... but it was a great experience and I overcame my stage fright. What I realized is that Jim and Buck saw my potential before I did. They never held me back and only encouraged me to soar.

My personal and professional hero is Buck Pegg. He taught me to work hard, respect others and always demand more from myself.

Buck’s hero is Gordy Howe, a famous hockey

player who played the game longer than any other professional. The key to his success was that each year he still felt he had to make the team. Nothing was given or expected. You had to always be your best and play the best game.

Buck brought a company to Nashville, Georgia in 1976 that literally changed the lives of thousands of people. He wants everyone to be successful. He changed my life by giving this country girl who grew up working in a tobacco field a chance to become independent and flourish. He gave that opportunity to countless others.

Also, Thom Dammrich gave me the opportunity to serve on both NMMA boards which broadened my knowledge of our industry.

BI: What were the challenges you faced in the early phases of your marine industry career as a professional woman ... and how did you overcome those obstacles?

AB: Decades ago, it wasn’t always easy to be taken seriously as a female. No matter your role, you were always regarded as a “secretary” just because of your gender.



“I’m never satisfied with the status quo. I can always be better, do better and learn more.”



Ann Baldree pictured with Buck Pegg (left) and Jim Lane (right).

Many strong female leaders have emerged over the years that have shifted that paradigm. The first strong female leader I met was Kris Carroll, president of Grady White Boats. She had a similar pathway in her start at Grady White and I saw how she emerged as a bold but compassionate leader. She is small in stature like me but mighty in spirit. She became my first female role model and I remain inspired by her wisdom and guidance.

BI: What have you enjoyed most about your career in the boating industry?

AB: Relationships! Relationships! Relationships! Early on I developed a deep respect for boat dealers who are true entrepreneurs. Many are multi-generational families who built their business from humble starts. Many have become personal friends over the years.

I also enjoy my relationships with our team who work very hard to provide for their families. I have enjoyed meeting and befriending industry professionals whom I have learned from. I always consider myself a student and every encounter and experience are learning opportunities.

BI: How do you stay on top of your game... what is your strategy for professional development and continued success?

AB: I'm never satisfied with the status quo. I can always be better, do better and learn more. I am never complacent. I am an idea person. Some ideas are great and frankly, some do not work as well as I imagined but ideas and strategies for personal and professional growth are part of my

everyday existence. I believe you learn as much from your failures as your successes.

BI: What advice do you have for women currently working in the marine industry who have long-term career aspirations?

AB: Work hard every day to be the best at what you do and earn a seat at the table. Be a leader in your company by earning respect and demonstrating compassion for others. Take on roles and/or tasks that others will not take. Get out of your comfort zone as that is where real growth happens. Do not be intimidated if most of your colleagues are male. You will bring something unique and special to the table.

BI: I'm aware that you've served as a professional mentor and supported young women both within and outside the industry.

AB: I believe we should all take mentorship seriously. Each of us have wisdom we can share with others. I have a group of young ladies in our community that I have had the honor of mentoring.

Several years ago, Thom Dammrich asked the females on the NMMA Board to mentor one of the NMMA female staffers. I was very fortunate to be assigned to Ellen Bradley. It turned out that over time and frequent phone calls and meetings, we became very close friends. She is a superstar. We bounce issues off each other and stay in touch. She has risen very quickly in the NMMA as an executive and I admire her very much. We have learned from each other, which is the best mentor/mentee relationship.

BI: Speaking of career opportunities and mentorship, what advice do you have for young people desiring to launch a career in the boating industry?

AB: The boating industry is exciting and very welcoming to young, eager talent. There are numerous fields to excel in within our industry, from the manufacturing floor to the C-Suite. More and more, technology has become an important part of our industry. You can work with your hands, program a robot, develop marketing campaigns, sell boats just to name a few opportunities. Also, it is important to note that marine technicians can have an outstanding career in our industry.

BI: As you reflect back on your successful and enduring 40-year career, what have been your key(s) to success?

AB: I never gave up! After a few years launching my career at Chaparral, I realized I wanted a seat at the table. I began to take on more and more responsibilities and never backed down from a challenge. You must be patient and realize you must prove your worth to your company and be willing to grow in stages and become valuable with every learning opportunity. Always surround yourself with others that complement your mission and work ethic.

Work hard, work smart and work well with others. You lead by example when you don't ask more of others than you are willing to give yourself.

BI: In addition to that valuable insight, do you have a mantra and/or words you live by?

AB: "To whom much is given much is required." Giving back to others is very important and is something I practice and find great pleasure in.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is another. I believe in treating people respectfully and equally. Most often you get back what you give.

My beloved father told me early on in my career that I should never forget my roots and where I came from. His words: "Never forget that no one is better than you, so do not be intimidated by others, but always treat others respectfully and fairly."

Another special quote that has guided me. "People come into your life for a reason. Some for a season and some for a lifetime." Relationships and friendships are important; they must be nurtured and valued. ●