

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



40+ years of memories, mentors and making waves

BY WANDA KENTON SMITH

As we celebrate *Boating Industry's* Women Making Waves, I can't help but reflect on my 40-plus-year industry career and the mentors who believed in me and made it all possible.

Terry Snow of World Publications gambled on a driven young journalist and launched my career into the marine stratosphere when he hired me to edit World WaterSkiing and WaterSki Business, and later, WindRider. I traveled the globe covering many of the iconic stars of watersports along with the tight knit community of builders, retailers and support organizations that flanked these segments.

Terry was my first true mentor and one of the brightest publishers in the business. I'll forever be indebted for what he taught me and his belief in my ability to get the job done.

I was on a flight from Jamaica returning from a waterski competition when Rob Shirley, the founder/president of MasterCraft, slid into the seat beside me. I'd been helping World Pub's ad department produce custom print ads and collateral for select advertisers and Rob was a client. He complimented my work and then suggested I launch my own ad agency with a water sports focus. Before the flight was over, I had a verbal commitment from my first national account! Without Rob's recognition and encouragement, I would never have taken the leap of faith to start my own agency.

A third, life-changing mentor was Paul Kuck, founder of Regal Boats. I was freelancing for an Orlando magazine and assigned to write a feature on Regal. I interviewed Paul and was impressed by his business and marketing smarts and the company's meteoric domestic and international growth. We became fast friends and he eventually retained me to manage advertising and PR. After a year, a full-time offer ensued to start Regal's in-house marketing department. I thoroughly enjoyed a whirlwind, 11-year stint with responsibility for the company's global brand and turnkey marketing operations. Paul provided a true, world-class marketing education and unleashed every opportunity for my professional growth.

In the early days of my career, there were few women in key management positions or who regularly traveled the boat show/event circuit. I connected with female rockstars like the indomitable Sally Helme who was with International Marine Holdings at the time, and PR maven Geri Haber of Haber & Quinn whose firm managed PR for both FLIBS and the Miami Boat Show. I cheered wildly from the sidelines as manufacturing powerhouses like Kris Carroll of Grady White, Joan Maxwell of Regulator Marine, Ann Baldree of Chaparral and Marcia Kull of Genmar earned important leadership roles on various NMMA boards.

This growth and my desire to network and meet other women who shared my passion for the boating business led me to launch "International Women in Boating" in the '90s, an association that topped 300 members at its zenith. IWB hosted professional development seminars, social/networking events in conjunction with boat shows along with a hosting a national awards program. Eventually, association management duties were assumed by the NMMA under the capable leadership of Arlene Sloan. However, years later when Arlene moved across the pond and the industry took a cyclical dive, the association died a natural death after a highly successful run.

Over the years, many have mentioned interest in a women's association. Sixteen women met at the Miami Boat Show prior to Covid to discuss the concept which was enthusiastically received. I formed an executive committee including Chapparal's and Robalo's Ann Baldree; Volvo Penta's Susan Bonivich; EPG Brand Acceleration and EPG Specialty Information owner Marion Minor; Correct Craft's Angela Pilkington; former MRAA Foundation's Natalie Briggs; and consultant Marcia Kull. The task force met sporadically, put in a lot of work and researched multiple operational models but has yet to find a viable solution to manage and financially underwrite a startup. To help in the process, EPG Brand Acceleration – *Boating Industry's* parent company – is currently conducting research to help us better define and understand the interests of women in our industry.

Today, there are more positive developments and opportunities for women in our industry than ever before. Consider the scores of successful achievers who have been recognized in "Women Making Waves," alongside winners of the annual Darlene Briggs Woman of the Year award. Many women have attended the new women's leadership training webinars and live series sponsored by Michele Goldsmith of *Soundings Trade Only*, which now features an exciting mentoring program for boating industry newcomers. In addition, Stephanie Vatalaro of the RBFF has organized a popular social media group, "Women Working in the Outdoor Industry," which currently has 588 members. Progress!

Based on a lifetime and a very fulfilling career in the boating industry, my advice is simple: grab a mentor or two, do the hard work, step up, have fun and make waves! ●

Wanda Kenton Smith is president of Kenton Smith Marketing, chief marketing officer of Regal & Nautique of Orlando and Director of Communications for the Water Sports Foundation. For more info on Wanda's marine industry career: www.kentonsmithmarketing.com.