

Sarasota Sailing Squadron. Burgee Article 12.18.08 Jan '09 Issue

I want to start off the New Year by wishing all of the members of the Sarasota Sailing Squadron a Happy and Healthy New Year. 2009 will no doubt be an interesting and challenging year both in "real life" and here at the Sailing Squadron.

I would like to thank those members who provided their support and encouragement to me in my effort to undertake yet another year as your Commodore. I pledge to do all that I can to help make the Squadron a better place for all its members, and to insure its success into the future as a Sarasota institution. And for those members whose support I have yet to receive, I will endeavor to work hard on behalf of all the members and will try my best to earn your trust and confidence in the year ahead. I hope that you all understand that my only agenda is in seeing that the greatest number of members are served in the best way possible and that we all may enjoy an even greater Sarasota Sailing Squadron in the New Year.

I would like to welcome the new and returning board members to duty. We have what I think is a terrific board this year. We have some uniquely talented and skilled members who have volunteered their time and services to help make the Squadron the best Squadron possible. Please take the time to thank them when you see them and talk with them in the weeks ahead.

And as you know, we are well into the management transition, a process which began back in 2006. I would like to recognize and welcome our talented management team, Greta Dabringhaus, General Manager, Joanne Hawkes, Assistant Manager, and Kacy Knope, Maintenance Technician. The management of the Squadron is a substantial business and requires a range of diverse and specific talents. Running the day to day business of the Squadron is a big job and one that should engender the support of all of the members to help encourage our management team do their best.

Volunteerism is key here at the Squadron, and the management continues to rely on your support and efforts to help the Squadron work for all its members. So even though we have an "opt out" program for those that are unable to fulfill the annual minimum volunteering efforts and would prefer to pay a little extra cash instead, we still need members to give of themselves and to help out here at our club.

There are numerous challenges ahead, but the three issues that stand out in my mind as most critical bear mentioning:

1. A successful completion of the transition in management that is well under way: This issue is critical to a well functioning club and will require the effort of both the management team and the new board to work together to set goals and priorities, and to establish the ability to measure their achievement.
2. A successful negotiation of our lease with the City of Sarasota:

As you I'm sure are aware, the Sailing Squadron was unable to renew its lease with a long term provision this year, despite past long term leases being executed between the City and the Squadron. We have received a one year lease at no cost increase with an option for a second year lease under the same terms. The City was unwilling to grant a long term lease as we do not yet have our submerged land lease with the State in place. The process of applying for a submerged land lease has been ongoing at the Squadron since 2000. The City has made a long term lease renewal conditional upon the execution of a submerged land lease for our mooring field. So, the lease renewal is clearly a priority but one that cannot be achieved until we tackle the third issue we face.

3. Completion of a "Sovereignty Submerged Land Lease" with the State of Florida in order to be compliant with the State with respect to our mooring field, and to be eligible for a long term City "uplands" lease for the Squadron property itself: We are currently out of compliance with the State of Florida with regard to our mooring field and are in the process of working with the State to become compliant in an effort to execute a full lease with Florida. We must choose which direction to move the Squadron in and there are several options we can take. This, I believe is one of the most critical decisions we will have to make here at the Sailing Squadron.

Former longtime Board Member Stan Zimmerman, spoke eloquently at our November board meeting and described his perception of what the Squadron is. Although I would not presume to try to paraphrase Stan's remarks I would like to mention some of the themes he raised.

The Sailing Squadron is a multifaceted venue for sailing activity in all its many forms. It is well known both locally, nationally and internationally as we attract people from far and wide to enjoy our facility. We have small boats, we have big boats; we have racing, day sailing and cruising. We educate young ones and older ones alike. We are committed to exposing would-be sailors to the sport and we are equally committed to making sailing accessible and affordable for many who would otherwise not be able to enjoy this richly rewarding activity in a most desirable location.

The Squadron has hired member and attorney David Levin to assist us in our efforts to secure a submerged land lease with Florida. At the November board meeting Dave gave a brief talk on the issues that we face. A question and answer period followed. At the risk of oversimplifying I'll take a stab at the "short story" version.

In 1981, the Squadron received a permit from the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation for construction of docks and moorings. In addition to the physical docks that exist today, the Squadron received permission for 38 moorings. During the intervening years, Squadron management failed to prevent the unauthorized placement of additional moorings in the mooring field by

Squadron members. We currently have 120 moorings in our field 28 years later, 82 of which we are not permitted for. For several years now, the board has imposed a moratorium on the placement of new moorings in an effort to fix the number of moorings at 120 as the Squadron seeks a lease from the state to cover these additional 82 moorings.

There are a few choices that we must consider. These options were outlined in a theoretical sense by Attorney Levin. Our first option could be simple. We could determine that the Squadron would only want to retain the original 38 moorings that have been permitted and we could agree to remove 82 moorings and pay no rental fee to the state for our 38 permitted moorings. These 38 moorings would be permanent and irrevocable. How we would determine which 82 moorings would need to be removed would be problematic to say the least. Nonetheless, this is an option that is on the table with the state.

Secondly, we could seek a five (5) year lease in the name of the Sarasota Sailing Squadron (without requiring the City of Sarasota as co-applicant) for an area to include all 120 moorings. The moorings will be eligible to Squadron members ONLY and we would incur an annual lease fee of \$131,000 per year (estimated). This would work out to a cost of less than \$1,100.00 per year per mooring or approximately \$91.00 per month. Sales tax would be additional. We can expect escalators in the rental rate in future years.

Alternatively, we could seek a ten (10) year lease (SSS only-No City Co-Application required) for the same number of moorings (120) at the same rental rate as above, plus tax. However, if we opt for a 10 year lease, we will be forced to make 74 of our 120 moorings available to the general public (including Squadron members of course) on a “First Come, First Served” basis. Furthermore, we would not be able to require these 74 mooring holders to be members of the Squadron. This would presumably mean that these non-member mooring holders would be able to park on the SSS property, store dinghies there, use Squadron restrooms, etc. These leases would be for a maximum of one year only to the 74 mooring holders which would necessitate a new “first come, first served” application process each year! The other 46 moorings could be held by SSS members and would not be available to the general public. How we would remove 74 members who currently hold moorings that would need to be relinquished has not yet been addressed in this scenario.

Another option would be to seek a 25 year lease but this would entail making 82 of our 120 moorings available to the general public at the same rental rate as above and under the same terms and conditions. This would reduce to 38 moorings the number that would be available exclusively to SSS members.

The final option that Attorney Levin has outlined would envision that the SSS join forces with the City of Sarasota and “co-apply” for a state lease for all of the 120 moorings. 82 of the 120 moorings would be offered to the general public on

a “first come, first served basis” (as above) but the difference here is that with the City as co-applicant, the City can apply for a fee waiver (as it has in the Marina Jack/O’Leary’s mooring field downtown). This would mean that if granted, there would be NO rental fee at all for the additional 82 moorings or the original 38 (total of 120).

So in a nutshell, we can either keep the 38 original moorings at no charge and call it a day, or agree to pay rental to the state for all 120 moorings with a 5 year lease and retain the moorings for the exclusive use of SSS members only, or seek to obtain longer term leases and pay rental to the state, with the majority of our moorings not reserved for SSS members and in fact, would open up the club to non members who would have the right to park on the property and transit the land, store dinghies, etc. The last option above listed above, which has the City as Co-applicant with the Squadron, would cause no increase in rent, but would cause the greatest number of moorings to be relinquished to non-members.

What is apparently not on the table is an option for us to do nothing. If we fail to act, we could be ordered by the state to remove 82 moorings or be subject to fines for failing to comply. It is pretty clear that the State is trying to work with us to come up with some suitable arrangement but clearly, the available options are limited.

I have tried to outline a few scenarios presented by Mr. Levin and have hopefully impressed upon each of you the need to give some serious consideration to where we want to take the Squadron in the future.

This is such an important issue that we as a board are seeking the input of the members in order to reach a decision as to the direction to take. So, I want to encourage you to send your email or snail mail opinions to Sara Allen, Fleet Captain so that she can begin to ascertain members’ views on this. Sara can be contacted at sarataos@newmex.com or phone her at 941-224-9025. You are also encouraged to call on any board member you choose to express your opinion.

On Saturday, January 24 at 7 PM the Squadron will host its annual Fireside Chat at the clubhouse. This gathering has traditionally been a “meet and greet” with your new board members. This year, this gathering will take on a much greater importance as it will be an opportunity for the general membership to learn more from the Board on this subject and to express their views on this extremely important topic. So if you wish to have your voice heard on this, you should plan to take steps to do so. The clock is ticking! We are on a very tight timetable with the City of Sarasota who is expecting us to act quickly to secure our submerged land lease in order to obtain a longer term lease with the City. So, we will take input now and through January. We expect to make a decision by a full Board of Directors’ vote at the February Board meeting. We will then be in a position to notify the City of Sarasota and the State of Florida of our intentions in February.

I also briefly want to mention that with the New Year, all members should give consideration to the safety and security of their boats at the Squadron. Make sure that you take all necessary steps now and well before the hurricane season begins on June 1 to secure your boat, with tie down straps and screws for trailer and rack stored boats, and inspect your gear and replace as needed all mooring gear for boats in the mooring field.

I know that this article is lengthy and I had become accustomed to trying to make these monthly reports a bit more entertaining, but given the gravity of the issues we face and given that the very future of the Squadron at stake, I want to urge each of you to think about what you would like the Squadron to be not only this year, and the next but in 10 or 20 years when our kids and grandkids can be enjoying this “Greatest Sailing Club in the World”.

Now, take a moment to give us your input, and then get out on the water and do some sailing in the New Year!