



Company guides novice boaters

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Hands-on instruction helps amateurs to learn the ropes

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With the summer in full swing, the area's waterways are full of amateur boaters. Boatboy Marine Training wants to make sure they know what they're doing.

JOHN ZIOMEK/Courier-Post
Russ Cohen, on his boat in Riverside, says hands-on training is crucial. His company, Boatboy Marine Training, provides the instruction.

The company offers rudimentary safety and boating training to novice boaters, on their own boats and in their home waterways. As with a driving instructor, the captains teach boaters the rules of the road and proper docking procedures. "There are no other companies that do this," said Russ Cohen, owner and general manager of Boatboy. "What a learning experience it is, if we're with (customers) on their boat, in their waterway."

Capt. Russ says he started the business to fill a need - people often buy their own boats, then take them out with little or no training. Some boaters take Coast Guard classroom training courses on boating, but according to Russ, hands-on training is crucial to boaters, and the Coast Guard classes lack that.

Often, Boatboy's captains accompany customers on their new boats' maiden voyage, teaching them how their specific boats work, as well as general boating techniques. "A lot of people buy boats and don't even know where to put the key in," said Kathy Mangiaracina, who does clerical work for the company. Her husband, Lenny Mangiaracina, is one of Boatboy's Coast Guard-certified master captains. "You can't predict where (a boat) is going to go unless you have some kind of education," he said. "We essentially raise people's confidence level."

Joe Thomas agrees. "I feel more confident with my boat," said Thomas, a Shamong resident who took one of Boatboy's training classes. "(The training) gave me a better understanding of boating laws and safety," he said. "Mainly safety." Thomas said that in Barnegat Bay, where he does most of his boating, he notices a clear difference between boaters who have been properly trained and those who have not. "You've got people that don't know what they're doing," he said. "They just go flying around."

Dennis Moessner, service manager at Dredge Harbor Marina in Delran, said that his marina provides a couple of hours of training through Boatboy to everyone who buys a boat from the marina. Often, he said, boaters choose to take additional training from Boatboy. "I think there's a need for it," Moessner said. "One of the biggest problems for new boaters is handling the boat. It's not like driving a car."

Capt. Russ said that his business is starting to get references from boat dealers and harbor managers like Dredge Harbor because those businesses are starting to realize the value of a business like Boatboy. "We've increased our business 30 to 40 percent every year," Russ said, adding that they are expanding their business to accommodate customers in Maryland, Chester County, Pa., and Long Island, N.Y.

Boatboy's standard lessons are four hours long, cost \$439, and include a boating handbook, float plans and other materials. Shorter lessons are available if necessary, but two hours is the minimum. Up to four boaters can participate in a session at a time for no additional charge. Contact BoatBoy Marine Training at (800) 493-9514 or on the web at www.boatboymarinetraining.com.