

Larry,

I want to start by thanking you for inviting my Mom to share in the festivities at the Yacht Club last Friday. She really appreciated seeing old friends and was happy you folks have maintained the Club so nicely. I spoke to my Mom at length about the origins of West Channel Yacht Club. Below is what told me.

It is true that the formal name and Club flag were all voted on in the spring of 1972 by 40 members. Here is the pre club story.

There were seven families who originally broke away from LYC and moved over to the west bank; Norm Novak, Joe Chase, Rocco DiLillo, Max Leonardi, Larry Jenkins, Bob Rupnow, and Al Kukral. They were disgruntled because the dock fees and the membership fees to use the Clubhouse increased each year. Mr. Cox who owned the Marinette Boat dealership also owned the land, docks, and the Clubhouse. Even worse was the fact that the LYC members spent their own money to upkeep and improve both the property and the Clubhouse each year. The officers of LYC did approach Mr. Cox more than once about selling the property & clubhouse to the LYC membership, but he would not sell. Additionally, as his son became involved with the family business there were more restrictions imposed on the LYC members.

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My Dad, Rocco DiLillo, owned a 30' Owens cabin cruiser that needed a lot of work and parts. Mr. Kirby owned Hi-Skipper Marina and sold Owens Boats and later when Owens moved to fiberglass the Owens Concorde line of boats. My Dad got to know Mr. Kirby well and even bought a new 33' Owens flybridge sedan from him. He knew that Mr. Kirby owned the house & property behind his marina and the land was not being used. In the spring of 1971 Joe Chase and my Dad approach Mr. Kirby, who was going through a divorce, about purchasing the property. I don't know if the divorce prompted him to sell or if he needed to sell the property to settle the divorce. I do know that his wife was still living in the house at the time the land contract was signed and even in the spring of 1971 when the seven members put their boats on the west bank.

In the winter of 1971 the original members met many times after work to discuss their plans, in secret. They were worried that if they could not come to terms with Mr. Kirby they would lose their dockage and even their membership in LYC. They were also worried Mr. Cox would sue them. Joe Chase (the elder stateman), Norm Novak, and Rocco DiLillo were the team that met with Mr. Kirby to negotiate the deal. It was a big gamble since they didn't know what the future held and how big a group they would become. In the spring of 1971 the seven members resigned from LYC and moved their boats to the west bank. At the time Mr. Cox and others told them they would never amount to anything.

About mid-summer 1971 the seven families held their first family picnic in one of the Hi-Skipper Marina buildings. They invited their friends from LYC to join them. That very day 33 families committed to join them in the new venture. In the spring of 1972 the 40 members voted on the name and the design of the West Channel Yacht Club flag which

my Mom sewed for the Club. By 1975 there were 79 members in the Club. In the first few years member Burt Hoffman, who owned an excavating company, put in the first bulkheading with the help of the members.

About the floods. We didn't have floating docks back then. In the early 1970's there were few boats south of the Club. Hi-Skipper Marina had a few in-water boats and limited dockage, but there were no docks south of Lakeshore. When the heavy rains would come in the spring all members were called to come down and help with the boats. Since there was nothing to stop the flow of water it wasn't unusual to have whole trees come racing down the river, and some boats were taken out by the trees. The members would work in shifts around the clock tending the dock lines, making sure the boats didn't float away with the dock, and making sure logs and debris didn't get trapped by or under the boats.

I was 19 years old and just out of high school in 1972. I remember each member had to put in 40 hours working around the Club each year. I also remember working with Club members to build their docks and one year with my 2 older brothers helped hand pile-drive dock support poles for 100 docks. Each winter with the ice jams many of the dock support poles would get ruined and need replacing. I know the river still floods, but back in the 70's it was bad almost every year. Joe Chase and Rocco DiLillo went to the City of Eastlake and convinced them to pay to open up the mouth and install a small jetty. This work was also done by Burt Hoffman.

Feel free to use any and all of this information however you like. If you want me to ask Mom about other early events just send me an email.

Take Care

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