

Barker's Island Marina & Hotel: A Successful Public/Private Partnership

By Bruce Hagen

Thirty-eight years ago, we had a vision to create a focal point for Superior. It included a first class marina, hotel/convention center and family recreational activities. At that time, Barker's Island was a man-made island created from dredge spoils that provided no opportunity for the people of Superior, visitors, businesses or job creation.

Some did not share the same vision. So a referendum was called for wherein 84 percent of the voters also embraced our vision.

Fast-forward 35 years. That is 35 years with a first-class marina, hotel/convention center, thriving businesses, housing, a place to recreate, festivals and jobs. All this without costing the taxpayers a dime, as the marina has paid for itself and has consistently provided 60 percent of its gross revenue back to the city every year.

Barker's Island Marina was the first investment made by the city other than the Nemadji Golf Course that provided a direct return on investment to the taxpayers. And both provide outstanding recreational opportunities for residents and for those visiting Superior.

Besides the fact that Barker's Island Marina, as we know it today, is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year, I want to note two important factors related to successful public/private partnerships.

The first is to point out the value and necessity for government – specifically municipalities – to embrace public/private partnerships. They work. They benefit the taxpayers. And most important, public/private partnerships create businesses and jobs with less taxpayer participation.

The second point is that we need to generate community discussions that will grow more opportunities between the public and private sectors, working together on community growth with minimal exposure for taxpayers.

To that point, Superior is a very sports- and recreation-minded community. This is true in all sports, no matter the age of the players. Talent has always run deep in Superior, as evidenced by the many athletes who

have gone on to rank very highly in the field of professional sports. To learn more, I invite you to read the "Superior Sports Legends" feature in the Aug./Sept. 2014 Positively Superior (under the "archives" link at www.positivelysuperior.com). The number of professional athletes from Superior is far above the average for a community of our size. This provides further evidence of the value of organized sports and recreational opportunities that grow Superior people.

However, it isn't just about professional athletes. Organizational sports grow individuals in many ways toward becoming solid and productive citizens, no matter their desired walk of life.

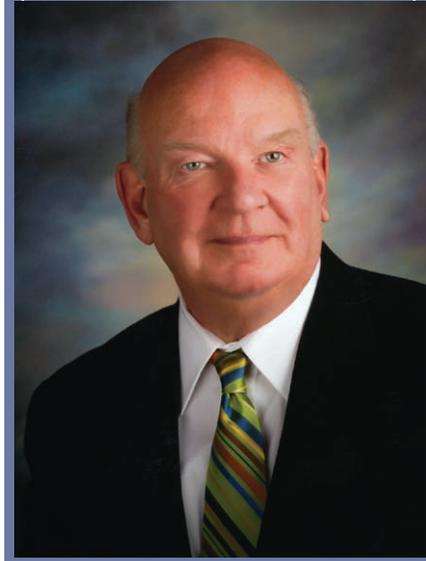
To that end, a discussion must be generated around the desire for upgraded and new opportunities for sports complexes within our community. The National Bank of Commerce (NBC) Sports Complex is a perfect and successful example of what can be done. The entire community came out to embrace this exciting addition to our city. The board of education is to be commended for their vision – one that we can emulate with other offerings.

So the next discussion will be centered on what more we can do together in the public/private sector partnership to grow recreational and sports opportunities for all residents, teams and tournaments that will likewise help grow Superior.

Sports and recreation is an economy all its own. An economy that produces jobs, increases tourism, supports the commercial and retail community and helps create an expanded tax base, which reduces the tax burden on all of us.

Barker's Island and its attributes are celebrating their success for all of the community this year. Together, we need to grow new and exciting opportunities for all of Superior. Greater and new sports and recreational opportunities are available. We just need to begin the conversation and move forward. 

Bruce Hagen is mayor of the City of Superior.



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New Leadership Announced at Barker's Island Marina

By Mary Morgan

Last fall, Eric Thomas and Fred Dudderar became the new owners of Sailboats Inc. and the city's new managing agents of Barker's Island Marina.

Thomas, who will lead the company's operations, had served as manager at the marina since 1998 and Dudderar is a loyal marina customer. Thomas's brother, Allen, is the new service manager.

Thomas sees the opportunity as a natural transition. "The founder of the company, Jack Culley, passed in 2012 and his son John retired, stepping out of the day-to-day operation of the business," he said. "Longtime company President Joe Radtke had also signaled a desire to work less after 35 years at the marina. The Thomas family has a long history of management, so it was a natural fit to step up and take the reins of the business."

Thomas was educated in geography and environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he spent a considerable amount of time maintaining the student union's fleet of more than 100 sailboats. He grew up on Lake Erie with a family sailboat that slept five and a tradition of racing. "I came to Sailboats Inc. in the summer of 1998, assuming the role of marine service manager that same fall," said Thomas. "While always a marina operator, Sailboats Inc. was in transition when I came aboard – from its roots as a new boat dealership and home of a significant rental fleet to that of the region's largest marine service center. During that time, I sold and managed the work we did on thousands of boats and yachts."

Thomas likens Lake Superior and the harbor to a "wide open park to enjoy and be amazed by." He believes the marina is the entrance to that experience. "We are a local marina. Seventy percent of our clientele are from the Twin Ports area. We should strive to help people get out on the water," he said.

Thomas is proud of his staff. "Time and time again we hear from customers that have literally traveled the world that they have had a great experience at our humble



Caption Here

facility," he said. "Our location in Superior is perfect for generating the uniquely skilled labor and many of the materials we need. The area provides a high standard of living for our staff and their families. The University of Wisconsin-Superior and the Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College are a steady source for staff and continuing education."

Thomas wants to create a family-friendly environment at the marina, emphasizing that the Ship's Store is the front door to the operation. He is hoping to populate it with new inventory including art, ice cream, kites and a line of toys and recreational products for use on the water. "Activity and color in a marina is key to its life," he said.

Thomas describes himself as an extrovert and a good listener who has no problem talking to groups and individuals. He has already reached out to Barker's Island Inn to partner on projects that impact both the marina and the inn. Further, his goal is "to convey what we do down here on the waterfront, the value of the jobs and the importance the facility has to the community."

Thomas's wife of 20 years, Sarah, is a veterinarian in Superior. He describes his daughter, Tea, age 4, as "an avid sailor and fan of sea stories." The family enjoys time exploring the woods, a house full of animals and many days on the water "in all sorts of ways."

BARKER'S ISLAND MARINA RENOVATION IS UNDER WAY

Mayor Bruce Hagen and the Superior Common Council have wisely allocated funds from their 2015 capital plan to begin updates at one of the city's most impressive assets. Crews and subcontractors for Marine Tech, Duluth's premier marine construction firm, have been working at Barker's Island Marina all winter to completely renovate Docks E and F.

According to Marine Tech President Ted Smith, "Although it is very convenient working on the docks in the winter months because there is full access on the ice, we also have to keep a close eye on temperatures and wind chill."

The project, designed by Superior-based AMI Consulting Engineers, started with demolishing the two docks and removing old plumbing and electrical systems. Teams from A.G. O'Brien Plumbing and Bachand Electric were able to access the docks to complete the work prior to the 2015 boating season. Increased electrical capacity and brand-new southern pine decking will offer marina customers the quality and comfort they've come to expect at Barker's Island Marina.

According to the city's new marina manager, Eric Thomas, Docks E and F typically host full-season clients. "They are the strongest piers with the most spuds and the most popular," he said. The electrical upgrades are building capacity for the future. "AMI gave us a smart approach that allows for both capacity and flexibility. We're increasing amperage and voltage so we can handle anything that shows up," he added.

Thomas said the docks will be decked with seven miles of southern yellow pine, secured with 40,000 screws. His preference for southern yellow pine is born of experience as it was used initially for all docks at the marina 37 years ago. "It's the industry standard for decking that's going to be there for a long, long time," he said.

Thomas is looking forward to the 2015 season, given that Docks E and F will be new, improved and ready for rental. **P.S.**

Mary Morgan is director of the City of Superior Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department.



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