

Yachting

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Cross Currents

Jacksonville's "Navy"

Yachtsmen are occasionally caricatured as fun seekers whose sole pleasure is to speed around in large, expensive toys, wasting precious energy resources and despoiling the environment. While the majority of us may just grin and bear it, a forward-looking, civic-minded group of North Florida yachtsmen has done something about it in a very positive way.

The city of Jacksonville is a thriving commercial and industrial complex situated on the St. Johns River some 16 deep-channel miles above the river's mouth at the Atlantic Ocean in the northeast corner of Florida. Because of its natural location and the excellence of its downtown port facilities, the city has been the focus of visiting industrialists, political figures, and potential investors, all of whom have the common need to see and understand what the geography has to offer. But that is easier said than done because the St. Johns is a large river, running right through the center of the metropolitan area, and even though there are six highway bridges crossing and recrossing the river proper, Jacksonville and its waterfront facilities are almost impossible to view satisfactorily by land.

So the Jacksonville Commodores League was established to provide boat transportation for important visitors to the city. Formed in early 1975 by a committee of business and professional leaders headed by Ed Bell Oberle, who became the first Flag Commodore, the League is composed of some 40 area yachtsmen, evenly

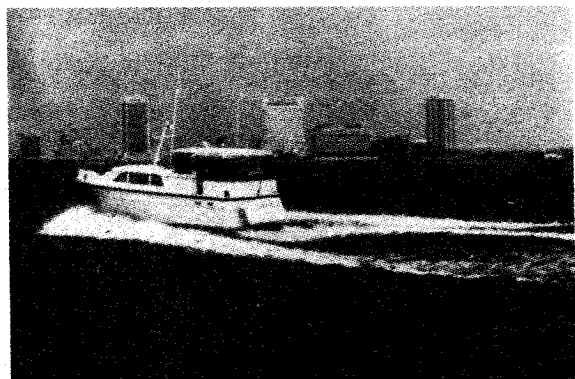
divided between yacht owners and crew commodores who serve aboard the boats of other members. Most of the League yachts are 40' and up, and the staffing and operating costs are all borne by the members. The group works in close coordination with the Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor's office, and other developmental authorities, but the services can be called on for almost any important function where civic betterment is concerned. Appointments are made through an executive secretary who organizes the appropriate fleet and personnel, and tailor-makes the cruise to meet the needs of the guests.

One of the more publicized of the League's efforts occurred during the conference between President Ford and the late President Sadat of Egypt. The program required transferring a large entourage between the Naval Air Station on the west side of the river to the meeting site on the east shore. The available Naval facilities were taxed to the limit, and the Commodores League responded in force. Thinking, perhaps, of the role played by yachtsmen at Dunkerque, one journalist coined the nickname "Jacksonville's Navy," which the members bear proudly.

The good will of the Commodores League members doesn't stop at the downtown waterfront. The upper reaches of the St. Johns, for several hundred miles above Jacksonville, are a superb recreational resource, there is scarcely a day when the river south of the city isn't dotted with sails. This is the regatta center of northern Florida, and another place where League members serve their fellow yachtsmen by performing committee-boat duties and the myriad other waterborne tasks required in a successful meet.

Without a doubt, given the organization and enthusiastic support demonstrated by Jacksonville's yachtsmen, the concept will work equally well in other yachting areas. Is this an idea that might find acceptance in yours? For further information, contact the Jacksonville Commodores League, P. O. Box 4850, Jacksonville, Fla. 32201.

—Stafford Campbell



First Flag Commodore Ed Bell Oberle's Hatteras 43, Lindy Bell, en route to Jacksonville's downtown waterfront during a Commodores League cruise.

