

Randall M. Lyons

Executive Director, Massachusetts Marine Trade Association

During a summer college stint 25 years ago, Randall Lyons unwittingly launched his marine industry career as a head cleaner at the Nantucket Boat Basin, one of the most famous marinas in the world. He returned to work the next two seasons and was promoted to “head cleaner supervisor,” where he was actively engaged in managing the down and dirty work of cleaning 18 head/bathroom facilities a day throughout the expansive facility.



By Wanda Kenton Smith

Lyons’ tenacity and positive work ethic opened doors to the front office. As time was available outside his workday, he volunteered to roll quarters from the marina’s laundry facility. He answered the busy phones in the heat of the season. He helped around the office. No surprise, when graduation from college was eminent, he was offered a full-time position as the marina’s communications director with responsibility for boat traffic control and reservations. With 25 boats on average coming and going daily during the summer, including busier weekends with as many as 75 boats turning over, it was a fast-paced position that matched his desire for professional growth.

The young Lyons had come a long way from cleaning heads.

After seven successful years in Nantucket, his next career stop included a quick one-year stint at Russo Marine, then onto Newburyport Marinas where he held several key positions over 10 years. Roles included guest service manager, assistant general manager, and then business manager/co-general manager. In the latter capacity, Lyons managed four marinas with 500+ wet slips, 200 dry storage spots, two ship stores, two full-service yards and a fuel dock. He was responsible for daily operations including berth assignments, budgeting, employee benefits,

overseeing marketing, computer processing, billing and OSHA compliance.

During this period, he was also invited to represent the marina with a seat on the Massachusetts Marine Trade Association Board of Directors, where he served seven years.

Wary of the grueling 140-mile daily commute and four hours in the car, when the opportunity arose to apply for a full-time executive director position with the MMTA, he enthusiastically responded and was hired. He’s since served five years at the helm of this well-respected trade association, been involved in many major industry initiatives and has become a driving force for positive change. Since coming aboard, MMTA membership has increased by 30%, with a 95% annual retention rate.

Boating Industry (BI): Can you provide a brief description of the MMTA?

Randall Lyons (RL): The MMTA was established in 1964. Its ongoing goal is to work with and for our nearly 250 members to help support their businesses and the recreational boating industry in Massachusetts. Our tagline, “Industry growth through Collaboration, Communication and Education,” remains a fundamental part of our vision.

I love the family feel of the industry and working with our members. I work for and with them.

BI: What’s your major area of focus today in your business activities?

RL: Workforce solutions within our industry has been my priority action item since this issue is so important to my members. We have the jobs/careers available; we just need the people to fill them. I do my best to come up with ideas and support to make this happen.

We are fortunate to work in collaboration with state officials, schools and educational partners, job seekers, our member businesses and more to come up with workforce solutions within the industry.

The MMTA has received funding over the past four years from the state and we have ac-



complished several goals including supporting new and established educational programs, supporting members through reimbursement of training costs, supporting new industry employees with gift cards to help build their toolboxes and promoting and marketing our educational trust job and career website - <http://www.massboatingcareers.com/> which provides industry and career information, job listings, partner school listing and scholarship opportunities. We also support the Massachusetts Marine Trade Educational Trust (MMTET).

BI: As it relates to welcoming young people into the boating industry and encouraging them to launch a career here, what advice do you offer?

RL: The opportunity to work with and for clients (boaters) that are typically happy and enjoying a recreational activity they are passionate about makes the job enjoyable. Do what you love, and it should make you happier.

BI: In terms of your achievements, you earned a Certified Marina Manager designation back in 2012 and have a lengthy list of appointments and volunteer contributions including membership in the Recreational Boating Leadership Council, the National Marine Trades Council, the advisory council of Marine Associations, the New England Marine Trade Association, the Mass Hire

State Workforce Board, among others. What are you most proud of in terms of your marine industry contributions?

RL: Recognizing the need to get more youth involved in boating and fishing has been a personal passion of mine for the last six years. I created a youth boating task force in my previous job which led to the creation of “Mass KIDS Boating & Fishing Week.” During Mass KIDS Boating & Fishing week, our association supports and promotes kids boating and fishing events around the state. We started in 2017 promoting four events and this expanded to over 10 events in 2019 prior to COVID. This year’s event takes place June 4 -12 with hopefully over 10 events once again. (www.masskidsboatingday.org)

Additionally, I created a KIDS In Boating initiative within our Educational Trust which has donated \$35,000+ in grant funding to various non-profit youth boating programs around the state over the last few years. We don’t want to reinvent the wheel, but we do want to support programs already in place that provide opportunities for kids to get on the water in a safe and smart manner.

BI: What has been the biggest challenge you’ve faced in your boating industry career ... and how did you address or overcome any setbacks?

RL: The pandemic was the biggest challenge. With the unknown circumstances in early 2020, the goal of working to support our members while at the same time helping to support my family became extremely difficult.

Communication and support were the key to



The family that plays together, stays together! Lyons shown with wife, Carolyn, children, Grady and Scarlett and their beloved family dog.

overcoming these challenges and turning a negative into a positive. I worked with state and national officials, industry associations, my board and more to collectively develop ideas to support the business of boating. I was fortunate to work on the state task force in Massachusetts that was focused on re-opening boating in a safe manner.

BI: What leadership traits do you feel are most needed by those working in the marine industry today... and why?

RL: I think I would have answered this differently before the pandemic but now I can truly appreciate and place a very high value on the skill set of ‘listening with empathy’ to staff members. Mental health and anxiety are and continue to be a major issue for employees and employers alike. 2020 was a wake-up call. Communicating with your team and keeping employees informed and appreciated can make a big difference in your organization’s culture.

Getting kids fishing and on the water is all part of Lyon’s Mass KIDS Boating and Fishing Week initiative.



BI: What is the biggest challenge you see facing the industry in the short and long-term?

RL: In the short term, the challenge is keeping the influx of new boaters engaged and happy. Retention is key within our industry and the ability to work on the comfort and safety level of new boaters with a focus on a positive first experience is a critical part of this.

In the long term, getting more youth involved and interested in boating and fishing, along with attracting new people to address workforce shortages, are two obstacles and opportunities.

BI: What was the last most impactful seminar/conference presentation?

RL: I attended the Business of Boating (BOB) Conference in January 2022. Joe Maniscalco of Yamaha moderated a workforce panel. He started by introducing the panel and then said, “Everything you’re going to hear is going to be useless” He paused and let the thought sink in for about 10 seconds, before adding ... “Unless, you put the information to use, and make a plan.” Powerful!

BI: In closing, do you have a mantra or words you live by?

RL: Most people who know me, have heard me say, “It’s GO DAY!” It started in the late 90s when I would reference an event I was looking forward to, but later became more of my philosophy about looking ahead in a positive manner. I’m fortunate to always find something positive to look forward to in the future, and that attitude has always helped me face obstacles over the years. ●

