



**CAPSTAN- VOL. VI | April 2026**

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## Industry News

### **A Well-Deserved Thank You to John!**

We'd like to recognize and thank John Fitzgerald for his many years of dedicated service to ABBRA and the broader marine industry. Over the years, John has been a valued member of the ABBRA Board of Directors—including during earlier chapters of the association—and a longtime instructor for the Budgeting and Estimating section of the Marine Service Manager (MSM) program.

In addition to his leadership and teaching, John has generously shared his expertise by leading seminars at both IBEX and the International Marina & Boatyard Conference, helping to educate and connect professionals across the industry. His contributions have made a lasting impact on countless colleagues and peers.

John currently serves as President and CEO of Saunders Yachtworks, a role he has held since 2008. Known for his servant leadership approach, he has consistently invested in his team, his community, and the industry at large. Reflecting on his time with ABBRA, John shared that the relationships he's built through his involvement have been among the most meaningful parts of his career.

While John is stepping down from his role with the MSM program, he isn't going far—he and his wife will continue to own and actively lead Saunders Yachtworks for years to come. We're grateful for all he has given to ABBRA and look forward to staying connected at future industry events.

Thank you, John, for your leadership, generosity, and lasting contributions.

### **Blizzard Can't Stop Progress: February MSM in Newport a Resounding Success**

In late February, as a historic North American blizzard swept across the Northeast, most plans came to a halt—but not ours. Held in Newport, Rhode Island, during record-breaking snowfall, our Marine Service Manager (MSM) course became a true testament to dedication and resilience. Despite extreme conditions,

14 committed marina professionals traveled through the storm to take part in one of our most memorable cohorts to date. Throughout the course, participants engaged in hands-on learning, collaborative discussions, and real-world problem solving—gaining practical tools they can immediately apply in their operations. What could have been a disruption became a defining moment. Our faculty quickly adapted, delivering sessions virtually when needed, while staff worked behind the scenes to ensure a seamless experience. More than just a training, this course was a powerful reminder of what's possible when a community comes together with a shared commitment to growth—and one these professionals won't soon forget.

The next MSM course will be held virtually from November 4–December 3, 2026. To learn more about the Marine Service Manager program, visit: <https://abra.org/events-training/marine-service-manager/>



## ABBRA CONFERS MARINE SERVICE MANAGER CERTIFICATION ON FOUR INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

ABBRA is proud to award the **Certified Marine Service Manager (CMSM)** designation to four marine professionals: **Nicole Gaeta** (Falmouth Marine), **Matthew Kuenzi** (Safe Harbor Marinas), **Matty Paquette** (Burr Brothers Boats Inc.), and **Paul Porter** (Acme Falmouth Marine). This industry-recognized certification highlights their experience, leadership, and commitment to excellence in marine service. ABBRA's CMSM program continues to support the growth and development of boatyard professionals across the industry.

## The Newport International Boat Show (NIBS)

One of the Northeast's premier boating events, spanning over seventeen acres across interconnected sites in historic downtown Newport, NIBS features an impressive lineup of new sailboats and powerboats—many making their U.S. debut—alongside hundreds of marine products, services, and accessories. Attendees can also take part in educational seminars, in-water boating courses, and exclusive VIP experiences. Taking place **September 17–20, 2026**, the event offers more than just boating, with Newport's coastal scenery, historic charm, boutique shopping, and renowned dining creating a perfect fall destination. **ABBRA** will kick things off with its **Member Social on September 16**, offering a great opportunity for members to connect, network, and engage with peers ahead of the show. [Check back for details](#)

## Check out the latest issue of Soundings

Topside paint decisions aren't always straightforward. Check out the latest issue of *Soundings* for an article on boat paint selection written by Nicole Jacques, featuring insights from technicians at an ABBRA member boatyard. Nicole also serves as an ABBRA Board Member and Treasurer. The challenges around topside paint were a topic the association explored at last year's IBEX conference in Tampa. [Read the article here.](#)



### Boatyard Wisdom: Lessons from the Helm

Recently, I was asked what the most important thing I learned in my 50 years of operating Huckins Yacht Corp. After giving it careful thought, my answer was simple: the workers of Huckins Yacht Corp—the men and women who built our boats, repaired them in the yard, and supported every step of the process. There are few trade schools in the U.S. that teach skills such as marine carpentry, plumbing, paint, mechanical and electrical. Europe has it right but the U.S. wants to send everyone to

college. These trades are not only vital to the marine industry; they are the backbone of our country.

Be appreciative of the skilled people who work for you. Get to know them and watch their craft—you will be amazed at their talent. Respect their skill, recognize a job well done, and never forget: you wouldn't have a company without them.

They are your backbone.

Cindy Purcell,  
Former Owner & Current Ambassador of Huckins Yacht

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## Building Stronger Connections Across the ABBRA Network

To strengthen our community and highlight the collaboration that drives the success of the marine industry, **ABBRA** is facilitating membership socials at the **Newport International Boat Show** and **IBEX**.

We held our first socials in 2025 at both locations, welcoming approximately 25–30 attendees at each. These **casual, connection-focused gatherings** are open to both members and non-members, while our **private online forums** offer ABBRA members a space **to ask questions, share insights, and learn from one another**. Together, these opportunities make it easier than ever to **connect, collaborate, and grow your network** within the industry.

*We would love for you to join us again this year!*

### SAVE-THE-DATE

#### **ABBRA Membership Social, Newport International Boat Show 2026**

September 16, 2026, 5-7 p.m. *Location to be announced.*

#### **ABBRA Membership Social, IBEX 2026**

October 6, 2026, 5-7 p.m. *Location to be announced.*

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# ABBRA GARD

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ABBRA GARD is ABBRA's exclusive insurance program for boatyards, marinas, and marine service providers, administered by Starkweather & Shepley. It offers comprehensive, marine-specific coverage along with proactive risk management and loss-control support.

Members benefit from tailored coverage, potential premium credits through ABBRA training, and access to expertise designed for marine operations of all sizes.

[Learn more about our member referral program and FREE audit.](#)

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**Welcome New ABBRA Members!**

Please join us in welcoming our newest members to the ABBRA community!  
We're excited to have the following organizations join our network of dedicated marine service professionals.



Safe Harbor Port Annapolis  
Safe Harbor Front Street Shipyard  
Safe Harbor Eastport Yacht Center  
Safe Harbor Wickford Cove



## Why Join ABBRA?

The American Boat Builders & Repairers Association (ABBRA) is the only national trade association dedicated to boatyards, repairers, and marine service professionals. Membership connects you to a powerful network, exclusive training, and industry leadership opportunities.

### Membership Benefits

#### Professional Growth & Training

- Exclusive access to ABBRA's flagship training, the Marine Service Manager Course™, plus technical seminars and leadership workshops.
- Learn from industry experts in maritime law, HR, safety compliance, financial management, estimating, and service recovery.

#### Networking & Peer Community

- Connect with a national network of boatyard owners, repairers, suppliers, and service professionals.
- Share best practices, problem-solve challenges, and collaborate with peers who understand your business.

#### Advocacy & Industry Voice

- ABBRA represents your interests on issues that impact the marine trades.

- Stay informed on regulations, environmental standards, and workforce development initiatives.

### **Member Discounts**

- Significant savings on industry training and events.
- For example: the Marine Service Manager Course is \$200 less for members (\$1,395 vs \$1,595).
- Membership often pays for itself in training discounts alone.

### **Credibility & Recognition**

- Build your reputation with ABBRA certifications and professional standards.
- Demonstrate your commitment to excellence and best practices to customers, employees, and partners.

**Join ABBRA Today!**

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## Thank You to Our Members

We'd like to extend a sincere thank you to all ABBRA members for your continued support and involvement. Your commitment strengthens our community and helps move the marine industry forward.

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