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Local Austin Area Marinas Take Statewide Award for Service, Promotions and Civic Affairs

Two locally owned Lake Travis Marinas were awarded top honors by the Marina Association of Texas. Lakeway Marina received the Outstanding Small Marina of the Year award (based on 350 boat slips or less) and its sister marina, Riviera Marina on the North side of Lake Travis, took the Large Marina of the Year Marina award (having more than 350 slips). The competition is open to 150 marinas across the state of Texas and these two marinas are celebrating this recognition for steadfast, hard work.

The competition's evaluation based on overall appearance, quality of facilities and services including launch facilities, food service, ship's store, gas dock, service and repair area, docks, recreation areas, and special awards for service, promotions, civic affairs, employee recognition, as well as unique community service or educational programs.

"There are many marinas that apply for these awards each year. This year has been one of the most exceptional years that I can remember as the Marina of the Year Chairman. Both Riviera and Lakeway Marinas have displayed over and above the recommended criteria," says Bill Gauspohl. Gauspohl a chairman for the annual awards project which is presented by the Marina Association of Texas.

"Both of these marinas are an example of what should become the standard for both customer service and cleanliness of the facility. It was a pleasure evaluating both of these marinas this year and look forward to the future," Gauspohl says.

This prestigious industry recognition comes after both waterfront, Highland Lakes area businesses have survived and weathered many storms, historic droughts and the constant struggle to adapt from random acts by Mother Nature. Day to day hard work, efforts to keep morale up with staff, customers, clients and the community during tribulations and constant challenges keeps marinas busy and always looking forward.

“During the five-year drought, which was the worst in Lake Travis history, we had to move the marina docks further into the deeper areas of the lake and out of our protected cove home-base. Of course, occupancy went down from the minor shuttling inconveniences, but we never stopped providing great customer service. And the bond with customers that saw us striving to keep serving our customers grew stronger,” says the Manager of Lakeway Marina Jodi Allen.

Working with various entities in order to operate within laws and conservation efforts is another big part of operating a marina.

“There are many regulatory rules and laws that we have to follow. We have a lot of paperwork and permits to process, for example with the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA),” Jodi Allen says.

One of many points that make Lakeway and Riviera Marinas worthy of the award is their focus on management practices that are good for the environment.

“We are a part of the Texas Sea Grant Clean Marina Program. The process of becoming certified helps us to be better prepared for possible disasters and shows regulatory agencies that we are serious about safety and the environment,” Jodi Allen explains.

These crews believe that their businesses are not just businesses. They are a part of the communities that they serve and the state they reside in. Both marinas were involved in making donations to recent Hurricane Harvey victims on the Gulf Coast. The love of water recreation and kinship to those who build their lives and families around water and nature runs deep.

“We are here to also give back to the community. The marinas have been big supporters of Central Texas Water Coalition (centraltexaswatercoalition.org), to ensure that the lake levels remain viable to provide drinking water for the citizens of Austin and surrounding areas to have sustainable drinking water for the foreseeable seeable future and to maintain the quality of lifestyle for residents of the region,” owner Janet Caylor says.

Running a Tight Ship

Having a fully staffed maintenance and service department is no small fete for a marina.

From responding to “distress” calls for customers’ crafts and rental boats to keeping regular moored boats running year-round, having an onsite repair facility is vital. Tenants need to be able to prevent, avoid and recover from freeze damage and all unforeseen problems that can crush a well-planned weekend on the lake. Simply put, the maintenance department never stops. The marinas offer protection gear, preventative care, regular winterizing and detail programs.

The state of the art Ships Store at Lakeway Marina is home to a 1950s resurrected vintage boat that was ironically pulled from the depths of Lake Travis during the 2009 historic drought. Totally restored, the boat was then hoisted high above the dressing rooms in the Lakeway Ships Store where visitors and neighbors come to shop for resort attire, beverages, ice cream and the

latest lake gear. Jodi Allen has years of experience in buying for the shop which carries sought after lines like Columbia, Billabong and more.

A variety of rentals keep things interesting at the two marinas. From ski boats, kayaks and Waverunners to paddleboards, party barges and pontoons, there is something for everyone that is ready to launch. Staying on top of trends in water recreation is important for marina management, Jodi Allen says. Keeping it running and providing instruction on how to operate these things is also key to keeping customers returning for good times.

Jodi Allen does weekly dock walks to make sure Lakeway Marina is clean from trash and the ever-present lakeside spider webs. She painstakingly looks for any safety items that may need to be addressed.

Longtime slip tenant Robert Etheridge of Lakeway says that he doesn't know of another marina that cares as much as do the staff of Lakeway Marina.

“Most marinas expect their slip tenants to clean up around their boat but they go beyond that and make sure it is always nice and clean,” Etheridge says.

Technology is important to the two marinas. Lakeway and Riviera have remained in constant contact with their customers through social media and other forms of internet marketing and communications. The marinas have all hands-on deck for daily operations on the docks, but somehow, they have also strived to keep digitally connected to their consumer and to the community. Managers say that riding an everchanging, ever-present wave of modern communication has helped to push their recreation business over the top.

The setting plays a big part in the success of Riviera and Lakeway Marinas too. Both marinas are scenic and beautiful to visit which is nice for even non-boaters who like to visit the docks and be around the peacefulness and lively activities. Riviera even has a large, live oak studded outdoor venue for weddings and family gatherings.

Lakeway Marina has cascading waterfalls that follow foot traffic and a tram down to the lake. The look and feel of the marinas really set the tone for the overall lakeside experiences. Maintaining these outdoor, park-like elements is a huge priority for both marinas. The owners feel like they are truly stewards of the stunning land on the water's edges.

Five Fingers Make a Strong Fist

They say a family is stronger when working collaboratively together and same goes for business. The marinas are both family owned and operated. Janet Caylor and her son Steve Allen purchased Riviera Marina in 1998 and Lakeway Marina later in 2008. Steve manages and oversees operations at Riviera Marina, while his wife Jodi Allen manages Lakeway Marina a few mile markers away. Their children have grown up in the business and enjoyed working in the

family business while attending school. Lance Looper, brother of Jodi Allen, is another integral part of managing Riviera Marina. Together, they all make it happen.

Caylor's passion for being near water started early and influenced her family's love of water recreation.

"I have been a water baby since my parents took me to the beach when we lived on Guam. My son (Steve Allen) learned to swim before he could walk. It was so cute to see that little guy hold his breath and swim like a frog," says owner Janet Caylor. "We lived on the lake in his high school years and did competitive water skiing. He and I are very close and always wanted to do a water business together."

A passion for the lakes have kept the family close and pursuing like-minded interests. The marina was the first of its kind on Lake Travis in 1963. In the 1980s, Steve Allen worked at Lakeway Marina as a ski boat driver and dockhand. The marina was a beloved stop for people visiting the Texas Hill Country. Dallas and Houston patrons fled the concrete jungles of the big city to be in the beauty and peace of the limestone lined bluffs and blue waters of Travis. Lakeway Marina has remained a busy gathering point for summer-fun seekers and families. Families have raised their children and it's not uncommon to hear of stories where generations have continued going to Lakeway Marina.

The acquisitions of Lakeway and Riviera Marinas, gave the family marine businesses on both the north and south side of Lake Travis, which 63.75 miles long, and with a maximum width of 4.5 miles.

"The marinas have been life changers for my family. The grandkids have grown up living life on the lake, involved in a service business, with a passion for water sports and entrepreneurship. Both have been very involved as dock hands, cashiers, store managers, and fork lift drivers *and whatever it takes*," Janet Caylor says.

The dual "Marina of the Year" awards honored both sister marinas on the banks of scenic Lake Travis mark a culmination of passions and consistent hard work ethics.

"Over the years, we have strived to make these marinas the best ones on the lake. We want to bring happiness to all the families that frequent or visit our businesses. It has been a great challenge as well as a joy to expand the marinas, and make them high-quality operations," Janet Caylor says.

Dreams are accessible with hard work and dedication and certainly the dream to live and work near the water has come true for this dedicated marina family.

"One of our boat dealers recently remarked that Lakeway Marina looked like Disneyland. We thought that was quite a compliment."

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Main Sources:

www.lakewaymarina.com

www.rivieramarina.com

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