

Certification program passes 250-dealer mark

NMMA hires a manager to administer the operation as planning begins for autumn sessions

By Melanie Winters/Associate Editor

The marine industry's dealer certification effort continues to make headway with a new program manager and a budding list of dealers seeking the "Marine Industry Certified" designation.

Elizabeth McAllister has been hired as program manager for the dealer certification aspect of the Grow Boating Initiative. Her salary is covered by the Grow Boating Fund.

"Liz's background in program management relates directly to the needs of this vital industry program," said Thom Dammrich, president of the National Marine Manufacturers Association.

McAllister comes to Grow Boating from Chicago Cares, where she most recently served as program manager for Children's Education and Development.

In her new position McAllister will work with marine industry partners to

promote acceptance of and participation in the dealership certification program. She will be responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of the program, as well as related promotional events and industry outreach efforts.

"The timing for bringing Liz on board is ideal, as current program enrollments already have more than 250 dealers registered, and the planning for fall sessions is about to begin," said Phil

Keeter, president of the Marine Retailers Association of America.

The certification program was developed by dealers, for dealers and focuses on areas that affect dealership quality — operations, facilities, professional sales/service processes, customer satisfaction and employee training/satisfaction. Its purpose is to address one of the critical issues that is limiting expansion in the marine industry: customer service.

Certification was launched last summer with a pilot program that included 21 dealers across the country. They met in Chicago in late July to review draft materials developed by program administrator Five Star Solutions. The dealers implemented a list of best management practices and underwent an inspection by Five Star Solutions before getting certified.

Four more boat dealerships became certified in late April, bringing the total number to 34. The newly certified dealers are: Legendary Marine of Destin, Fla.; Spicer's Boat City of Houghton Lake, Mich.; Longshore Boats of Charleston, S.C.; and McMachen Marine of Harrison Township, Mich.

"These dealerships are leading the way by demonstrating their commitment to quality service and growing the entire marine industry," said Keeter.

Becoming certified is a three-step process:

- Attend a pre-certification launch meeting or workshop and participate in the employee satisfaction survey, at a cost of \$500;
- Participate in the third-party certification process, onsite consultant visitation and criteria/standards review, for \$1,500; and,
- Receive certification and merchandise your dealership with Marine Industry Certification point-of-sale materials, for \$495.

Several manufacturers and trade associations have offered rebates to defray the costs for dealers.

Since Jan. 1 there have been 14 workshops with more planned for fall.

The dealer certification program is part of the industry's Grow Boating Initiative, an integrated effort within the recreational marine industry designed to promote the boating lifestyle and improve the boating experience. The initiative focuses on all areas of boating, including water access, dealer and product certification, marketing, and research.

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