



Be an Eagle

There's an old Southern "bidnessman's" saying: **"It's not too hard to be an Eagle if you are surrounded by Turkeys."**

Let me tell you how this relates to getting your dealership certified. You probably already have an inkling, anyway.

Unlike the carefully conceived but ill-fated Marine Industry Certification program of a few years ago, this new NMMA-MRAA cooperative venture in dealer certification has legs. More accurately, it has wings — hence the comment about Turkeys vs. Eagles.

There's no way Lockwood is going to admit to Turkeyship, so we jumped right in on certification. It was a great organizational experience, one we look forward to repeating each year at recertification. If you haven't signed up already, you need to explore the process ASAP for your dealership. You will like what you see.

The announced goal is 250 dealers certified the first year. At this writing (as the first quarter of '06 draws to a close), 30 dealers are complete with 38 more in the chute awaiting inspection. Over 200 are signed up for their introductory meeting (146 have already

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attended), and I haven't heard of anyone not following through and making the necessary changes — it's that good. I think the 250 estimate is low, but that was probably good management of the industry expectations. Just as in selling boats, it's good to under-promise and over-deliver.

You can go on the Web site www.stakeholder@growboating.org with the password GROW, or go to www.growboating.org and register as a dealer to get to more information. These sites are steadily being improved, so bear with them if there is some confusion.

I attended a Metro Atlanta Marine Trades Association meeting a couple of nights ago and listened to Larry Russo enumerate the virtues of the Dealer Certification program. Communication was surprisingly good, considering that Larry speaks "Boston" instead of "Deep South." Twelve dealers were already signed up for Atlanta's introductory gathering, and more were added that night. The Atlanta group decided to subsidize those dealers finishing certification this year. Don't tell me Yankees can't be charming — if they want to be.

There is plenty of industry "scholarship money" around. I figure that I could get a little over twice my \$2,495 back if I was ethically challenged — and didn't think I would get caught double dipping. I'm aware of significant financial help available for certifying dealers from Grady-White, Regulator, Scout, Formula, Regal, Proline, Chaparral, Honda, Mercury, plus the Northwest, Southern

California, and Atlanta Marine Trade Associations. I'll bet there will be dozens soon.

Larry suggested the belief is that "A" dealers (probably the top 20 percent or so) will rush right through, and that is what seems to be happening. The "B" dealers, being quality folk also, will follow them quickly. The "C" dealers are likely to get moving slowly, but many will eventually jump on board. In the process, Bs may become As and even some Cs become Bs. The Ds probably won't ever get the word — or care.

A word of guidance: Don't just send the owner. Take the folks who make it happen, too — general manager, sales manager, service manager, etc. You need buy-in throughout the dealership. The extra cost is minimal, and the more folks on the firing line present, the easier your job will be. The task primarily consists of mapping how you do things now, adding things you realize you need to do, and maybe going back and retrieving some things you've let fall through the cracks and quit doing.

Why am I pushing you guys to join the certified group when those of us now finished can fly like solitary eagles? It will bring more sales to all of us if we get you to join us on high. Sales leads generated by the Discover Boating Campaign, just kicking off, are currently to be distributed through manufacturers to all their dealers. (Learn how it all works on page 10.) Eventually, only certified dealers will get them — directly. When I asked for a definition of "eventually," I heard minimum numbers like 500 bandied about, to guarantee a wide enough spread for good potential customer coverage.

There is talk of giving the earlier certifiers access just before the distribution to manufacturers. You and I (Eagles) want those highly qualified leads to ourselves. Let the Turkeys grub around with only walk-ins. We will likely get more than our share of those, too. We will be displaying the "Discover Boating through a Certified Dealer" type paraphernalia, much of which is already in the pipeline.

I opened my April copy of *Popular Science* yesterday and was greeted immediately by a two-page spread inside the cover headed, "Captain more than a neatly mowed quarter-acre of crab grass." It's a great ad, complete with a foldout bearing the inscription, "The only hard part of owning a boat is returning to land."

This is good stuff, and it will bring us all leads shortly. The sooner we can channel them directly to us Eagles, the better. 🦅

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