



LESSONS LEARNED

MAINE CRUISE 2013

Scheduling:

Based on prior experience, the choice of Maine was made over two years in advance and that allowed the chairs ample time for event planning. We appreciated the reminders from Larry Somers regarding the need for communication on a timely basis. The dates of the cruise were set well in advance, which was fortunate since many other clubs decided to come to Maine in 2013. Fleet Captain AJ Evans ran interference when the NYYC wished to arrive in our time slot; in fact their opening at Rockland on the 16th of August, a day after our closing event at Roque, precluded several of our members from continuing east, since they wished to join the second cruise.

We chose venues that could accommodate a large number of vessels based on prior cruises in Maine. However, we did not anticipate the larger number that expressed interest. At one point we felt that the venues were approaching capacity and attempted to close registration; however, without previously setting a limit on numbers, the Commodore felt we should allow those who wished to attend to register. Therefore one should clearly state if there is a limit to the number of vessels that can be accommodated, or in the number of people for a cruise event.

There are no yacht clubs in Penobscot Bay which could accommodate 300 people and 80 boats. Their "season" is now compressed into about eight weeks in July and August. During this time they need to accommodate their own members and would have to charge dearly to take on something as large as our cruise.

Where possible, it can work to your advantage to choose venues who value their exposure to our members. Trident Marine in Rockland is only a few years old and they appreciated our bringing so many boat owners to their facility. In return, they charged us less than one thousand dollars for the use of their large gazebo for our opening reception and allowed us to use their showers and laundry facilities without charge. They also did their best to open up dock space for those wishing to tie up. The Gulf of Maine Post has had a long standing relationship with the Maine Maritime Academy at Castine. Several of our members are graduates and Peg Brandon, our Port Captain, is on the faculty. We were able to schedule our arrival at a time when the cadets were on vacation and the campus was not occupied by another activity such as a conference. Their waterfront crew assisted us with setting up the building for cocktails on two nights. They also ran two large launches on a day of wind driven rain to move us in and out from our boats. Their facilities and food charges were the most reasonable of the cruise and all went well. The Hinckley Yard in Southwest Harbor has undergone a major financial restructuring and is focusing on offer yacht service in addition to yacht building. They saw our cruise as a good opportunity to introduce their new offerings to our members. They assisted with a major commitment of man hours in setting up the facility for our dinner and running three launches to transport members. They have rebuilt their extensive mooring field and made much of it available to us at a reduced nightly fee. Having the venue provided at literally no charge allowed the cruise to invest in top quality food and drink.

Cruise fee:

Commodore Dyer wisely indicated this should not be an “a la carte” cruise with members picking venues and paying for each event separately. We came to appreciate the wisdom of his advice, as numbers at each event fluctuated, and even with spreadsheet detail it was difficult to keep track of who was missing which event. We did allow two events – Castine and Southwest Harbor – to register members for dinners ashore, in order to facilitate crew changes and ensure that members who could not partake of the cruise due to health or other reasons might join with friends for an evening. Where that is feasible, we believe some flexibility is appreciated by our group.

Setting the fee at a higher rate than some anticipated for a Maine cruise allowed us to enlist top quality caterers while still ensuring a reserve to meet unexpected costs. And, as we found out to our dismay: there are always unexpected costs. When a caterer suggested having some of the passed hors d'oeuvres be hot, we did not have enough experience to realize that the \$275 cost to rent an oven and propane would be added to the invoice from the party rental company, a bill which we were to pay. And so it goes.

Electronic communication:

In the current world, electronic communication is critical. No longer does it make sense to request a check to indicate interest, although a deposit made electronically is welcomed. Checks still do work for members who prefer them. As past cruises have indicated, a larger number will indicate interest and intent to attend than are able to participate. At least two or three boats were sold by members who planned on joining on vessels that were for sale. Family, business and health issues intervene to cause changes in plans, and refunds were available in full for those who cancelled early (by June 15). Those who cancelled afterwards were refunded an amount less \$50 per person, reflecting the need to recover some of the costs incurred by that time. One unanticipated expense of those cancellations is the credit charge fees of approximately 4% that the Club sustains from its card processing firm. An email reminder of balance due seemed sufficient (Some members mistook the \$50 per person deposit as a \$50 per boat deposit.) and the Treasurer appreciated not having multiple payments. We are sure that luck played a role, but we had not one boat captain come to registration, check in hand. All had completed payment well in advance.

Email allowed the cruise chairs to develop the cruise book in word documents which were sent back and forth to Doug and Dale Bruce, who expanded on the material with hyperlinks, photographs, chartlets and layout details. We were able to email a draft version of the cruise book to registered members and post the material to the website just prior to the Club's Annual meeting in March – which might have been a record for timeliness. We are sure that Doug and Dale's lovely book played a large roll in our having so many members join the cruise.

Email allowed quick notification of cancellations, additions, crew changes, and updates on activities. We found members responsive to our efforts to communicate and interested in what activities were offered.

Interest survey and Optional events:

Our interest survey sought to elicit answers regarding menu choices at two events, and interest in several optional activities. Its effectiveness was mixed. Those who needed transportation information or housing information were sent relevant material. Many members changed answers regarding optional events, as time intervened between answers at first registration and event proximity. Interest in small boat racing depended greatly on timing, which was eventually weather dependent. Simulator interest was strong, but our options to expand sessions were limited. A sudden leak in Maine Maritime's pool resulted in a less than ideal "dry pool" life raft training session that attracted less interest.

The most notable failure in the interest survey was in plans for a Saturday barbeque to follow events at Maine Maritime Academy. Preliminary interest indicated over 150 people planned to attend the event, and meal numbers were needed by the Academy prior to the payment by members. However, many members changed plans and the final count was closer to 100. Lesson learned: optional events that require funding should have payments of a non-refundable nature in advance. See again the early notice of the wisdom of Commodore Dyer's determination that this *not* be an a la carte cruise.

Roque Island also provided evidence that plans change, since many more vessels chose not to head east from Southwest Harbor than initially indicated. The proximity of the New York Yacht Club cruise had been a factor in some prior decisions, but other members changed plans based on crew and vessel needs. Fortunately the luncheon surplus was readily distributed to those who attended and the funds had been collected as part of the total cruise fee.

Drink tickets

Based on the lessons from the Abaco cruise, we specified in detail that drinks would be 2 oz. of hard liquor for bar drinks; 6 oz. of wine and settled with each caterer the cost of the tickets. The top shelf brands were agreed upon in advance and the caterers stuck with them. We printed a CCA logo on wooden chips with the concept that two chips would equal one bar drink – one chip would equal a beer or wine. We provided plastic containers in which the bartenders could place the chips as they received them over the bar. The rum kegs, which Boston Station is fortunate to have as a Station keg, Buzzards Bay keg and Gulf of Maine keg – all in service – were free at the events until emptied, about five gallons at forty proof. The rum that was added to them was bought from the licensed Permittee who was bartending. It is present Club policy that at all Club level events there shall be a licensed Permittee, whose insurance should stand twixt the Club and any member who might be involved in an accident in which alcohol might play a part. While bartenders took a bit of time to consider the use of the chips, they generally felt this worked well and we reimbursed them at the end of the evening based on the chips they collected. It looked a lot like the end of a big poker night as we all stacked up the chips and then, literally, bought them back by writing a check.

The object of this exercise was to limit the time in lines – making change costs time, and the chips also eliminated much of the risk that caterers experience when cash is present in large volumes. All were advised to include staffing charges and told that tip jars were discouraged by Club policy. We felt lines at the bars moved at a reasonable rate given the numbers present and were never more than two or three deep. We must note that we had three different chips for

the three main events. Some members did not bother to make such a fine distinction and used chips meant for one event at another. Since all the chips were paid for in the cruise fee, when we noticed what was happening, we told the bartenders to accept chips as offered: we did not think it was worth the bad feelings that might be caused by making this an issue.

Our thousand plus chips remain available to any cruise chair wishing them in the future.

Port Captains:

Choose them carefully. We were fortunate to have the assistance of Jim and Sue Chambers who filled in at several events when we needed more help. They volunteered to oversee the setup at registration when it was clear that our two Port Captains had full time jobs in the marine industry and might be challenged to be present at times needed. Knowing how important an opening event is, they wished to ensure it went well. We cannot stress too much the need to have a few experienced hands who have run Club cruise events in the past on your team. Without the Chambers, the 2013 coast of Maine cruise would not have been as successful.

One Port Captain, whose name we cannot recall, did not attend the event at the port he captained – nor advise the chairs of his absence, which was evident when he asked another member to take his guest aboard. Fortunately other members amply filled in and the event went well.

The event planning sheet developed by Ross Santy was not something that any of the port captains wished to utilize. We found few interested in the financial details and negotiations with caterers became the responsibility of cruise chairs, and the budget that was developed became a cruise budget not a series of event budgets. We appreciated that Ross provided guidance on our costs as they were budgeted, and oversaw the budget development.

There is something to be said for being willing to front the expenses of the Club. Knowing that Peter Chandler will reimburse for valid expenses, there are still times when a local check is valuable – and when a check one or two weeks later is not seen as worthy, despite the equivalency. It makes sense to confer with your suppliers and determine their payment requirements in advance. Some items that were to be utilized multiple times at different venues seemed to warrant purchase and became Club property to be disposed of. Some caterers in providing details of what was needed at an event overlooked what became obvious –e.g. the oven for hot hors d'oeuvres – in rental agreements. A reserve is a useful thing to plan for, and it does become utilized in unforeseen ways.

There are decisions to be made regarding how best to provide party items such as tables, chairs, table cloths, table settings, lighting etc. By working with an outfit called 'Web Restaurant' we were able to purchase a lot of nice looking plastic silverware, bambu plates, table napkins and other items at prices that beat the local Walmart. As a rule of thumb, it turns out that we could buy, and dispose of most of the table settings for about half of what we would have had to pay for rentals. We also bought ten rugged eight foot folding tables and 20 folding chairs from Sam's Club. These we used at all the events which allowed us to set up reception tables without having to count on a rental agency showing up early. This furniture pretty much paid for itself during the cruise and we were able to then sell it all to a local church for about half of our initial cost. Of course with three hundred people in attendance at many of the events, we also rented tables and chairs in a truck load quantity. We were able to deal with a single rental outfit, Wallace Tent, for all of our locations. This kept the billing straightforward and gained us a bit of leverage. For instance when we needed a large tent for the opening reception as back up for the gazebo space, Wallace gave us a brand new wedding level tent that really looked clean and elegant. (They told us that their tents go thru a series of uses as they age: they start as wedding tents, move down to party tents, and then finish their life as rental tents for fairs and sales.)

To move all of our paraphernalia among the four venues, we rented a 17' U Haul truck for about for two weeks. It turns out that local rental fees for such trucks are a great deal less than the one way rental they are usually used for when one moves from one home to another. While we had good weather during much of our cruise, having a dry place for everything during the day and night when we received two and half inches of wind driven rain was a Godsend. We also employed our own F150 at each location as it worked well for running errands.

Mother ship:

Club officers have had mixed experience with mother ships on cruises overseas. Given the availability of a large number of charter boats in our area, we did not foresee a need to plan for a large vessel. However, Jim Morgan of the Southern California Station filled a need for members of his station in arranging a charter of the 170 ft. Victory Chimes, the only three masted schooner in the Maine windjammer fleet. We felt fortunate that we were not involved in its selection or its scheduling, since the Chimes sailed to Castine from Rockland, but did not otherwise attend the events scheduled. Members knew that her lack of an engine precluded her sail to Roque, but we were all surprised that she left Bass Harbor where she had anchored Sunday night and headed west rather than around the corner to Southwest Harbor. The weather

concern that was expressed hardly seemed warranted, but the cruise committee bore no responsibility for the action. Dinner at Southwest Harbor lacked the 42 passengers aboard, but caterers can not adjust for such last minute plan changes and we paid for those who were not there. Again, *avoid* an a la carte cruise. The concept of a Station charter boat vs. a Club mother ship for a cruise may still be worth considering.

In Conclusion:

While many have said that it is better to be lucky than to be good, luck is a sometimes thing. Knowing that we did not know enough to run a Club cruise may have been lucky. In turn this knowledge led us to enlist good advice and counsel. Past Commodores Jim Harvie and Ross Sherbrooke were very generous with their time and enthusiasm. Past entertainment chair and Rear Commodore of the Boston Station, Rob Kiley had a number of specific suggestions. We have already mentioned the huge help we received from Jim and Sue Chambers who attended many of our planning meetings and business meetings with caterers. Reading the two cruise planning guides on the Club web site is also most valuable. While we all make mistakes, it is useful to read of mistakes made by others in the past as a warning not to make them all over again. Finally we are grateful to Commodore Dyer and his charming wife, Mimi, for many hours of support. They gave us many valuable course corrections but we never felt that they pushed us away from the wheel.

Respectfully submitted,
Garry and Leslie Schneider, Cruise co-chairs