

Charming Bayshore Town Makes Great Boating & Fishing Destination

by Kelley Anne Mc Gee

As you stroll the residential section of Keyport NJ, one can't help but admiring manicured lawns, pretty landscaping, tree lined streets and fine historic homes, some well over a century, once belonging to sea captains and boat builders. Harvesting of oysters like the world famous Chingarora Oyster, shipping of shellfish to places like New York and well beyond other ports, as well as transporting passengers back and forth, along with boat building, all became important trades and major industries here at one time, that helped to put Keyport on the map. Famous steamboats such as "The River Queen" served in the Civil War, and was used by President Lincoln and General Grant.

Located in Monmouth County's Bayshore Region at the beginning of the Jersey Shore, exit 117 off the GS Parkway, the official town of Keyport dates back to 1830, although Lenape Indians first fished the local waters here for shellfish like clams and oysters during the 1600s, and a plantation operated here during the 1700s.

Highway 36, which runs through Keyport and intercedes with Route 35, is typically busy with a wide range of stores, services and fast food restaurants. Downtown Keyport offers quaint shops, businesses, casual eateries and fine dining restaurants. The nearby waterfront offers plenty to see and do to keep boaters, fishermen and tourists happy, starting with picturesque water views.

Over looking the Raritan Bay and Keyport Harbor, handsome and rugged fishing boats, often dominate this watery landscape. But other times, colorful sailboats parade through or may gather for regattas. In addition to the busy boating and fishing activity in these waters, folks flock here for other reasons too. Anything from catching brilliant sunrises over the bay, to unforgettable views of the Manhattan skyline, to fading sunsets over the harbor, or just to see time stand still, watch life and the boats go by.

Several marinas are within close proximity and nearby to help meet boaters needs. Hans Pedersen & Sons, Keyport Marine Basin, Brown's Point, Seaboard Marine and Wagners Twin Towers. Their services and or amenities may vary, so it's probably a good idea to check ahead if you plan to visit, to see which marina might best suite you.

Keyport Marine Basin for example offers full-services such as fuel, a bait & tackle shop, which carries some convenience store type of items also including ice, does repairs, has boat slips and a launch, a pump out station, and is located next to a casual style waterfront restaurant and tavern. While Pedersen's, a 3rd generation family owned and operated marina, has boat slips, ice, fuel, a boat launch and ramp, and does repairs. Brown's offers rack and storage, plus does repairs, has boat slips and more. Please note facilities information may be subject to changes.

There are about four charter boats available for hire that can accommodate approximately six passengers for fishing excursions or leisure cruises. Lucky Carm, Double Down II, Papa's Angels and Skinny Drifters. Keyport has long had a reputation for some of the finest fishing around. All types of species can be found here, and with a little luck, hopefully caught here too, and is easily accessible to several local and main waterways.

Bait & tackle shops such as Crabby's or Keyport Marine Basin, are more than happy to spin fishing yarns with customers while assisting them, and can help point them to some of the best fishing spots. Check out popular bay grounds like Buoy 1 in Keyport, The Reach, Chapel Hill Channels, and nearby Keansburg Pier. Or head out eight miles to the Atlantic and Sandy Hook for flounder, fluke, blues, stripers and weaks.

One interesting note, Peter Benchley's best selling novel "Jaws" is said to have been inspired by a string of shark attacks that occurred along the Jersey Shore including nearby Matawan Creek in July of 1916. So it's quite possible to catch just about anything in these waters.

There are several, large party boats also available for hire for fishing that can accommodate larger groups such as Captain John's. The 80 ft. touring boat also does some leisure cruises such as taking passengers to fireworks at various locations. NY/NJ Baykeeper offers eco tours such as birdwatching or sunset cruises aboard Captain John's and the Kath-



Keyport Yacht Club, Keyport, NJ

leen D. (a 40 ft. sailing catamaran) throughout summer. Fees, trips, times and days vary.

The Keyport Yacht Club, which dates back to 1908, has a good neighbor policy and offers offshore guest moorings and a launch service to visitors from other yacht clubs. Here boaters can quench their thirst with a cocktail, relax, enjoy the company of other sailors, and take in spectacular views.

The Keyport Yacht Club preserves the history and love of sailing along this part of the shore, while promoting the sport and introducing it to younger generations through various programs, courses and instruction. The club is very active and offers a number of pleasant social activities and special events throughout the year including races, cruises and regattas.

The waterfront has a public fishing pier, where a fishing contest for snapper is held in August for children and young teens. Prizes such as brand new fishing rods, are awarded to the winners. Also, the pier's a popular spot for catching blue claw crabs, and a flea market takes place weekends here, usually Sundays,



spring thru late fall.

There are about four public waterfront parks. One offers a few picnic tables as well as great water views, and two bay beaches offer swimming for small or young children. Lifeguards are not present though, so children should be accompanied by adults.

Also, free concerts with musical groups like the Jazz Lobsters (I just love the band's name), take place throughout summer in town. But the concerts location will eventually be moved to the new waterfront once it's completed, which is currently being rebuilt.

Located across from the harbor, is a maritime museum. The Steamboat Dock Museum, touts a wonderful collection of articles, photos, artifacts, antiques, and rare memorabilia associated with the bayshore town's past, along with interesting exhibits and displays. Friendly and informative tour guides, gladly welcome visitors, and are on hand to answer any questions or guide you through the museum.

The non-profit museum is especially popular among school children, and has a small gift-shop for kids. Also available for larger group tours, arrangements for this should be made in advance. Admission into the museum free, but donations gladly accepted, and very much appreciated. Parking is available on the premises and nearby. The museum is open May thru September various days and times, and also by appointment the rest of the year.

Keyport boasts seven fire departments, and with that said, is it any wonder then they have a Fireman's Museum here as well. The first fire department in Keyport dates back to 1877, after the community suffered a devastating fire that destroyed a good part of town and its businesses, and the need for a fire department became apparent.

Monmouth County's only fire museum displays artifacts and equipment dating from the 19th century to a section of steel from the World Trade Center Twin Towers. Open April thru December weekends, but museum volunteers will do their best to accommodate visitors other days and times of the year. They sponsor a terrific fireman's fair every July.

Keyport has several nice waterfront spots to grab a drink and bite to eat, ranging from the ultimate casual to fine dining. A popular landmark, the Keyport Fishery, has been around since the 1930s. It offers all types of fresh seafood including raw seafood bar items like shrimp and oysters, homemade chowders and soups, appetizers, and cooked seafood dishes.

The fresh seafood market only offers take-out, but

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