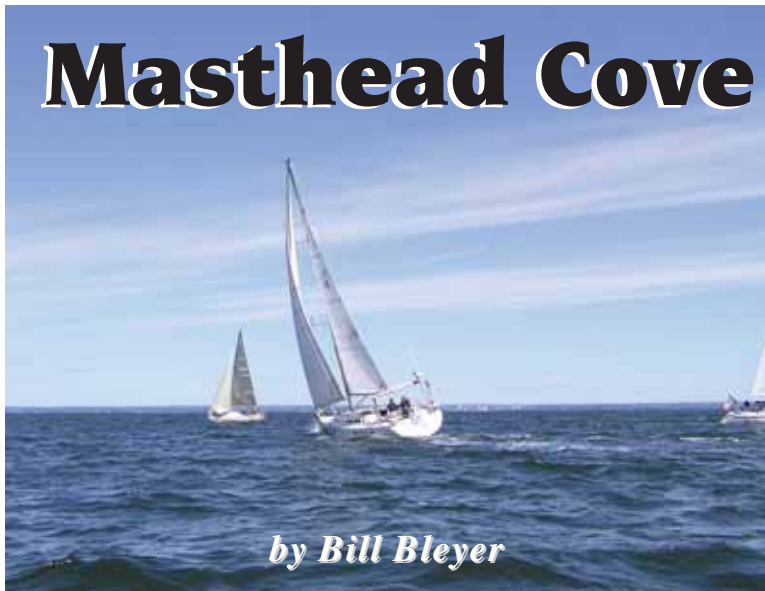


# Masthead Cove – a “Paper Yacht Club”



by Bill Bleyer

There are two types of yacht clubs punctuating the 1,100 miles of Long Island coastline.

Most people are familiar with the traditional yacht club with its own building, docks and sometimes a pool and tennis courts, whose officers wear blue blazers and military-style hats at formal functions and hold naval-style titles. In nautical parlance, these are called “bricks-and-mortar” yacht clubs.

Then there are “paper yacht clubs” with no clubhouse or other expensive-to-maintain facilities. Masthead Cove Yacht Club is one example. Its only assets are three moorings: Lloyd Harbor, Sand City by Eatons Neck and Port Jefferson Harbor.

The idea of a paper club is to keep the expense of membership to a minimum - a plus when owning a large sailboat usually does live up to the old cliché that a yacht is a hole in the water into which the owner throws money. With family dues of only \$80 a year and no requirement to spend a minimum amount in a club restaurant or bar, Masthead Cove members can concentrate on raft-ups, group cruises to the Connecticut River and other destinations, parties ashore and fundraising for charities.

As the club website ([www.mastheadcoveyachtclub.com](http://www.mastheadcoveyachtclub.com)) explains, it all began in 1975 when a group of Huntington sailors got together to form a sailing club geared towards family activities. The founders devised a simple credo: “Enjoy your sailing experiences in the good company of other sailors and have fun doing it.”

The club history also claims a first: when Tina Van Ghent became commodore in 1986, she was the first woman to head a Long Island yacht club. “We limit our membership to 100 families. There are currently more than 80,” Commodore Tom Mazzotta said, “so everybody knows everybody. The criterion is you have to have a sailboat 23 feet or better in

the Huntington Bay area so you can participate in the events.” The current roster includes an elementary school music teacher, engineer, dentist, nurse, professional chef and retired art professor.

Those who move out of the area as well as those who purchase powerboats (“going to the dark side”) become associate members at half-dues but still can participate in all events. “Many of our members are also members of bricks-and-mortar clubs,” said Mazzotta, who estimated that there are more paper clubs around Long Island than

traditional yacht clubs. Some paper clubs are primarily for racing, like the Lloyd Harbor Yacht Club, and others are geared to cruising. “They all have their character,” he says. “Our club is really geared toward new sailors, but we have professional captains who are members.”

While Masthead Cove’s members primarily are interested in cruising, about 10 or 15 percent race, Mazzotta said, and the club jointly sponsors races with other local clubs. At one club raft-up in Lloyd Harbor members, whose boats sported the red and blue Masthead Cove burgee, talked about how they connected with Masthead Cove and why they like it while barbecues mounted on stern rails emitted plumes of vertical gray smoke into the still air as hot dogs, burgers and steaks sizzled and members hopped from boat to boat to socialize and pass around beer and other beverages. Kayaks, rafts and tubes floated off the sterns as children and their parents splashed in the calm water and Mazzotta kept an ear to his portable VHF radio to guide incoming vessels to their proper spot.

John West of Huntington, owner of a Hunter 31 named *Legacy*, joined two years ago after sailing about four years as his own captain and about 15 years on other peoples’ boats. “I had met some people from those other [bricks and mortar] clubs and those clubs didn’t meet my needs,” he said. “This is more casual. I didn’t want to be more formalized with a building and uniforms. This club offers the casual sailor the destination sailing experience and camaraderie and a chance to increase your sailing skills.”

The uniform - or lack of it - issue comes up frequently at Masthead Cove gatherings. “You’re looking at the uniform,” Mazzotta said, pointing to his Masthead Cove t-shirt and baseball hat.

Hans Bartels of Huntington, owner of *Dutch Dream*

(yes, he’s Dutch) was lounging on his Chaparral 300, one of two powerboats in the club. A former commodore, he used to have a Catalina 36 sloop, but bought a “stinkpot” - sailors’ loving term for a craft powered only by an engine - because “I have a bad back so I couldn’t do all the work. I’ve belonged to yacht clubs, but yacht clubs are very cliquy and we don’t have that here at all,” Bartels said. He also says Masthead Cove is much more affordable. When he joined more than 20 years ago, “I knew nothing about boating and when you go cruising as a novice it’s easier to follow somebody.” Bartels has since taken Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadron courses and purchased sophisticated electronic navigation equipment. But he still likes to cruise with the club. “It’s just the camaraderie. Sometimes we’ve had 26 boats on cruises. We’ve had lobster bakes, picnics, barbecues, cocktail parties all over the East Coast from here to Block Island and Martha’s Vineyard.”

The cruises generally include about 15 boats. Bartels said, “It’s nice to have the other boats around if a mechanical problem develops. They’ll tow you. Some of us have radar and some of us don’t, so the boats with radar lead the way and everyone knows where they are, which is great, especially for a novice sailor.”

Bartels’ wife, Marian, said “There’s tremendous camaraderie. It’s been one of the driving forces in our social life. It’s not just sailing and it’s not just a summer thing. The club has organized a winter bus trip to a boat show in Atlantic City and gone skiing together. We’ve improved the quality of life in this area as well with fundraising races for Special Olympics, the Marcincuk Fund for Ovarian Cancer Research and other charities.”

Another plus, Bartels added, is that the kids all like it and grow up together. Mazzotta’s son, Paul, 13, said “I go from boat to boat, partying.” He said he likes taking club cruises because “at night, we usually get a giant group of kids together to play cards.”

The first activity of the season is a July raft-up at Lloyd Harbor with an unusual main event - the hoisting of the commodore. Mazzotta of Huntington, owner of a Catalina 36 named *@ Sea*, said “It’s a tradition that the commodore gets hoisted up the mast in a bosun’s chair and then is subjected to taunts for at least five minutes.” There are lots of jokes about what the spikes mounted on the spreaders sticking out from the mast to keep cormorants and other seabirds from perching might do to tender areas of the commodore’s anatomy. After the head honcho is back on deck, everyone has a drink or jumps into the drink.

Evidently, “paper” yacht clubs are not all on paper!



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