

YACHT CLUBS OF MARYLAND

PROTOCOL MATTERS

BY JOE HELLNER, THE ORIGINAL "CAPTAIN PROTOCOL"

Most yacht clubs hold at least two major "all hands" events each year, one typically celebrating the start of boating season and the other to celebrate changing the watch for a new year. For most clubs in our area, these events are known as Opening Day and the Commodore's Ball. Opening Day is also known as Flag Raising, which is technically the ceremony that occurs on Opening Day. These are occasions for all members, family, and guests to get together in friendship to celebrate their involvement in their club and to mark special milestones with a little bit of ceremony and "speechifying". There are many yachting and nautical traditions and symbols associated with each occasion. Representatives and VIPs from many neighbor yacht clubs and boating organizations attend to renew bonds of friendship and to help celebrate the good fortune to be able to enjoy boating and a club on the water.

The Commodore's Ball celebrates the start of a new club year (sort of like a Club Birthday Party), welcomes and thanks the incoming and outgoing Commodores, and welcomes those members who have volunteered to serve as officers and Board members for the upcoming year. In most years, it is the only full formal catered event in a nice hall the club holds, providing music and dinner for a "let's go out for the evening" event at a time of year when the boats and club are asleep for winter.

Opening Day often involves a whole weekend of activities, most of which are carried on in the informal and relaxed ways of the boating life. This is one of the best times to bring friends and family down to the club and for folks from neighboring clubs to visit by land or sea. The club and grounds are at their shining best, usually decorated to a theme. Food and drink are everywhere and hospitality is aboard every vessel at docks often full of visiting boats. Rafting up visiting boats is common with lines, electric cords, and water hoses running everywhere. In most clubs, no visiting boat is ever charged for dockage on opening weekend. At some point during the weekend, a ceremony is held with yachting uniforms and attire, courtesies exchanged, officer reports, speeches made, cannons fired, and the club burgee officially raised for the season. Some clubs will hold a fleet review as part of the official season kick-off.

Attendance by the membership at the Ball and Opening Day should always be strong. This is especially important for small clubs where every member can make a big difference.