

Style Spotlight~Coan River Marina, A Boat Owner's Dream



By Martha M. Hall

*"I must go down to the seas again,
to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship, and
a star to steer her by..."*

Sea Fever by John Masefield

And a marina—you need a marina. Fortunately, Matt Miller and Guy Nolan have created just that. After a purchase and rehab that is almost five years old, Matt and Guy have honed the marina business down to the basics that most sailors need: gas, a vessel lift, boat

slips, onshore boat stands, and a little maintenance. "We're not going to have a restaurant or a ship's store, or anything extra," Matt told me. "That just complicates operations, and

we're interested in keeping things simple. We're a two man operation, and that suits us just fine."

"Have you run a marina before?" I asked. Matt laughed. "No! I was a bean counter in my other life. I was responsible for starting up companies, so I traveled all over the world. I'm originally from Annapolis, and my father was in the military. We moved a lot, so when I went to work, traveling was something I was used to.

But it got tiring, so when I retired, my wife and I settled here in the Northern Neck." And Guy? "He's

retired Coast Guard and a naval architect. He still has his day job, but no, he's never run a marina, either."

"So why a marina?" I asked, although I thought I pretty much knew the answer.

"Well, I have some boats, and I've always had to pay somebody to take care of them. I figured I might as well have a way to take care of them myself," Matt responded.

"How many boats?" I asked, although I pretty much knew the answer to that, too. "Six," Matt grinned. And Guy? "He has more than I do."

When Matt and Guy found the Coan River Marina, it had been out of service for almost two years and needed some serious rehabilitating. "The docks were in bad shape, and the lift needed work, but we're in good shape now. We have slip space for 50 big boats, plus 10 for crabbing boats, and onshore storage for more.

"Our lift can handle 25 tons, so we can provide hauling in and out of the water for pretty large vessels. We have six acres of space total, and our location is really good, especially for those who are traveling to and from the Washington, DC area. We are on Killneck Creek, part of the Coan River, which empties into the Potomac River and feeds into the Chesapeake Bay.

"Many of our slips have electricity, and the whole marina has complimentary Wi-Fi. We try to make it easy for boaters to spend the night if they want, although we don't have a campground."

How about service? "It's just the two of us, so we can handle basic service, preventative maintenance—routine kind of stuff," Matt told me. "If a boater needs more than that, we



have people we can call in to help with that. We hired an intern, right before this COVID-19 thing hit, but we haven't had a lot of requests for service so far.

"The virus slowed our business down a bit at first, as people weren't eager to put their boats in the water, but it's picking up now. Some of our regular customers

are spending their time doing maintenance and trim work on their boats on site, getting them ready to go out." I commented on seeing one of those customers painting the keel of his tall masted sailboat—it was a large boat, and the keel seemed quite a bit taller than the man painting it.

"Our mean low water here at the marina is seven feet, so boaters have no problem motoring in and out, and we're far enough back from the Bay and the Potomac that we can provide a safe haven for boaters caught in a storm."

"We sell some boats," Matt told me when I asked about the few For Sale signs that I had seen on the grounds, "but our main business is providing service and space for boaters who keep their boats here or those that stop by for gas or for the night." The Marina's location, at the end of a country road dotted with a few houses, is a relaxed and welcoming spot. "This is the best office I've ever had," Matt told me, and I could see why.

Contact the Coan River Marina in Lottsburg at 804-529-6767, visit their webpage at www.coanrivermarina.com, or follow them on Facebook. *Martha Hall photos, Matt Miller.*