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UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

The Tri-Cities rolls out the red carpet for H1 awards night.

by Chris Tracy

The Tri-City Water Follies has sought to host the annual H1 Award's Banquet for the past three years. This year, the Water Follies event director, Kathy Powell, was not going to take no for answer.

It was not easy for her to convince H1 Unlimited to have the annual award's gala in the Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland, Washington). Some complained that snow in the passes between Seattle and the eastern side of Washington could cause havoc for owners, drivers, crews, and fans traveling over from the Seattle area. Others complained about the cost to stay overnight, compared to commuting to a Seattle location and wondered about how many people would attend.

But Powell countered each argument and reminded H1's interim chairman, Charlie Grooms, that Tri-Cities is the gold standard for racing and that the Tri-Cities community of 250,000 residents was deserving to host the event.



Chris Denslow

The Madison Race Team with their award hardware.

And, with relatively short notice, Powell, along with Tri-City Water Follies volunteers and H1 volunteers, went to work to host the banquet on February 10. A couple of larger Tri-Cities' venues had already been booked, but fortunately the Red Lion Hotel in Kennewick was available and the hotel agreed to special pricing for its rooms, too. The banquet space could accommodate at least 300 people, which is generally at the top end for the yearly banquet

attendance.

Powell flew to Seattle the Wednesday before the banquet, picked up the Gold Cup, President's Cup, and the Martini and Rossi trophy, and drove them all back to Pasco so they could be on display for media to see before they were transported to the gala. The weather at the pass was fine, the event sold out fast, and about 350 attended!

Brad Luce and Kay Brewer were recruited to be the joint

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Brad Luce

master of ceremonies. Luce and Brewer have shared public address duties at unlimited races. Luce, also a veteran radio and TV unlimited hydro event broadcaster, always talks hydros with enthusiasm and passion. He's a true fan and his Gold Cup Lounge was profiled in an issue of the Unlimited News-Journal.

Brewer is much younger, but she has been an outboard racer since she was a little girl. I first remember watching her race outboards on Mason Lake, near Shelton, Washington, when she was only about 9 years old. She led all racers into the first corner, missed a couple of buoys, and the kids piloting the other boats in the heat just followed her, also missing the same



Kay Brewer

buoys. Since she grew up, she has called outboard, F-1, and unlimited races on the race public address systems and for TV. She's also my former junior high student and one that I am very proud of. Luce and Brewer made a good and knowledgeable combination as hosts for the event.

There was a unique twist at the beginning of the banquet. The mayors of both Kennewick and Pasco spoke and welcomed the crowd. They mentioned that unlimited hydroplane racing was woven into the 'Tri-Cities' culture and provided their citizens with "unlimited memories."

The mayor of Pasco revealed that he was the 2001 president of the Tri-City Water Follies and the

The 2017 Award Winners

Radio station.....	KONA Radio (Tri-Cities)
Newspaper writer	Nathan Joyce, The Seattle Times
Photographer	Greg Gilbert, The Seattle Times
Television station.....	KNDU-TV (Tri-Cities)
Internet coverage.....	Hydro News
Race program.....	Tri-City Water Follies
National marketing	GoPro Cameras
Community marketing engagement.....	HomeStreet Bank
Regional marketing	Grigg's Ace Hardware
Regional marketing	Metro Detroit Chevy Dealers
Race site	Detroit
Historical Award	Jim Sharkey
Special Chairman's Award	Brad Luce
Chairman's Award	Chris Denslow
Safety and rescue team	Tri-City Water Follies
Official	Steve Petersen
Significant unrecognized contributions.....	John Walters
Rookie of the Year	Dustin Echols
Outstanding Achievement	Scott and Shannon Raney
Crew of the Year.....	Go Fast, Turn Left Racing
Crew Chief of the Year	Jeff Campbell
Boat of the Year	Bucket List Racing
Owner of the Year	Rob Graham
Commercial Race Sponsor of the Year.....	Albert Lee Appliance
Race Team of the Year	Graham Trucking
Sportsmanship Award	Kevin Eacret
Lifetime Achievement	Bill Osborne
Distinguished Service.....	Bill Lampson
Gar Wood Award	Rev. Jim Riley
President's Cup Winner.....	Andrew Tate
Fans' Favorite Driver	Andrew Tate
Fans' Favorite Team	Dan Hoover and the Miss Madison Race Team
Gold Cup Winner.....	Jimmy Shane
Bill Muncey National High-Point Champion Driver	Jimmy Shane
Martini and Rossi Trophy.....	Miss Madison Race Team

cherished memory he had, as a child, when Bill Muncey held him up upon the *Atlas Van Lines* hydroplane. You know, the local news-



Kathy Powell of Tri-City Water Follies and Miss Tri-Cities Hannah Mowry



The trophy hardware ready to be presented.

paper, the *Tri-City Herald*, always promotes the Tri-Cities as Hydro Town; they are right!

Several videos were shown that included an opening video put together by i3 Global. A year-in-review video produced by the Meyer brothers showed exciting race action. The awards slide show/video was put together by Lisa Courneya. Near the end of the program, the i3 Global video titled 2018-Ready, Set, Go! was shown. But, maybe the video/slide program that pulled at all our hearts was the Owen Blauman-produced piece that looked at those associated with hydroplane racing who passed away in the in 2017 and early 2018.

An expanded number of awards were presented this year, 35 in total. Each recipient got a trophy and a photo opportunity with Miss Tri-Cities Hannah Mowry. It took nearly three hours to present all of the awards, but it was the time, actually overdue, to honor the work and accomplishments of many people associated with the sport who have not been traditionally recognized for their contributions.

Bill Osborne was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his 50 years of writing and taking photographs; his pieces and

photos have also appeared in the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. Greg Gilbert was awarded Photographer of the Year, but really the award was for his lifetime body of work. Gilbert has taken outstanding photos for 50 years for the *Seattle Times*. Both Osborne and Gilbert were present to accept their awards.

Jim Sharkey, also an *Unlimited NewsJournal* contributor, was presented the Historical Award for his precise work to maintain historical information about boats, drivers, and more. Sharkey lives in Southern California and his award was accepted by Craig Fjarlie.

At the races, Pastor Jim Riley

has a church service on Sunday at each race site, but probably more important, he is the pastor to the drivers, crews, and owners and is always there when they need him. Riley's contributions were recognized with the Gar Wood Award, which is another term for Person of the Year. Riley flew in from Texas to accept the award.

Chris Denslow just helps in any way he can. He takes great photographs that have appeared in various media, including the *Unlimited NewsJournal*, has written articles for race programs, serves on the Tri-Cities Water Follies Board, and does much more. Denslow accepted the Chairman's Award.

The Distinguished Service Award was awarded to Bill Lampson and accepted for him by Aaron Stephens of Lampson Cranes. While Lampson deserved the award, many understand it was the Lampson family that helped bring unlimited racing to the Tri-Cities and their firm has provided cranes for the pits for over 50 years.

Brad Luce was surprised by Charlie Grooms when he was awarded the Special Chairman's Award for his work with the sport. *Hydro News* was finally recognized



The U-21 Go Fast, Turn Left Race Team.

for its Outstanding Internet Coverage and Lon Erickson, from *Hydro News*, accepted the award on their behalf.

Yep, there were all the traditional and well deserved awards.

Fan's Favorite Driver was Andrew Tate and he told stories about his three heroes: Jimmy Shane, J. Michael Kelly, and Tom Thompson. Charlie Grooms, speaking as the U-1 team manager, had the quote of the night when he jokingly said of competitor Andrew Tate, "You've got a lot to learn and we will do the best to teach you."

Kevin Eacret said, when accepting the Sportsmanship Award, "I relate to kids better than adults" when talking about giving kids the opportunity to speak with a driver. And, Andrew Tate, only half-way jokingly said, "I try to keep (my crew chief) Jeff Campbell happy."

Rookie of the Year, Dustin Echols, relayed that he bought his first outboard motor with money he earned mowing lawns. Due to

the recent death of their crew chief, the HomeStreet team was rightly subdued, but Jimmy Shane accepted the Bill Muncey High Point Champion Driver Award and the his team accepted the Martini and Rossi trophy for the HomeStreet boat being the national high-point champion.

It's only February, so there was not a lot of solid H1 news to report. Charlie Grooms noted that there have been a multitude of meetings with owners. "They have a plan and we are implementing the plan, but we have no major announcements tonight," he remarked. He added, "We are working hard for a positive direction."

There will be a new race in Guntersville, Alabama, kicking off the 2018 season. Event director, Katy Norton, spoke about the new race and confidently remarked, "Next year, we will be bringing home some awards." Norton reminded all that racing was part of Guntersville's history and added that not only do "we have good



Greg McCorkle

The winner of the Gar Wood Award, Rev. Jim Riley.

water to race in," but added, "we look forward to being part of the unlimited family."

But this year—the 53rd awards presentation program—will be likely remembered as the one that spotlighted Hydro Town, the Tri-Cities, and that recognized many unsung heroes of our sport. ❖

Madison will get a points race in 2018.

Officials for the Madison Regatta in Madison, Indiana, have reached an agreement with H1 Unlimited that will give the city an event in which competitors can earn points toward the national championship. The Governor's Cup will be held on the Ohio River July 7 and 8.

Last year, race organizers opted to pay tow money to only four boats because they need to save money. The event had been plagued in previous years with events that were canceled or greatly reduced in scope because of water conditions on the racecourse. Because only four boats could compete last year, the entries could not earn points toward the national title.



Dan Cole, president of the Madison Regatta, said the agreement with H1 will provide at least six boats for the race and possibly as many as eight. The event will

feature qualifying on Saturday and competition on Sunday.

Many Madison race fans had expressed some dissatisfaction with last year's exhibition race and said they wanted more for 2018. Cole said that the new agreement should be enough to bring those people back.

With regard to the negotiations with H1, Cole said the two parties went back and forth three or four times. "The fact is they want to work with us and we want to work with them," he told the *Madison Courier*. "We've now got a deal where they will bring quality boats and put on a great show." ❖

The sport mourns the death of Dan Hoover, Madison team crew chief.

People throughout the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing were shocked to hear the sad news that Dan Hoover, the crew chief of the national champion *Miss HomeStreet*, apparently took his own life on Sunday, February 4. He was 45 years old.

Hoover had been visiting his mother in the Tri-Cities and was heading back to the team's shop in Seattle. His body was discovered by police near a highway along that route.

Charlie Grooms, president of Miss Madison, Inc., said Hoover had been in Seattle to complete the construction of the team's new boat, which is expected to make its debut this summer.

Grooms said the Madison team members were all in shock and heartbroken by the news. "Right now we're just trying to grasp all of it and just understand what's happened and how we can best move forward," he told the *Madison Courier*.



Chris Denslow

Dan Hoover after his team's Gold Cup victory this past summer.

Jimmy Shane, the team's driver, had become a close personal friend with Hoover. "I have no words and I am hurting a lot right now," he posted on his Facebook page.

Hoover was named the crew chief of the *Miss HomeStreet* in 2016 and had won six races and two national titles as crew chief.

His racing career started in 1996 when he purchased a Pro Stock flatbottom boat. He was hired a short time later to assist with the turbine engines on the *Appian Jeronimo* then joined Kim Gregory's

U-10 race team in 2001. He became the crew chief of that team three years later.

After taking time away from unlimiteds to be crew chief and test driver for turbine-powered catamarans, he joined the *Formula II* race team in 2006 and won the national title. He won another title with that team in 2013 then moved to the Miss Madison Team in 2014, where he was responsible for a number of systems and helped lead the *Oberto* to two more national titles before he took over as crew chief. ♦

Leland Unlimited team names a new driver.

The Leland Unlimited Race Team has announced the hiring of Aaron Salmon as the new driver for their boat. Salmon is a first-generation racer who began his career in the J-Stock outboard hydroplane class using a boat that he built through the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum's junior hydro program.

The 25-year-old Salmon said he has raced every class of outboard hydroplane since then and along the way has won the 2014 national championship in the OSY 400 Pro outboard class and the 2016 45SS outboard class national title.

"This is a story you only dream about," he said. "I began with a dream and a lot of help along the way, including my dad and family. This year my dream is coming true. When Stacy presented me the opportunity, I had to take it."

Team owner Stacy Briseno said Salmon will not only be her boat's driver, but will also lead the team's



Leland Unlimited

crew. The boat, which was built in 1998, is undergoing repair after a blow-over accident on the Detroit River last summer.

In addition to driving outboards, Salmon has worked the past two years as a full-time crew member on the U-11 Unlimited Racing Group race team. ♦

UNJ INTERVIEW: Steve Sposari

Words of wisdom from a man who has directed unlimited races from coast to coast.

Steve Sposari served as race director for Seattle Seafair as well as other sites in the 1990s. He has been involved with hydroplane racing since childhood when he helped his father on Seafair's Resources Committee. He was born in Seattle and grew up in the West Seattle neighborhood. "Ever since I was eight years old, I've never missed a Seafair hydroplane race," he says. Sposari attended Holy Rosary Grade School. "I got in big trouble one year because I was at recess; that was back in the days when they would test in May and I could hear a

hydroplane running on Lake Washington," he remembers. "I left school, got on a bus, went downtown, transferred over to Lake Washington so I could watch the hydro test there. Got in big trouble that day."

During Seafair week, Sposari worked on his father's Resources Committee making sandwiches, delivering donuts to all the boat crews, that type of thing, he explains. "He put me to work early, but I really enjoyed being down in the pits."

Soon, Sposari was interested in taking on more responsibility. "When I turned 18 and was old enough to be a full-fledged volunteer at the time, I took over the Crane Committee. That really got me started as far as truly working on hydroplane races and learning how to become a race director."

In the following interview, Steve Sposari discusses his work as a race director and offers some thoughts about the current status of unlimited racing. The conversation was conducted in late December 2017 by Craig Fjarlie at Sposari's office.

Photo from SK Food Group



UNJ: What things did you learn doing the cranes and other jobs like that?

Sposari: Well, I got really involved in it and there's a lot of detail, especially in Seattle, making the pit area work. I started working with the land-side committee and I just started to learn every aspect of the race. Within a couple years I took on more and more responsibility at a very young age and just kind of embraced it. I really loved

being around the boats. I loved working with the Seafair volunteers. It is a volunteer organization, so if you're willing to work, they're willing to allow you to do so.

What are some of the major responsibilities that a race director has for an unlimited race?

Back when I was a race director, and it's been a few years, Seattle had a little bit of a different job description than it does now. Back then you were pretty much in charge of everything associated with the race site: helping with the hospitality set-up, with the Genessee Park set-up, parking, transportation, security. I mean, pretty much every aspect of the race.

You oversaw everything.

Oversaw everything, yes. Now, the paid staff does the majority of that work as there is more contracted work. I think it's appropriate given the huge financial responsibility it encompasses. It is really a commitment to be the race director and without a doubt a year-round job.

You not only did it for Seafair, you did it for other sites as well.

Right. I became race director for Norfolk, Virginia, for the years that they had that race. I did it for Dallas, Lewisville Lake, in Kansas City, and I helped in Hawaii the first year. I supported the group in British Columbia [Kelowna – Ed.] and helped them to get set up.

In those sites, not Seafair, some of them were new. What were your obligations as race director? It must've been different than Seafair because you were starting with people who had never done it before.

Right, right. It was really training those people on how to operate an unlimited race

Especially in Hawaii?

Hawaii was OK because you had the Navy infrastructure that helped. Norfolk was also on a Navy base and we had some Naval support there, MWR, but mostly we did it with volunteers. It took some training as to what it took to put on a hydroplane race. The more complicated aspect was the water-side operations, making sure people understood what needed to be done in order to manage the water situation.

Did you get help from local inboard or outboard clubs,



Mark Hooten

The crowd near the pit area for the 1995 Texas Hydrofest, which was held near Dallas in Lewisville, Texas and organized by Steve Sposari.

people who had been around boat racing for a while, or was it mostly a just "off the street" kind of thing?

Both. There wasn't a lot of hydroplane racing in Hawaii.

No.

And, there really wasn't in Dallas, but there was in Virginia. In fact, I remember Larry Lauterbach helped us acquire some people back there as that is where he was from.

Would you go through what you do setting up a race, what the steps are?

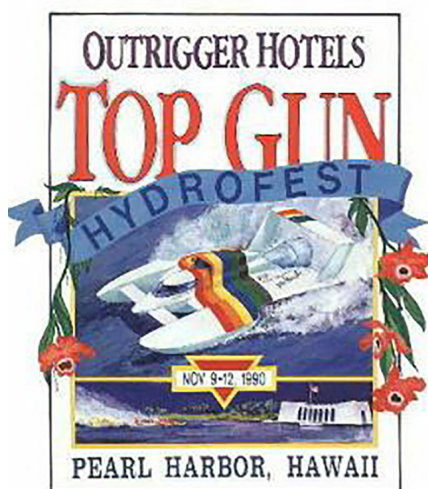
Sure. The first thing you have to identify is do you have a body of water that would accommodate an unlimited race. Ascertain if you can tie up that body of water for the amount of time it takes to run a race. That's one of the biggest challenges and probably job one. But then you have to determine if you have a racecourse, do you have proper viewing, and infrastructure available to put on the race. Can you control the ingress and egress to the site. From there, you start working with the local municipalities to see if they're going to embrace it. Back then we worked with a number of different groups. We were on a Navy base for a couple of those venues. That was very helpful because they provided significant support. In Dallas, we had a big restaurant adjacent to the race site that was very supportive of the event. They helped to integrate us with city and local officials, which helped get that race off the ground. The level of support needed in every city was different, but it always needed coordination and oversight.

Recruiting some of the people, did you have some local leaders who could do that, or did



Mark Hooten

The crowd watching the action during the 1995 Texas Hydrofest. The race was won by Chip Hanauer in the Miss Budweiser.



*Race program for the 1990
Pearl Harbor Hydrofest*

you have to make phone calls and...

Both. We had local officials that put us in touch with different groups such as the Rotary Clubs, etc. We encouraged and supported their efforts to fund-raise through their volunteerism. That's what we did and I can't remember a time where we did not get the people we needed.

Recruiting a sponsor, was the race director involved?

I was not involved in the sponsorship deals at the site. That was usually done by whoever the promoter was. I worked with whoever was determined to be the promoter. They were responsible for sponsors, public relations, those aspects. I did work with the sponsors at the site to insure they were taken care of and operational provisions within their agreements were taken care of.

Yeah. So maybe you could just go through the general steps in making it all come together, from the time they open the pits until the last checkered flag is out.

Well, from my perspective it takes a year to properly prepare and operate an unlimited race. All the

preparation work, planning, volunteer and services sourcing needs to be done well in advance and appropriately. By the time you are going to open the gates and put boats on the water you need to have a detailed plan and schedule in place. In unlimited hydroplane racing, things rarely go as planned so you need to have a contingency plan in place. I believe this flexible infrastructure is important so that when things do change, you can keep things moving, the fans engaged, and quickly provide information so everyone knows what is going to happen. That's something that's really important, but it doesn't always happen at an unlimited race.

Then just getting everything set in the pits, getting boats on the water to work for turn judges and tow boats and other things.

Right. Well, making sure that you have the water, the electricity, the space, mapping out what your pit layout's going to look like. If you have access to the infrastructure, you can do it in a few days. If you have to build everything from the ground up, which has been the case at a number of venues, then it takes longer. It just depends on what the need is.

Did you have to fly back and forth across the country several times?

Many times. Spent a lot of time on airplanes traveling back and forth to venues and spending time with the local people while providing some oversight. Eventually I generated a manual, actually with the help of others in the sport, to help guide new sites with specifics as to what needed to be done.

So they had some directions they could follow.

Yes. When I would arrive at a site, the first step was to map out what would be ideal for boat placement, services such as electrical and plumbing, then develop a matrix

they could follow. I would then travel back and forth and help to oversee and help with implementation and insure it was acceptable.

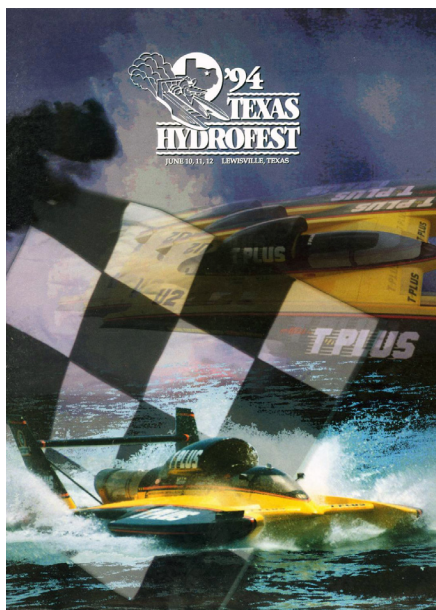
OK. You were involved in being a race director and Don Jones was suddenly out. They talked about bringing you on board to replace him. It ended up being Bill Doner, instead. Did you want that job?

I did. I felt like I could bring something to the sport at the time. I thought Don Jones was a true gentleman, but I didn't think the sport was going in the right direction, so there were lots of conversations. Through my involvement in the sport, I had a feel for what was happening and an opinion on where it could go. It was at a time in my career where I thought it was something that I wanted to take on. Steve Woomer actually recruited me to take that role, so we did a bunch of work as to what things would look like. We got to the February meetings that were at the time held in Miami, and after much discussing and positioning, my taking over as commissioner came to a vote. I missed being elected commissioner by half a vote.

Oh!

They actually brought in a member of the APBA, who wasn't scheduled to be there, to be there, who had the ability to vote, which is why I lost. In retrospect, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. (Laughter.) I continue to work at the same organization that I worked for way back then. I have become an owner and have grown the business dramatically. [SK Food Group – Ed.] I'm very happy. But, you know, I truly have a love for the sport and feel like even to this day that I could bring something to the sport and help them to grow and prosper.

When you look at things now, not in relation to whether you



1994 Texas Hydrofest program

were put in that position or not, but just what's happening with the sport, do you have some thoughts that you would care to share?

Sure. First of all I have to be honest and say that I'm a true fan. I'm someone that still loves unlimited hydroplane racing and thinks it's thrilling and I love watching it. But I'm disappointed where the sport is right now, like I think so many fans are.

Yeah.

I think they have good direction and I don't think that they've really put together a proper business plan that would help to grow the organization. In fact, I'm not sure they have ever had one that really allowed them to grow the sport, be professional, and attract the audience that the sport deserves.

Do you feel it still could be done or have they gone too far, past the point?

I think they really have to change course in order for the sport to expand. They need to pool their money, meaning the owners, and bring in someone who is young, aggressive, understands marketing, and can pull the sport back up to

a 10-, 12-race schedule. Then they would have the ability to attract more sponsors and develop a relationship with a new demographic that will allow the sport to grow. I understand why, but I think the owners have been really self-serving. They've made a big investment in their equipment and most of them are just interested in surviving and don't have the ability to look beyond their own boat camp and needs to expand the sport.

There was a meeting in fall at the former Budweiser shop that HomeStreet is taking over and it seems they are looking for that elusive benevolent dictator, or something.

Yeah.

That person may not exist.

I believe they need a professional to come in that they all agree on and who is given a chance to implement a plan. But the important this is that they give that person a chance and not interfere. It seems like they always get caught up in

"I don't think they've really put together a proper business plan that would help grow the organization."

their own special interests, which, once again, I understand, but ultimately it's not for the good of the sport. Something I've suggested on more than one occasion is that they need a five-year plan that they follow. In any business there's always things that may become roadblocks, but you have to overcome them and stay the course. But they don't appear to have that plan. They really don't have anything and it appears to me they just kind of hope for the best. I'm surprised they have what they have right now,

frankly. It's just a lot of people in certain cities who love the sport and provide enough support to keep it going. It's certainly not in growth mode.

You've grown this business. Did you buy it from Don Campbell? [Sposari is president and CEO of the SK Food Group. Campbell was sponsor of Miss Van's P-X and Don Campbell's Food Service - Ed.]

No, you know, it's a funny story. I actually met Don Campbell...

That background would be kind of interesting, too.

Yeah. I met Don Campbell at Seafair when I was a very young person volunteering with my father. I came to work after I met Don Campbell at Seafair. Started working here while I was still in high school and worked my way up through the organization. In 1999, I became president and an owner in 2000, so I have been associated with the company ever since I was 15. Forty-two years I've

been here. I've had quite a long run here and have built the business from a small, regional company in the Pacific Northwest to one of the largest food assemblers in all of North America. We have eight manufacturing plants around North America and employ over 3,000 individuals.

OK. You had a role in the Seafair Boat Club, didn't you?

I was actually the commodore of the Seafair Boat Club in 1988. Long time ago. The Seafair Boat Club at the time was the main vol-

unteer base and operations team for the hydroplane race. That structure has changed as the years have progressed, but there still is a wonderful group of people do a phenomenal job volunteering at Seafair.

What are you doing now with Seafair?

I support Seafair and have through being a long-term member and on their board of directors. I am spearheading a fund-raiser for Seafair called Breakfast with the Blues [the Blue Angels – Ed.]. We raise money for the Seafair Foundation, so that's my main focus now at Seafair.

In the years since you were a race director, have you gone to many other races around the circuit?

I have. I've gone to many races in San Diego. I haven't missed Tri-Cities in a number of years. My son, Matthew, and I are great fans of that race and go every year. And, like I said, I haven't missed a Seafair race since I was eight years old. So, yes I still follow the sport. I know a lot of people in the sport. I've actually volunteered to do some work for the sport if they would have had me.

The city has changed, too,

over the years with what they focus on for sports.

Right.

The races seem to have gotten pushed aside, but maybe it was their own fault for not promoting it properly. Also, they're up against some big money.

Yes that's true, but I would tell you that the venue and event, especially the one Seattle provides a potential race fan, is spectacular. Between the log boom, the Blue Angels' show, the music, everything that Seafair brings to the party. It's pretty significant and should bring a lot of people down to the lake. The cost for the amount of entertainment available is unmatched. Overall, I believe the popularity of the unlimited racing has declined because it's too long a day. People come down with family and young kids and really, for the amount of racing they actually see in six hours, well it's a pretty big commitment. One of the things that I would be in favor of is that you shorten the race day. You shorten the period in which they race and try to run more heats within a tighter period of time. I think that would be a lot more entertaining for the fans. I've heard rumblings that they're going



1997 Virginia is for Lovers race program

to move in that direction. I hope that's true.

We've heard that, too, but don't know where it stands.

So, you know, with the advent of the turbine engine, they can turn those boats around fast. And they need to do so. They really need to do that so they can capture the fans' attention and keep it throughout the weekend.

Attention spans for the public have changed based on the way the web works and smart phones and all those things. They don't focus on things for long periods of time the way they did years ago.

I think that's another big challenge the sport has. I would consider myself a pretty informed fan, yet even I have trouble sometimes keeping track of all the rules and format changes and what-not. It's really hard to follow. They need to come up with a format that everybody understands, run that format, and don't change it. Same thing on the technical side. Learning who won the race sometimes two hours after the heat is over in my opinion is unacceptable. You've got to come



Karl Pearson

Dave Villwock drove the Miss Budweiser to victory in the 1997 Virginia is for Lovers race in Norfolk, Virginia, which was organized by Steve Sposari.

up with a plan where, when the race is over, within minutes it's verified and you can celebrate that.

Not like what happened in Tri-Cities in 2016.

Well, I mean...

But that was one situation.

Every race they had some sort of challenge and nobody knew what exactly how things were going to transpire. The fans need to know that when the race is over,

would be job one. Everybody lives off their phone now. Hydroplane racing's got to get on that phone so everybody can understand it. But, once again, that's that person they need that can spearhead that; can make those types of things a priority.

Yeah.

Really important, really important. The wavering interest in the sport has got to be its biggest

about unlimited hydroplane racing.

I've known all aspects of the race. I drove the rescue boat a couple of seasons when I wasn't the race director. I did quite a few broadcasts with Jim Hendrick on ESPN Radio years ago. You know, it's funny, I really wanted to take the sport on, but in retrospect I am glad it did not happen.

It would have been the sport or your business, but not both.

I've done pretty well at the business I am in and yet I probably never would have gotten a start here if I didn't meet Don Campbell at Seafair.

Looking back over the years, do you have some thoughts on everything you've seen?

I have seen a lot and most of it has been entertaining and engaging. That is what disappoints me about the sport. So much to offer and yet they don't go down the right path to take advantage of it. Everyone involved in the sport does it for one reason, they love it. It barely makes any kind of financial sense. It takes an inordinate amount of time and energy. But it's spectacular! I think the best thing the sport can do is remember how someone like Bill Muncey approached it. He was all about what was best for the sport. He was the consummate promoter and he always remembered the fan experience. I think there is a future, but things have to change. I, for one, am really hopeful they find the right path and the sport is something that is enjoyed for generations to come.

Yeah, yeah.

That just makes it tough for any kind of a show, you know. Like I say, I sure hope they can pull it together.

All right, thank you for your time.

My pleasure, thank you. ❖

"One of the things that I would be in favor of is that you shorten the race day. ... I think that would be a lot more entertaining for the fans."

its over. The winner is declared. How many fans actually know the results changed as it pertains to the Tri-Cities race in 2016?

Yeah.

I think the sport has great young personalities now. I think they really need to take advantage of that. Jimmy Shane, Brian Perkins, J. Michael Kelly, Andrew Tate, they're great personalities and people want to see them. They're very competitive and they're great drivers. They are very talented and those are things we should be building on right now.

It seems that the younger generation - and we don't want to put everybody in one bucket - but it doesn't seem to have as much interest, and it's probably because it hasn't been promoted to them.

That's exactly right. You know, there should be apps for hydroplane racing. When you come, you can follow on your phone exactly what's going on out there. To me, that

concern. The sport has not done a very good job when they have secure national sponsors and the sport doesn't have a very good reputation. It's going to take new blood, new ideas in order to turn that around.

And keep those sponsors involved.

Right. It's disappointing that we've gone through a seven- or eight-year period of strong economic growth and stability in the financial markets and business and yet the sport hasn't been able to take advantage of that. There are still no dollars flowing into unlimited hydroplane racing.

In fact, maybe it has gotten less.

Right, right. So that's got to be a concern moving forward. Eventually our economy is going to turn a little bit and it's gonna be tougher.

It goes in cycles.

Yes it does.

Well, over the years you've seen as much as almost anyone

Around the Circuit

Race Site News



Chris Tracy

U-9 crew chief Jeff Campbell: His story and thoughts.

Unlimiteds Unanimous, publishers of the Unlimited NewsJournal, named Jeff Campbell its Crew Chief of the Year for the 2017 season and his boat, the U-9 *Les Schwab Tires*, its boat of the year. So it was a special treat to listen to Campbell speak on February 3 at the annual get-together of the Royal Order of the Turbine (ROTT) West Club.

Biographical Information:

Campbell, 56, is originally from Oregon and from a family of boat racers. When he was a kid, he remembers his dad bought a step hydro, but did not run it. And he recalls his dad built a 145 conventional hull in their garage, from plans in a magazine. That hull took forever to build, due to a garage fire. He recalls always being out in the garage, trying to help. So, his entire life he has been around boats and recalls going to races on weekends.

At age 14, his dad said, "I can build you a boat or buy you a car." Campbell opted for the boat, a one-litre stock hydro, and when he was 15 he ran it over 80 mph. Eventually, he sold that boat to Greg Hopp, and it was Hopp's first hydro. That boat is now on display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum in Kent, Washington. Campbell's brother, Mike, was also a racer and generally drove one of his dad's boats.

In 1986, Campbell was offered a job at Kelson's Boat Shop, mostly making patterns for boats. He worked there for 10 or 11 years. While still working at Kelson's full-time, from one time or another, he worked on the *Budweiser*, *Atlas Van Lines*/Blue Blaster, *Pringles*, *Miller*, and even a *Miss US* that was turned into a *Budweiser* display boat. In 1987, he wore his first crew uniform for the *Miller* boat and was introduced as a member of the crew after the 1987 San Diego win.

The *Miss Budweiser* was nearly destroyed in 1992 and Campbell and his brother were asked to help rebuild it. He had a full-time job, so he worked on the boat in the evenings and weekends; the Bud crew worked during the day and would leave them directions for their evening and weekend work. In

1995, we was offered full-time job to work on the *Budweiser* crew and he accepted, even though it was a cut in pay. There were 13 races that season and he quickly had to learn to drive the hauler. He did a lot of display work and logged 100,000 miles on the truck. He crewed for the *Budweiser* team until 2004.

After Bernie Little passed away, Campbell went to work full time for Red Dot Corporation. He did some part-time work on hydros, but not full time. In 2011, Mike Jones asked him if he'd help run his boat in Tri-Cities and Seattle—nothing serious, just round out the field.

He was not really excited about doing it, but Jones was a friend and Campbell said yes. But soon after, he learned that he'd need to ready the boat quickly to replace another damaged boat and let them race the Jones' boat in Detroit.

He managed to get the boat ready, but the trip to Detroit was a nightmare. The hauler broke down



Chris Tracy



Lon Erickson

in Spokane and in route to Detroit blew several tires. They limped into Detroit—late— with one flat tire, as they were out of spares! But Campbell was amazed at how well the boat ran and he told Jones, “We might want to really race.”

After the Tri-Cities and Seattle races, Campbell decided to make the hull into a race boat. They rebuilt the cockpit to make it stronger and copied a lot of things he learned in his *Budweiser* years. And key to changes, Jones allowed Campbell to innovate and try new ideas that he could not have while on the *Budweiser* crew.

“Mike Jones gave me permission to experiment,” says Campbell. Things like the successful articulated canard are a result. Campbell says, “There’s not a lot left of the 1992 boat, but it does have the original sponsons and non-trips.” The boat is much lighter than when he started working on it, trimming it down from about 7,100 pounds to 6,500 pounds.

The U-9 crew installed much lighter carbon decks and removed

duplicate hardware in the boat. Campbell is proud that the U-9 is the oldest boat to win a race, but also remarked, “The biggest problem with old boats is corrosion.” Salt is really hard on a boat. He also said that it costs them about \$10,000 to rebuild an engine after racing in salt water.

When Campbell was asked about how the U-9 can sometimes pass very fast boats that are inside of it, he said it is about boat ride. Over the years, the U-9 crew has worked to provide a better boat ride and that’s the difference.

The Future of Unlimited Hydroplane Racing:

Campbell was asked about the state of the sport and if he had recommendations. He explained that sponsorship and tow money do not pay the bills for most teams. He and his crew members do not get any salary for their work, although his owner covers their race expenses, such as travel, hotels, and meals.

Campbell estimates that his owner likely spends about \$100,000 each season, beyond the income provided by sponsors and tow money. Simply put, much more money needs to be generated for owners to stay in the sport and for potential new owners to put together a new team.

Campbell noted that in the days of the Doha, Qatar, races, that single race could pay the costs for the whole season, but that race is gone. He believes that sponsors want a solid TV package and noted that in his talks with potential 2018 sponsors, they all want to know about the TV package that will be in Seattle in 2018.

Campbell suggested that H1 needs to work with their insurance company to open the pits and get spectators as close to the boats as possible.

“Fans don’t get in our way,” he says, “and to generate fans, spec-

tators need to be able to get right next to a boat and even touch it.” He noted that Seafair in Seattle was working on ways to allow spectators to get up close to the boats and suggested that Tri-Cities do the same.

To help control boat-team costs, Campbell suggests that H1 not allow the super thin props that some teams use, which are only good for one heat and then they are toast. Props are \$10,000 to \$12,000 and many teams cannot afford to race a one-heat thin prop. Secondly, he suggested that H1 consider reducing the fuel flow a little more to save on engines.

Campbell’s Future Plans:

Campbell announced that he and his brother, Mike, “intend” to retire from crewing unlimited hydroplanes at the end of the 2018 season.



Chris Tracy

HydroFile

Race Team News



Lon Erickson

U-1 HomeStreet Racing

As reported in this issue, the HomeStreet Racing team lost their crew chief Dan Hoover early in February. The team has recently met to formulate plans on how to move forward from this loss. The overall plan is to still have both the new hull and national championship U-1 hull ready to test in the Tri-Cities in early June. The specifics of their plan will be announced in the near future. Below are recent photos of the new Miss HomeStreet Racing hull from the Tukwila shop.



U-21 Go Fast Turn Left Racing

Crew nights continue at GFTL Racing with more progress on the new hull. Shaft log fitting and sponson runner vacuum bagging are among some of the work being done recently. Strut placement and bottom paint is soon to follow.



Go3 Racing

The team reports owner Ed Cooper and crewman Robert Grossman have been busy in the engine shop with the routine overhaul and rebuilds of the Allison V-12s (right). The hull will get some attention in the coming months. That will include re-working some decks and repairs from last season's competition. Plans for 2018, as always, are highly dependent upon obtaining adequate sponsorship, either for the season or each race site on the circuit.



U-99.9 Leland Unlimited

Leland Unlimited announced a new direction for the team, naming Aaron Salmon as driver for the 2018 season. Salmon is an accomplished national champion outboard racer who worked for several years on the U-11 URG team and has raced in the smaller-class inboards in the Northwest. He is leading a crew to do repairs to the U-99.9 hull that was suffered in a flip during the President's Cup in Detroit last year. The crew, which works on Thursdays and Saturdays, includes some members from last year and some new members. Salmon and team owner Stacy Briseno have laid out a checklist of what needs to happen and they are on course to have the boat ready for the 2018 season opener in Guntersville, Alabama. Repairs to some hidden damage to the front spar have been completed and the transom work is in the process of being prepped to go back together. Scott Raney from the U-11 team has been contracted to get the engine rebuild program ready. Sponsorship talks have been initiated and hope to be finalized in the coming months.



440 Bucket List Racing

Kelly Stocklin reports the team at Bucket List Racing has a number of projects underway. Included are finishing up the new cowling, new props, and new runners for the sponsos. The boat now is rolled back right side up for more work topside.



My \$0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment



Andy
Muntz

About eight years ago, NASCAR realized that it had a significant problem. An industry that just a few years earlier had been the second largest sport in the United States had seen its race attendance drop by 22 percent and TV viewership decline by 30 percent. The sport's business model, with a marketing effort that relied on traditional media outlets such as newspaper, was completely outdated.

Brian France, the CEO of NASCAR and grandson of the sport's founder, embarked on one of the largest marketing research initiatives ever undertaken by a U.S. sport. The effort included numerous focus groups and surveys and even included a program where they sent families to a NASCAR race, an NFL game, and a circus or concert and asked them to compare the experiences.

The result caused NASCAR officials to embark on a plan with five key goals:

- ◆ Build the star power of individual drivers.
- ◆ Increase engagement among children and college-age consumers.
- ◆ Attract a multicultural fan base.
- ◆ Craft more cohesive digital- and social-media strategies.
- ◆ Improve the race track experience for fans.

The effort to build the star power of its drivers was spurred on with the recent retirement of stars such as Jeff Gordon, Tony Stewart, and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. The sport has been working hard to increase the exposure of promising young drivers such as Ryan Blaney, Chase Elliott, and Bubba Wallace. Blaney, for example, landed a role as the voice of a character in the movie *Cars 3* and a role in the movie *Logan Lucky*.

As for demographics, the research revealed that NASCAR's fan base is primarily white, married, middle-aged men. But, in a nation that has a rapidly changing population, the sport saw that it needs much more than that if it hopes to survive. As a result, NASCAR is now making a serious effort to be more attractive to Hispanic fans.

The sport hopes to attract the younger fans with a more effective use of digital media and social media. NASCAR's marketing experts have not only improved the sport's website and is using Facebook and Twitter more extensively, but have teamed up with Snapchat to increase its Live Story coverage, has created a digital film series, and is livestreaming on Facebook Live.

Hydroplane racing faces challenges that are similar to NASCAR. Perhaps there are lessons we could learn from what they are doing?

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS.

2 p.m. on Sunday, March 11, 2018

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