Commodore’s Corner

Our Annual Meeting tonight kicks off the 2016 season and I am very excited for all members to have the chance to listen to our Committee Chairpersons and Flag Officers showcase what we have accomplished in 2015 and what's in store for 2016. This venue also gives members a chance to provide suggestions for improving our organization.

During our Annual Meeting the Club will award one member with the newly created “SYC Ship’s Bell Award.” Your Flag Officers have voted to award this recognition each year to the member that has shown exemplary effort to dedicating their time and effort to support the Club. It was very hard to single out just one member out of all of our fantastic members who give so much to the Club. We also felt we needed to exclude those individuals active in the Club management, such as Board Members and Committee Chairpersons, and instead to look to the general membership for the individual or family that embodies the qualities the Club stands for: I know you will agree the recipient of the first Annual “Ship’s Bell Award” is deserving of such an honor!

At our last Board meeting we firmed up the preponderance of events for our calendar for 2016. Many events will be familiar

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Southport Yacht Club Member Profile:
Bill and Laura Howell:
When One Circumnavigation Just Isn’t Enough

One cocktail was all it took to change the course, literally and figuratively, of Bill and Laura Howell’s lives.

It was 1978 and Bill and Laura were working in IT in what would later become Silicone Valley. Bill was a product manager and Laura was in sales and they were often in meetings together.

One Friday mid-afternoon, Laura stopped by Bill’s office and boldly asked if he wanted to go out for a drink. Her plan, she says, allowed him to say, “I can’t at the moment but some other time.” It also let him know she was available.

Bill got up from his chair and put his jacket on to join her for a drink right then.

After the first drink, Bill told Laura his plan: In three years, he wanted to sail around the world. He said, “If this is something that interests you, let’s have another drink.” If not, no harm, no foul.

They had another drink and 18 months later, they boarded their 28’boat, which they’d named FOREVER because it summed up how they felt about each other and their plans, and set out for the first of what would be two trips around the world.

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Tonight, January 16, 2016

First Annual Southport Yacht Club Annual Meeting and Dinner
6:00 PM Call to order Annual Meeting
(Appetizers will be served beginning at 6 p.m.)
7:30 PM Dinner
8:30 – 11:00 PM Music provided by the Privateers
Don’t forget to bring a canned good to donate!!

Upcoming Events

February 20: Wine Tasting, The Wine Rack, 3-5 p.m., $10 per person, reservations required

March 19: Frogmore Stew: 3-5 p.m.

April 9: Spring Social at Provision Company, 3-6 p.m.

May 1: Primero de Mayo (First of May) Party, Loco Jo’s, 3 p.m., BYOB and $10 per couple for the best wings in town, registration required.

Letter from the editor:

I didn’t want to write about New Year’s resolutions. I find them boring. Cliché. Banal. And truth be told, I haven’t lost 20 pounds cumulatively in my entire life, much less in one year. I’m always going to be a tad untidy. I can live with that. And if I could resolve to have a better sense of direction, I would. But I can’t.

But the beginning of the year is a good time for reflection, and I’ve been reflecting on the adventurous people I’ve met through boating. For instance, I had the pleasure of meeting Donna Lange at the Southport Marina when she was passing through last year. When I met Donna she was a fifty-three-year-old mother of four and grandmother of eleven. And she was preparing to sail around the world. Alone. For the second time. In a 28-foot Southern Cross sailboat called Inspired Sanity. Donna learned to sail when she was 40. In 2007, she sailed around the world, stopping twice, and earning the title of fastest American woman to complete the solo trek. (You can read her blog at http://www.sailblogs.com/member/sailtwicearound/)

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Summer may have been officially over, but the Southport Yacht Club still had lots of activities that took them out on the water or in pubs in Wilmington. Regardless the venue, it was all about fun!
and there will also be some new events for 2016. Please make sure you go to the web site to see the calendar (https://www.sycnc.org/calendar/) and register for those events that need a prior registration. Please let us know if you have suggestions for potential events!

With the holidays behind us, it seems like many members were anxious to get back to the water for our second annual "get out on the water and Chili cook off" on New Year's Day. Starting out the New Year by going out on the water and then coming back to share favorite chili recipes with fellow members was the perfect kickoff to 2016. Congratulations to Freda Jones for being this year's winner of the cook off!

The Sunday after Thanksgiving I helped our Vice Commodore Sam Johnston deliver his boat to Elbow Cay in the Abacos. A trip like this requires a considerable amount of planning, preparation and overall maritime savvy. Sam had the boat ready to go and we had no boat issues other than the 10 cases of Miller Lite banging around in the fore peak! Jeff Fisher was a great help handling the boat and navigating.

Several interesting tidbits stick out about the trip. For instance we listened to a local Wilmington FM radio station for close to 200 miles off shore. We knew every commercial by the time we lost reception!

The stars...I mean the stars. In the dark sky with no ambient light there are more stars in the sky than you can possibly imagine. Made me wish I had taken an astronomy course. The clouds begin to take the shape of things with which we are familiar—pets, animals, objects. You get very imaginative while standing your watch. All in all it was a great trip and I thank Sam and Jeff allowing me to make the trip with them! PS: Make sure your passport is valid!

So far the winter has been fairly mild for most of us. We have no excuse and every reason to untie the dock lines and get out on the water as we wait for spring. Hope to see all of you at the Annual Meeting tonight!

Safe boating,
Eric

Laura didn’t know how to sail when she met Bill. Yet, she said when he proposed his fateful plan, “It sounded like fun. That’s all I thought.”

First Time Sailing
The first time he took her sailing, he guided the boat into a channel headed into San Francisco Bay, gave her the tiller and said, “I’ll be right back.” He raised the main while Laura tried to figure out what to do. At the end of the day, after a few little bumps and bangs, Bill recalls, he knew that Laura would be a better helmsman than he was.

“She has a natural affinity for the wind and the movement of the boat,” he says. “Laura only got better. She was our helmsman on both circumnavigations.”

Their first Christmas together, Laura gave Bill a spinnaker pole. “He needed one,” she says matter-of-factly.

Laura and Bill made a good team on a several levels, one being sailing. Bill says Laura’s a good driver of action while he’s a good dreamer and planner. They pulled the old gas engine out of FOREVER to make room for food and headed out on their first round-the-world trip with a lot of kerosene lamps, a taffrail log (an instrument that measures speed through the water) and a sextant. They had no refrigeration. They planned to take three years to make the journey. They had set aside enough money to make their boat loan payments and cover all their expenses while they were gone.

Their first leg, a 3,000 mile trek from San Diego to the Marquesas Islands in French Polynesia, took 28 days, during which they experienced their first storm.

“I thought it was a blast, like a great roller coaster ride,” Laura says of the experience. “I didn’t’ realize it was a bad storm.” In hindsight, and with many nautical miles behind her, she adds, “I have much more respect for the ocean,” while admitting, “I’m not afraid of much.” What did they learn from this experience? Celestial (cont. on page 5)
navigation worked. Really. They had no idea in the wide open sea if their calculations were on target. Until, that is, they saw the tall peak of the volcanic Marquesas Islands. They continued across the Pacific visiting Tahiti, Moorea, Taah’a, Bora Bora, Tonga, Fuji and New Caledonia.

By the time they crossed the Pacific they were down to about twenty dollars in the kitty and due to the boat loan payment plan going awry, they had to find work in Australia.

They stayed in Sydney for three years, earning the money to pay off their boat loan and refill their cruising kitty. Laura ran a yacht chandlery, selling gear and rigging, while Bill worked for a startup technology company.

In 1983, they sold their boat and commissioned to have a 36-foot, S&S (Sparkman & Stephens) designed boat built on the west coast of Australia. They signed off and paid after each phase of the construction was completed. After they signed off on their completed boat, they learned that they had been scammed. They did have a hull and deck, but they weren’t even attached. They learned the ‘builder’ had previously spent time in jail previously for fraud. And thanks to the strict laws in Australia, that’s where he was headed again.

Laura and Bill gave up their jobs, flew to Fremantle and for three months they worked side-by-side with their shipwright to complete the boat. They told the Hood loft that they still didn't have an engine, so the sails had to serve as their only one.

They couldn't come up with a new name for their new boat so they named her FOREVER, since that was the way they still felt about each other and their chosen lifestyle.

They headed off in FOREVER, across the Indian Ocean and reached South Africa. Their life situation had improved dramatically since they arrived in Australia: They now had $50, owned their boat, no bank loan; but they still didn't have an engine.

They worked in South Africa from 1984 to 1988. Laura graduated with her Grande Diploma from Sillwood Cordon Bleu School after three intense years of training and internships while Bill became a Partner in Deloitte Consulting. They lived in Capetown, their favorite of the gorgeous places they’ve lived, including San Francisco and Sydney.

At that time, Bill and Laura had been married nine years and were planning to build a house on Signal Hill, overlooking Capetown (a property Laura says would now be worth a TON of money). And, they learned that Laura was pregnant. To give the story’s timeline context, Nelson Mandela was still in prison. They knew they couldn’t raise their child under an apartheid government, so they departed Capetown when Laura was four months pregnant. Their oldest son, Matthew, was born in Tortola. They stayed for about a month and Laura and Matthew flew home while Bill sailed the boat back to the U.S.

Bill docked FOREVER in Charleston. A couple months later Hurricane Hugo arrived. He prepared her for Hugo based on experience gained in two prior hurricane encounters; stripped everything off her deck and tied her down in a double slip at the marina.

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As soon as he was allowed to return to the area, he went to check on her. He found her about a mile from the marina up the Ashley River, still tied to her section of the marina dock. She’d gone under a low bridge, her mast was gone and her stanchions bent, but otherwise in remarkably good shape considering her unplanned, unmanned voyage.

The Howells were boatless for four years while FOREVER was rebuilt in Wilmington.

Their second son, Paul, was born.

**Family Sailing**

Fast forward: Matthew is in seventh grade and Paul is in third. The Howells decided they wanted their children to experience lives outside the U.S. and to learn about the world around them and about sailing. The seeds of a second around-the-world trip are planted.

Then came the pursuit.

Most boaters know it. The one for the perfect boat designed for what you want to do with it. It had to be large enough to handle four liveaboards. And it certainly needed to be seaworthy and in good shape. They began the search, finally settling on a 46-foot Privilege 465, WINGS, that was in Tortola when they found her. They got a loan for the boat, sailed her back to Annapolis, sold their house and started outfitting her.

On a chilly spring morning two weeks away from moving aboard they were meeting with a sailmaker onboard and they plugged in a heater. The heater cord, however, was faulty and started a fire that began in the starboard hull and rapidly spread, sending heavy black smoke from the rapidly burning fiberglass. Despite their efforts and the efforts of the marina’s brand new “fireboat” that was quickly on sight to help, WINGS burned to the waterline. The fire was so hot the entire boom and most of the mast was melted into a silver puddle.

It was a horrible story, but nobody was hurt. And the U.S.-based insurance company, Markel Insurance, was fabulous handling their claim. Within 60 days the Howells had their money and paid off the bank loan. The company would also insure their next boat.

“As we were sitting there watching her burn I was thinking, ‘Why?’, and ‘There’s got to be a better plan’,” Bill says, noting that he and Laura are people of faith.

The better plan began when their broker called and said there was a boat they might like and it was available in Florida. They needed to get there quickly, however, because another buyer was interested in it. But Laura had already committed to going to Guatemala on a mission trip with their church. They believed the boat would be there for them if it was meant to be. They would honor their commitment to God.

The other buyer put a deposit on the boat. After a sea trial he told the broker he wanted her and would return with the check for the balance. Then he disappeared.

*(cont. on page 7)*
Help Recruit Your New Best Friends

FYCM seeking HQNM for good times. Financial incentives available.

We’ve still got spaces left on the Southport Yacht Club roster and we’d like your help in finding the kind of members who ‘get’ our mission and like what we do (and appreciate our humor). If you know someone, please ask them to start the application process by contacting Gwen Tanner, Membership Committee Chair, at membership@sycnc.org

(BTW, it’s Fun Yacht Club Members seeking High Quality New Members :)
Letter from the Editor (cont. from page 2)

And then there are Bill and Laura Howell, who also circumnavigated the globe twice. The first time they didn’t have an engine. The second time they took their children. You can read their story in this issue of Kilo.

And most of us were on the dock recently to bid safe travels to Sam, Eric and Jeff, who took Naos to the Abacos.

Sometimes we need to push our limits. Granted, not all of us even aspire to sail around the world, either alone or with a crew of 20. Maybe pushing your limit means committing to learn how to dock your boat, how to navigate, or something totally unrelated to boating.

Pushing our limits lets us see that we’re bigger, better, stronger, more resilient, kinder than we thought we were. We grow. It keeps us from being stagnant and from letting our limitations define us. It allows us to redraw the line.

So for the new year I wish you more adventures and less limitations.

Best wishes for a healthy and happy 2016!

Cheryl L. Serra (info@sycnc.org)

Member Profile: Bill and Laura Howell (cont. from page 7)

“I would have EMMA for the rest of my life if I could,” Laura says of the boat. But putting her in a marina would be what she calls cruel and unusual punishment for their loyal EMMA. She was meant to take a family around the world, so when the Howell family returned from their second around-the-world-trip, they sold her to a family who would do the same, marking EMMA’s fourth time around.

Now

Today, Matthew is a Computer Science Engineer working in cybersecurity and Paul is Biomedical Engineer. Laura and Bill are transitioning to live in Southport, where they recently completed building a house. They joined the SYC. They don’t have a boat. They don’t think there’s another big trip in their future. But there may be a few smaller ones.

Maybe they’ll consider their future plans over another cocktail. On the dock this time.