

## **INTRODUCTION**

My name is Jill Quast.

I have been a member of the Trent Severn Waterway Advisory Committee for the past 6 years. This Committee is suspended while the Panel review is underway but my understanding of my role while a member of that committee was to represent the houseboat industry and liaise between the committee, the public and houseboat rental companies

Along with my husband Frank, we own and operate Happy Days Houseboat Rentals which is located on Pigeon Lake, 10 km south of Bobcaygeon. We are the second generation of this family owned business which has been welcoming boaters to the Trent Severn Waterway since 1978.

Pigeon Lake is home to 3 rental houseboat companies with Happy Days Houseboats accounting for 37.5% of the industry. We are the largest mooring of houseboats in Ontario. While Pigeon Lake between the locks of Bobcaygeon and Buckhorn is our immediate backyard, rental houseboats traverse the entire waterway from Trenton to Georgian Bay. Geographically, we have a BIG backyard to operate in.

This year, to be an active participant in the TSW Panel review process, we decided that it was important for Happy Days Houseboats to conduct some research in order to determine what sort of economic contributions our house boaters have on communities along the Waterway Corridor.

## **WHO RENTS OUR HOUSEBOATS?**

There are a few stereotypes that I would like to address about our house boaters. Some people think that all house boaters are partyers and every year we receive phone calls from members of the community who believe that houseboats should be banned from the locks.

Our guests are predominantly families. Over 70% of guests on our houseboats indicate that they traveled along the Waterway with family members. The remainder travel with friends. 85% have been in the area before as a guest with us or another houseboat rental company or on their own boat.

90% are residents of Canada with 87% traveling from within Ontario. 38% are from South Western Ontario (519 area code) and 26% coming from the GTA (905 area code). 10% visit from Toronto (416 area code). 9.5% come from the

705 area code and 3.5% from Eastern Ontario (613 area code). 9% are from the United States and 1% travel from other countries. We will welcome over 3500 guests this year to the Trent Severn Waterway to travel on our boats.

A rental house boater on the Trent Severn Waterway is more likely to be victim of crime than the perpetrator. Our boaters report that they have been untied at the lock stations throughout the night, swamped by the wakes of large cruisers which has caused personal injury and property damage, harassed by local youth at the locks, or been pulled over by an overzealous OPP Marine Unit. The only guests that we have banned from our boats have been "locals".

Happy Days Houseboats is one of very few businesses along the Waterway that "contracts behaviour" by getting all guests to sign our Houseboat Charter Agreement. This contract specifically addresses boating etiquette, appropriate navigation, noise on the water, boating safety and environmental awareness. We send out a pre-arrival package to help people understand what is expected and we also actively market the Trent Severn Waterway and other businesses along the route.

### **WHY DO PEOPLE RENT OUR HOUSEBOATS??**

Rental Houseboats are located in some of the best recreational boating areas throughout North America. Places include Lake Powell in Grand Canyon National Park, Lake Cumberland in Kentucky, Lake Shasta in California, the Shushwap Lakes in British Columbia's, and here in Ontario, Lake of the Woods, the 1000 Islands, Rideau Canal and here on the Trent Severn Waterway.

In British Columbia, there is a little town with a population of 3192 people called Sicamous. The town sign reads "Welcome to Sicamous...houseboat capital of Canada". This town is home to the largest houseboat rental fleet in Canada, second largest in the world, with over 300 rental boats operating on Shushwap Lake Provincial Marine Park. The local community has embraced house boating and house boaters and is thriving because of it.

House boating is a unique combination of transportation, accommodation, tourism and recreation. It is a key economic contributor to the "lifestyle economy" which is referred to in Discussion Paper #4. People rent houseboats to have an adventure holiday with their family that involves leisure pursuits in a natural setting.

## **HOW DOES HOUSEBOATING CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

We can make some predictions about the economic contributions that the houseboat industry makes into the local economy based on our survey results.

We polled one guest per houseboat during a 25 day period. We were able to obtain data from 22% of our expected guests for the 2007 season which will be over 3500 people this year. The guest completing the survey reported spending an average of \$701 during the vacations not including the cost of the rental. We can predict, based on our survey results that house boaters will contribute approximately 3.5 million dollars into the local economy this year to come to the Trent Severn Waterway. This figure includes the cost to rent the boat as well as additional expenditures such as restaurants, retail, souvenirs, groceries and provisions, gas, mooring and other expenses.

The houseboat industry supports local communities financially by providing a guaranteed labour force annually. In addition, local houseboat companies have a significant impact on the surrounding community's economy by purchasing supplies, parts and service for the houseboat business. Operational costs for the houseboat industry on Pigeon Lake for the 2007 season can be estimated at 1.66 million dollars. Of the operational expenses, 2% goes to the Trent Severn Waterway for lock and mooring passes.

The combined economics of houseboat tourists and the operations from houseboat companies 5 million dollars to communities along the Waterway Corridor. An interesting note from Discussion paper #4 states that lockages peaked in 1988 and have declined by 50% since then. This coincides with a peak in the houseboat industry when over 200 rental houseboats operated from Pigeon Lake.

## **HOUSEBOATS AND OTHER BUSINESSES ALONG THE WATERWAY**

We have collected data on the direct economic impact of the house boating industry. Boats must have water. The indirect benefits to all businesses located along the Waterway Corridor are more difficult to assess and prove but we can make assumptions that tourism and boating are key contributors. Businesses such as restaurants, grocery stores, Liquor and Beer Stores, land based marinas and boat brokers, insurance companies, general retail, spas, resorts, golf courses...the list could be endless. These businesses benefit economically, yet contribute nothing to the operation of the Waterway.

Similarly, Discussion Papers #3 and #4 states that "rough estimates suggest that up to 40,000 boaters use portions of the waterway but do not purchase lockage permits". These papers further suggests that "over the last 20 years the locks

have served an increasingly smaller proportion of the waterway's boaters.”

One question from our Comment Card at Happy Days asks house boaters to rate their Parks Canada Lock Experience. The lowest levels of satisfaction were reported in the availability of day and overnight mooring at the locks. Many boaters reported that they were unable to find space at the locks. Although lock and overnight mooring passes are provided for all Happy Days Houseboat customers, 60% of boaters still report additional expenditures on overnight mooring at other marinas. This may suggest that space was not available or the facilities and services were not suitable.

Lock permits may be down but I suggest that this is a result of cost avoidance rather than decreased usage. Tracking waterway usage of boaters by user fees is not accurate when it is reported over 40,000 boats do not pay into the system. Boats may not be traveling through the locks...but boaters from cottages, residences, marinas, trailer parks and camp grounds are definitely traveling into the towns, tying off on the lock walls, benefiting from aids to navigation, water levels, garbage disposal, and using on shore washroom facilities.

Similarly, land based visitors are reported to be on the rise but that is because Parks Canada has come up with a method of tracking land based visitors. Land visitors must pay to park at lock stations, yet boaters do not.

Discussion Paper #3 on Recreation states that Houseboats comprise 8% of the vessels traveling through the locks in 1997. We know that there were approximately 56 rental houseboats at that time. With the high number of non-paying users at 40,000 boats, we can predict that only 1 in 56 boaters are paying to use the system. The ones paying are the transient or tourist boats.

We are a local business that pays a premium for waterfront property to our municipality, the City of Kawartha Lakes. We know that the tax collected for being waterfront does not give us access to additional municipal services nor does the City, who charges the premium, contribute to the economic benefit of the waterway.

We know that we pay user fees that are not a reflection of true usership. We have paid increasing fees and experienced decreasing services. Specifically hours of service and marker removal. In 2005, Fisheries and Oceans Canada re-plotted the hydrographic charts and re-printed most of the Trent Severn Waterway charts. In 2006, Parks Canada determined it would be a cost savings to remove an estimated 400 aids to navigation. It seems that there was little or no consultation between the two federal branches of government. The removal of markers may have saved Parks Canada but we have paid the price in damage to boats, repurchasing of hydrographic charts and boaters that feel a lack of confidence in using the system. All of those factors contribute to a decline in business. Because of the challenges that are beyond our control that we face as

a business operating along the waterway, we have had to increase our marketing strategies and marketing budget which is up by over 200% since last year.

We have been informed this year that our overnight mooring rates are to increase to a commercial rate, yet we are not being offered the same considerations that other commercial operators receive such as reserved parking at the locks.

Marinas are being targeted for water lot licensing/leasing due to being "in receipt of benefit" for being on the waterway. This process is on hold only as a result of the TSW Panel review. Parks Canada needs to stop taking the "path of least resistance" and targeting existing contributors and either equalize the system so no one has to pay and it comes out of the federal tax reserves that all Canadians pay into and receive benefit from our national park system...or Parks Canada needs to implement equitable and non-discriminatory user fees that reflect true usage.

We are part of a business community in which every business benefits, yet not every one pays for that benefit.

Happy Days Houseboats has the opportunity to participate in free advertising with a major US magazine that specifically promotes the house boating industry by answering some survey questions for publication. 3 questions are holding me back and they are:

1. Did you see more or less visitors this year than average - LESS
2. Would you describe your weather and water conditions for the year as excellent, fair or poor and why? Weather was great but the water levels were low with the big issue being the dead carp. Although our government representatives are telling the public that the bacteria found in the dead carp is not harmful to humans...no one has addressed the implications that 40-70 tonne of rotting meat/flesh in our lakes and landfills has. If it were 40 tonne of rotting cows in our waterway, would we be so complacent?
3. What is the biggest challenge you face as a marina/resort operator? Factors beyond our control that I just talked about and the lack of governance for the Waterway on ALL levels - municipal, provincial and federal.

## **GOVERNANCE AND WATER LEVEL MANAGEMENT**

The current mandate of Parks Canada and the Trent Severn Waterway is navigation and water management. Until that mandate is changed, the current management has a responsibility to be accountable to that mandate. Water management is complex on a good day but when there is clearly human error in daily operations such as low water levels on Lake Scugog, people want

someone to be held accountable...not just be told it is a result of a lack of communication. Telephones and e-mails should make such lack of communication impossible.

In the TSW State of the Waterway Report Card, 15 indicators were used to assess the state of the Waterway with a ranking of acceptable, of concern or unacceptable. 33% of the indicators reflect an acceptable level and over half of those indicators deemed acceptable are implemented by others beyond the Trent Severn Waterway. (E.coli, air quality and stewardship activity were deemed acceptable and implemented other than by the Trent Severn Waterway).

Marker removal has impacted on visiting boaters returning to the area. The locals do not need the markers...they know where they are going...but the visitors need them. The City of Kawartha Lakes is undergoing the Premier Ranked Tourist Destination process...trying to determine how to market the area to draw in more tourists. The Trent Severn Waterway has also asked the question "How do we market our area?". Imagine the City of Toronto engaging in a huge publicity and marketing campaign after the SARS scare in 2004 and then removing road signs along the 401. You can't invite people to visit and then take away signage

Governance of the Waterway has long been in question. The 1982 CORTS agreement, the 1995 Trent Severn Waterway Management Plan and now the panel will all have provided extensive and exhaustive research to put forward recommendations to improve the function of the Waterway. Yet follow up and follow through is glaringly absent. Where is the political will to appropriately fund and recognize the Waterway as a true national treasure? And who is holding the current management responsible?

## **FUTURE FUNDING FRAMEWORK(S) AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **What the federal government should be responsible for**

- ✓ Providing adequate funding for capital restorations by:
- ✓ Reinvesting the gasoline tax that is collected from marinas back into the Trent Severn Waterway.
- ✓ Using the federal tax surplus

### **What Parks Canada can do**

- ✓ Implement user fees that reflect true usage. Either equalize fees so that all users pay or remove user fees completely since statistics clearly show that they represent only a small portion of user.

- ✓ A method of permitting that will facilitate the application and waiting process. Increase staffing for this department so there is appropriate review of the permits being sought. Permit fees that reflect the extent of the work being done. For example...if a residence or cottage is requesting a permit for a shoreline retaining wall that costs \$10,000 to install...permit fee should be a percentage of the work rather than a \$50 fee which does not cover the time involved for the staff to examine and review the application.
- ✓ All businesses that receive direct or indirect benefit to operating on the Waterway contribute economically to the waterway.
- Municipalities that charge a waterfront premium re-invest the tax collected to the Waterway. Uploading.
- ✓ Development of “Partnership Agreements” that would provide a template for appropriate participation and partnership along the Waterway. Prior to coming to the Kawarthas and operating a marina and houseboat rental company, I worked in Health Care when our Provincial hospitals were being privatized. I worked in a community development and research unit that developed agreements with other stake holders to allocate and share resources, develop programming and that further outlined stakeholder responsibilities.

### ***EDUCATING OUR FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS***

There is a lack youth participating in this process. We are not handing down the canal to our children but borrowing it from them. There exists an opportunity to educate our future stewards of the earth...my kids, your kids, grandchildren, etc.

Curriculum development in schools should include the history and engineering of the Canal system. Why study the Panama Canal when we have many examples of engineering marvels in our own backyard. Environmental Studies is another area that could encompass the natural and technological environments that exist along the Waterway.

All high school students in Ontario must complete 40 hours of community service. Have students participate in developing a community service feature at lock stations that will increase awareness about the system such as displays or information stations.

### **PARTING COMMENTS**

The 1995 Management Review recommends that Canals should put a premium on delivering good customer service and that lock personnel should act as ambassadors to the Waterway. According to our customer feedback on the Parks Canada Lock Experience, our boaters received excellent service and

assistance from lock personnel.

Front line staff are an extremely valuable asset who contribute in such direct and indirect ways to the overall success of the waterway. As the Collective Agreement is currently due, please recognize the value and importance of your lock staff.

The wording of the Private Members Bill that was put forward by Bruce Stanton was sufficient to start the process. To the Panel...do not let the efforts of yet another review and recommendation process become benign...

write the recommendations...

Ensure politicians will fund the system appropriately...

Provide long term education to ensure that this national treasure is not forgotten and that every Canadian is a steward to our environment.