



# The Smoke Signal

Newsletter of the **BLACKHAWK CHAPTER-ACBS**



**VOLUME 23 ISSUE 1**

**Winter 2016-17**

## Henry C. Grebe Boat Company 1926-1994



**ROBERT ALLAN II** *Launched: 1936 - Designed and Built by Henry C. Grebe* **CELEBRATING 80 YEARS IN CHICAGO WATERS**

## The River, Porky, and the Lake

By Captain Toby Lindo

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# BLACKHAWK CHAPTER

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<b>Photos by :</b>	Mary West, Amanda Matos, Seth Anderson

## Presidents Notes:

Hello fellow Blackhawk members,

Spring has finally arrived and so begins the boating season, or almost. Even though the Ground Hog saw his shadow and we can expect six more weeks of winter I look forward to getting my boat prepared for the great season ahead. And a busy one it will be. As you look through the pages of this newsletter you will see just how many events we have planned.



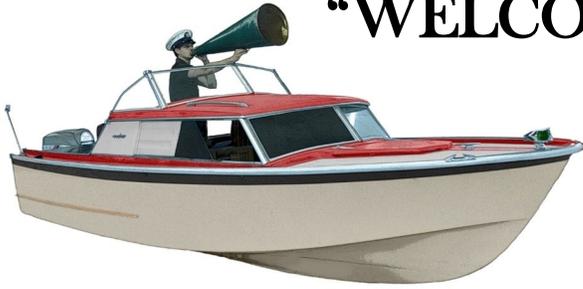
The Blackhawk Spring Workshop is scheduled for April 22nd. This year it will be held at Streblov in Lake Geneva. Look for additional information in this issue. Please RSVP to Dave Vogeler at 847-477-3373 or [dvogeler214@ameritech.net](mailto:dvogeler214@ameritech.net) by April 10th if interested in attending.

Our Spring Dinner will be held in the Cobalt Lounge at Gordy's Marina in Fontana on May 20th. See the registration form in this I issue for more information.

You may have seen in a past email. On January 30th we lost a good friend and Blackhawk member Len Bonnevier. Jan and I had the honor of attending his funeral services held on February 3rd. Len was a retired Lieutenant from the Oak Forest Fire Department. Miles before we arrived at the funeral home the support of his firefighting brothers was evident as we saw 2 ladder trucks with ladders extended forming an arch over Cicero Avenue. As we paid our respects to Toni and Len's family it was comforting to see all of his co-workers which seemed to outnumber family and friends. The procession to the church and cemetery was escorted by several Oak Forest Police cars along with 4 fire trucks. Each intersection was blocked off by the police departments of the 4 different towns that we traveled through. I noticed people along the route who stopped their daily activities to watch the procession and pay their respects. The emotional ceremony ended at Resurrection Cemetery in Justice with the Firefighters Honor Guard including bagpipes playing Amazing Grace and full Navy Honors with a Bugler playing Taps. It was a fitting tribute to a man who dedicated his life in service. To his country by serving in the Navy, his community through his service in the Oak Forest Fire Department, and the Blackhawk Chapter through his never ending volunteering. Thank you Len, you will be missed!

Looking forward to seeing all of you soon,

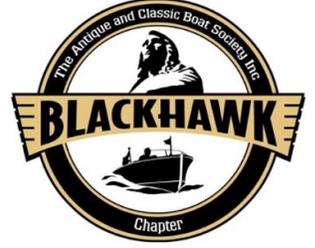
Dave



# “WELCOME ABOARD”

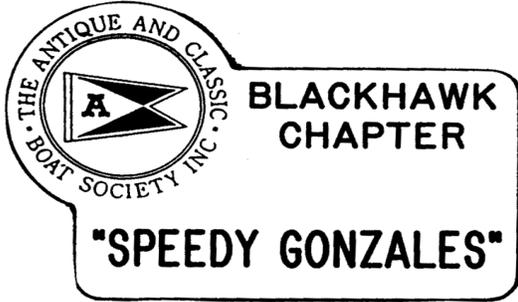
## BLACKHAWK CHAPTER'S NEWEST MEMBERS

Membership Chairperson, Jan Vogeler reports Blackhawk membership has grown to over 300 members



Dean & Jeanne Kaczorowski, Shawano WI  
Jeff & Katie Kennath, Geneva IL  
James M. Miller III, Long Lake IL

Charles Young, Waukegan IL  
Sean Slattery & Ted Pankau, Fontana WI



Blackhawk Chapter name badges are again available. These tasteful badges are a great way to let other members know who you are at outings, and to show your affiliation at non-Blackhawk events.

Contact Membership Chairperson Jan Vogeler  
[membership@blackhawkacbs.com](mailto:membership@blackhawkacbs.com)  
(847) 477-3358

# ALL HANDS ON DECK

Ahoy Blackhawk Members! This is a shout out to any and all to lend a helping hand at some of our upcoming boat shows and events. If you are interested in volunteering your time and energy please contact Dave Vogeler at [president@blackhawkacbs.com](mailto:president@blackhawkacbs.com) or 847-477-3373



Attention Blackhawk members: The newsletter belongs to you and you can make it better. It's all about our stories. Whether hanging out at the docks during a show or dining together as a group, we all share our stories...the restoration project, bringing an engine back to life, a boating event, the maiden voyage, the mishaps as well as the glorious days when all goes well.

To keep the newsletter fresh, exciting and providing new viewpoints to the readers, we need your stories...the funny, the interesting, the informative. There are over 300 members now and I invite all of you to share your stories of a day, a boat, or a lifetime of your experience.

Please send your stories and pictures to [stmfittr@aol.com](mailto:stmfittr@aol.com) Thanks, Terry Dickson, Smoke Signal Editor

## Blackhawk Smoke Signal Advertising Policy

Individual Blackhawk Chapter members may run a single complimentary non-commercial advertisement in any issue of the Smoke Signal. Individual advertisements will not be rerun unless the editor is notified prior to publication of the following issue. The editor reserves the right to edit if necessary to fit available space.

Provide all advertisements to: Matt Byrne at [mattbyrne@mrbtech.com](mailto:mattbyrne@mrbtech.com) or Terry Dickson at [stmfittr@aol.com](mailto:stmfittr@aol.com)



# BLACKHAWK CHAPTER

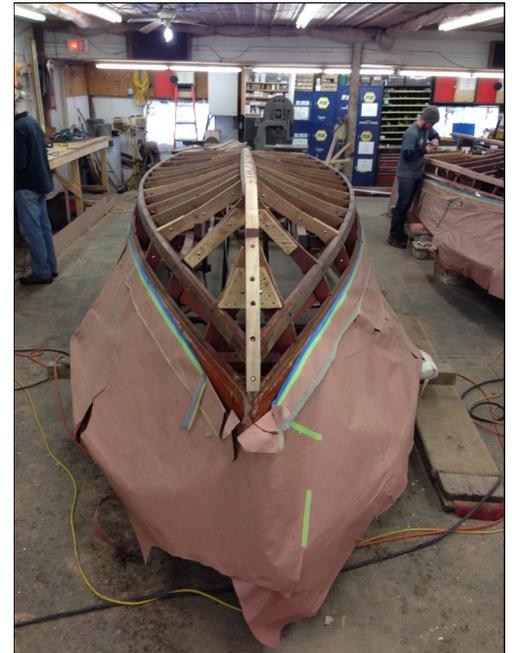


## 2017 ACBS Blackhawk Chapter Spring Workshop Saturday April 22, 2017

The Blackhawk Chapter will be holding a dual workshop at the Delevan Lake Boat Shed and Streblow Custom Boats on April 22, 2017.

We will start at 10am at the Delevan Lake Boat Shed with Coffee and Doughnuts, Then travel to Streblow Custom Boats a few miles away for a light lunch complements of the Blackhawk Chapter. Following lunch we will continue our education of boat restoration and maintenance at Streblow Custom Boats.

Members and guests of ALL ages are welcome to attend. Come with questions, talk with the experts, support the Blackhawk Chapter and stay for lunch! Is there a better way to spend a Spring day?

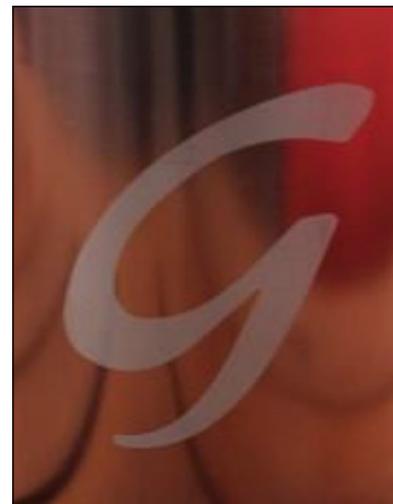


**Delevan Lake Boat Shed      5495 State Rd 50, Delevan, WI. 53115      262-728-5438**  
**Streblow Custom Boats      2672 County Rd F, Walworth, WI. 53184      262-728-6898**

**Please RSVP to:**  
**Dave Vogeler at 847-477-3373 or [dvogeler214@ameritech.net](mailto:dvogeler214@ameritech.net)**  
**Please reply no later than Monday April 10th, 2017**

# Blackhawk Chapter Spring Dinner At Gordy's Cobalt Lounge Saturday May 20th, 2017 Starting at 5pm

Located on the West end of Lake Geneva. Make it a boating day!!!!  
Limited Boat parking available. Show up early or raft off with friends.  
Free boat launching available at Abbey Marina



Come join the Blackhawk Chapter 2017 Spring Kickoff Dinner which will be held at Gordy's in Fontana WI. Cocktails begin at 5pm with dinner around 6:30. The Buffet Diner includes Caesar Salad, Beef Tenderloin and Chicken Oscar, served with Twice Baked Potatoes and Green Beans with Almonds.

Coffee and a Desert Platter included.

Price: \$45.00 for Adults \$15.00 for Children



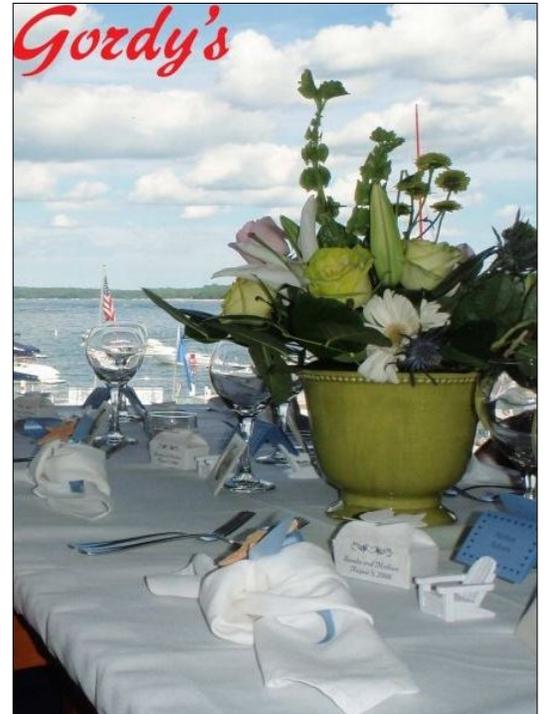
Gordy's Cobalt Lounge  
366 Lake Ave.  
Fontana, WI 53125  
Phone: 262-275-6800

RSVP Deadline May 1st 2017  
See next page for registration form

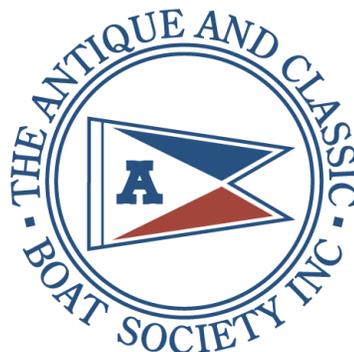
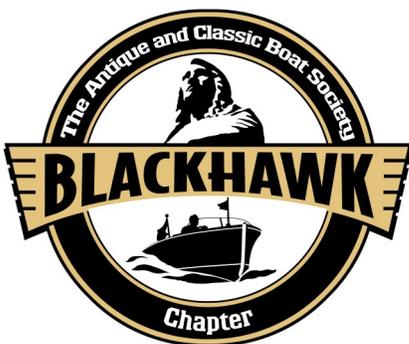
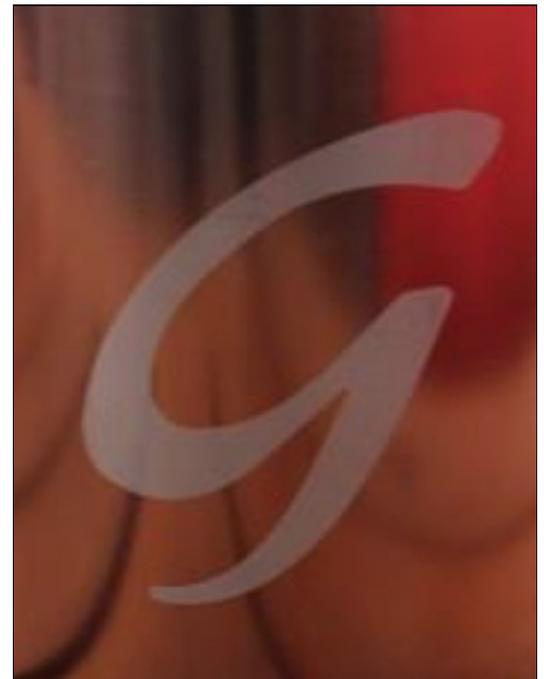
# ACBS Blackhawk Chapter 2017 Spring Dinner Registration

**Location: Gordy's Cobalt Lounge**  
**366 Lake Ave.**  
**Fontana, WI 53125**  
**Phone: 262-275-6800**

**Time: 5:00 PM Cocktails 6:30 Dinner**  
**Cost: \$45.00 Adults, Children \$15.00 (5-11)**  
**Bar: Full Service Cash,**  
**RSVP: Deadline May 1, 2017**



Name	
Guests	
Adults	X \$45.00 =
Kids	X \$15.00 =
Total	
Email Address	
Mobile Phone	
Home Phone	



<p><b>Make checks payable to:</b>          Blackhawk Chapter, ACBS  <b>Mail to:</b>          Dave Vogeler          214 River Dr.          Trout Valley, IL 60013</p>	<p><b>Fax or email registration to:</b>          dvogeler214@ameritech.net          Fax 847-639-7396</p>	<p><b>For additional info or questions contact:</b>          Dave Vogeler          Mobile 847-477-3373</p>
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★ ★ ★ 33rd ANNUAL ★ ★ ★

ANTIQUE & CLASSIC  
IN-WATER BOAT SHOW



Saturday ★ July 15, 2017

*Presented by*

**BLACKHAWK ACBS**

*at Famous Freddie's on Pistakee Lake*

*510 Park Avenue Fox Lake, IL*

★ 9:00AM - 2:00PM ★

*Awards presented at 1:30PM*



For more information:

Ron Van Horn 708.347.8951 Ted Cartner 847.395.8902





# TAKE A VET FISHING

A DAY of GIVING BACK

Fox Lake Event May 21st 2017



<http://takeavetfishing.org/events/>



Happy Campers cruising on Ted and Cindy's Chris Craft Sedan

Take-A-Vet-Fishing is a non-profit organization which gives emotional support to Veterans and their families by inviting the Veterans out for a day of fishing. All Veterans are invited, especially those with PTSD. Many of the volunteers are professional fishermen. This year there will be 5 events, two in Minnesota, one in Michigan, one in Wisconsin, and one on Channel Lake on the Chain. Often families will accompany their Vets to the event but not spend the day fishing with them. In the past on Channel Lake those left on shore and not fishing were very excited to be taken for cruises on a classic boat. Those who are interested to participate in this event contact Ted Cartner, 847-395-8902



Thirsty Turtle Marina and Brew & View Pub  
42273 N Woodbine Ave.  
Antioch, IL. 60002  
(847) 833-5571

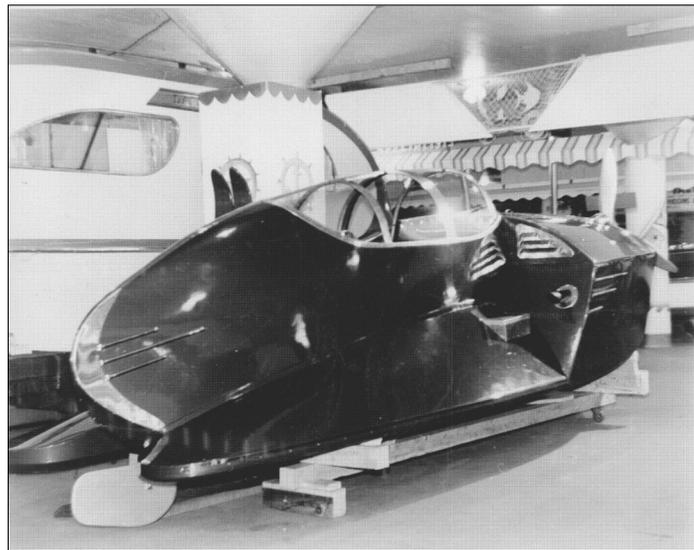
[www.turtlebeachmarina.net](http://www.turtlebeachmarina.net)

Registration/Check In starts at 6:00am for BOTH Veterans and Guides at The Thirsty Turtle Marina

# It's A Boat... It's A Plane... Its Aqua Aircar !

“Prop Wash” the Christiansen Aqua Aircar

By Paul Miller



Dateline: Metropolis, March 2015

My friend Peter Mueller sent me an email with pictures of a very unusual boat listed on the internet with the suggestion we needed to buy and restore it. The internet listing had current pictures and a few original photos said to be from about 1947 or 1948. Mention was made that the hull was intact but missing the original Continental 125 HP airplane engine and propeller. No other comment was made about the boat or what might be included with the boat.

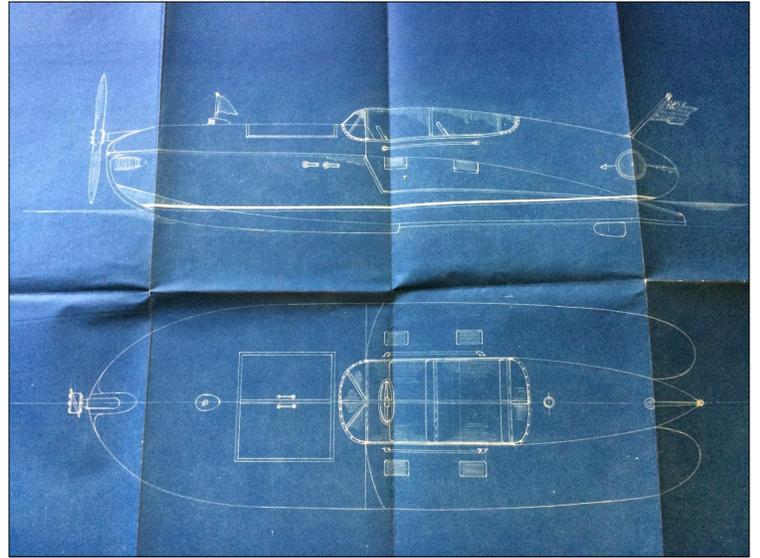
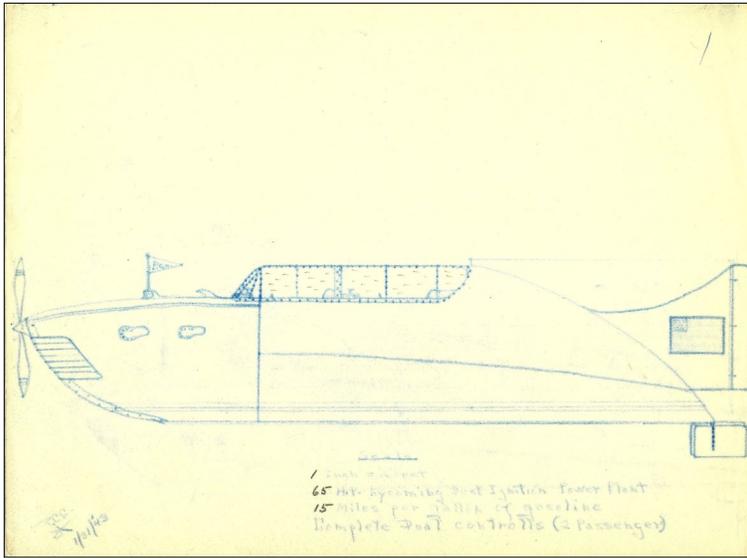
We agreed to pursue it, and made the purchase within days. Within a week we drove up to Wisconsin to pick up the boat on a flat bed car hauler. When we arrived and looked into the boat to find it was full of parts and trim seen in a few of the early pictures from the Milwaukee Boat show of March 1947.

When we went into the home to complete the transaction we were handed a large box and told “this goes with it”. The boxed contained hundreds of letters and other documents to include receipts, photos, and an 8mm film. We hit the JACK POT. Days of reviewing the contents were like Christmas morning many times over. We found series of letters to and from the engineering company, his patent attorney, boat magazines, the boat builder, airplane engine and propeller companies, and product suppliers of all sorts. This guy kept everything, even a letter requesting the return of a hammer he borrowed at the boat show.



Philip Christiansen of Phelps Wisconsin had a dream about a new kind of boat and first put that dream to paper in January of 1943, at the age of 21. Philip first wrote to A. M. Deering Engineering in Chicago on January 13, 1944 in reply to an ad in “Motor Boat” magazine offering services. Side note; A.M. Deering was doing the prints for Shepherd Boats of Canada at the time and later worked with Streblow, the favorite Geneva Lake boat.

August Deering replied they were busy with government work but could fit it in at a cost of about \$65.00 to \$75.00. By March 24<sup>th</sup> Deering sent preliminary prints for review that were developed from the “cartoon” drawings Philip sent to them. The final working drawings were not delivered until late spring of 1945.



While Deering was working on the drawings, Philip contacted a Milwaukee patent attorney. An interesting quote from his May 18, 1944 letter: *“The writer has had a good deal of boating experience, and from this I have gathered a large portion of the knowledge incorporated into this definitely new design. ...and advice from a field of Naval Architects.”* Keep in mind he is age 22 at the time. The letter further mentions the instrumentation to include the usual gauge as well as barometer, cabin heat regulator, variable pitch control for the propeller, and a two-way radio. A metal propeller would *“overcome breakage should a wood propeller be used and should same hit water while in motion”*.

His patent was filed March 7, 1945 and issued March 8, 1949 #2,464,166, total cost \$112.00.

Construction on the boat was held up while Philip entered the Military November 5, 1944. Upon Philip's return he contracted Hemming Larsen of Menominee, MI. to build the boat which began in late November of 1946 with a goal to complete the boat for the Milwaukee Sentinel Sport Show on April 19, 1947. Included in the correspondence were construction pictures and the processed checks paid to I. Hemming Larsen.

All of the letters give an interesting look into Philip's personality with one of my favorite being from the Continental airplane engine people. Their letter dated 3/14/47 states: *“We do not recommend or encourage installation of this nature, as from what we are told, there is a tremendous amount of development work involved.”* Philip's reply: *“I do not relish the idea of buying this equipment not knowing how satisfactory it will prove to be, but have in mind the fact that should it not be the most effective unit usable in my experimental boat, I can always resell it as not too great a loss.”* The receipt for the motor was \$854.53, not to include shipping.



Lakeland Yachting wrote to Philip in a letter 7/3/47 mentioning they heard from Hemming Larsen that *“trials have proved quite successful.”* July 7<sup>th</sup> Philip replied: *“The writer does not wish to disclose any figures or information on the new “Aqua-Aircar” at this time. You may hear from me at a later date.”* We can assume that was because the boat did not work.

Continental did send an engineer to Menominee when the motor was delivered and I have no doubt the engineer told him it would not work. No record is found of what happened to the motor. But we gain some insight through letters between Philip and a number boat magazines following the boat show.



This may be confirmed by the film we found and converted to a video and believe to be done in the early 1960's The film shows the boat repowered with a V-8 in the rear with a drive shaft under the cockpit driving a sprocket and chain to the propeller shaft. Watch the video and discover why we named the boat *“Prop Wash”*. Bottom line the boat could not get up on plane before the propeller hit the water. I'm not sure what Philip was thinking about or if he was used to calm water lakes of Northern Wisconsin. I do have a copy of the ad to sell the V-8 with only 2 hours of running time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

He never gave up; June 8, 2000 letter to the Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers to request assistance finding: *“An imaginative Marine Turbo Engineer to re-design propulsion of a patented prototype boat.”* Philip added a hand written note at the bottom of his secretary's typed letter; *“P.S. This is no “Mickey Mouse”! Nor is it a “Star Wars”!* Sadly he never found anyone to help him finish his dream.

After long thought and consideration Peter and I decided to restore the boat to its original design powered by the Continental 125 and propeller, however, due to current FAA and USCG regulations we are not able to operate the boat as originally configured.

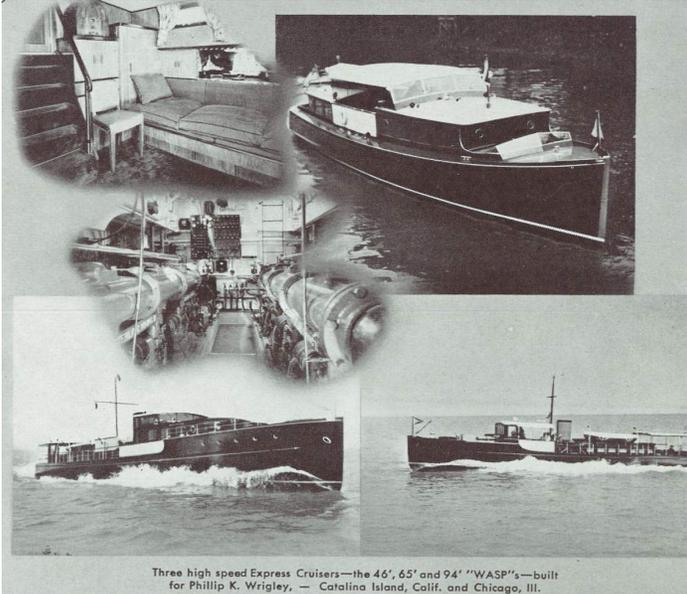


*This crowd pleasing one of a kind watercraft won the “Peoples Choice” award at The Geneva Lakes show last September at the Abbey Resort in Fontana out of over 100 boats on display. The Christiansen Aqua Aircar was also displayed at Chicago's Navy Pier for The 2016 Tall Ships Event. Many spectators did not quite know what they were looking at and speculated, was it a boat, or was it an plane, maybe a submarine? Thanks to Paul and Peter for preserving this unique marine artifact and the associated history-Editor*

# Henry C. Grebe & Company, Chicago IL

By Ted Cartner

In 1926 the former Great Lakes Boat Building Corporation of Milwaukee became the Henry C. Grebe & Co. and moved to Chicago. The yard was over 8 acres on the north branch of the Chicago River at Washtenaw Ave., across from the famous Riverview Park.



Three high speed Express Cruisers—the 46', 65' and 94' "WASP"s—built for Phillip K. Wrigley, — Catalina Island, Calif. and Chicago, Ill.



Grebe built large custom yachts for the wealthy of Chicago and across the country. Some of these included: 3 high speed cruisers of 46', 65', & 94' "WASPS" for P. K. Wrigley

During WWII Grebe built various wood and steel vessels for the Navy. The yard had cranes with capacities to 50 tons and a complete inter-yard rail system throughout. There was storage for 400 yachts.

But as time went on the interest in these high end yachts waned. Grebe built their last boat in 1970, although continued to service their clients until 1994 when the boat business ceased. Henry Grebe had passed sometime before and the land was now worth more than the business.

There was an auction to sell off anything they could before selling the land. Unfortunately I was out of town and didn't attend the auction. However I was able to visit the yard about a week later. The yard was deserted except for the office secretary who invited us to look around as much as we wanted. Wandering around the facility gave us a spooky feeling. In some of the work sheds there were partially finished projects still on the tables. It was as if the workers laid down their tools, went to lunch, and never came back.

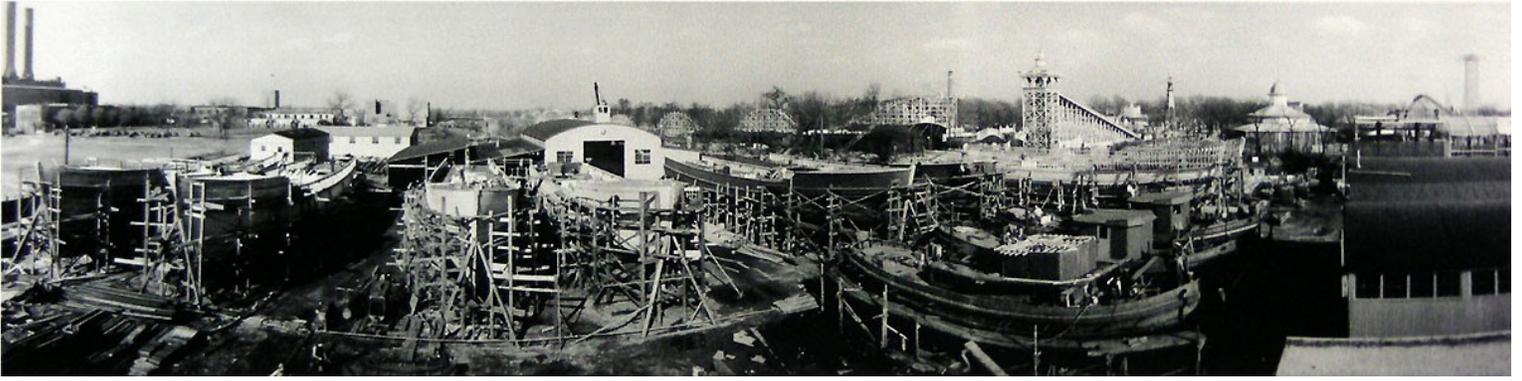




We noted about 15 cruisers and a few sail boats still in the larger buildings. One of the sail boats was a Chris Craft. Eventually we went back to the office to say goodbye. I asked the secretary about the boats. She asked “do you want to buy them?” They were all for sale for \$1 each. But if we bought one or all of them they had to be out in less than two weeks. That’s when the demolition company was going to clear the yard. I think most, if not all of those boats, were still there when the wrecking ball crushed the buildings around them..

A few Grebes are still around. One 40’ twin screw cruiser, small by Grebe standards, was built for Mrs. Grebe in 1936, originally named *DUTCHESS* is now the *ROBERT ALLAN II*. This classic motoryacht is still used regularly and maintained by a dedicated crew headed by Captain Toby Lindo, but that’s another story.





This is a 1943 panorama of the Grebe Shipyard located along the North Branch of the Chicago River near Belmont Avenue. The shipyard operated from 1926 to 1994. The former Riverview Amusement Park is visible in the background of this photograph. In the foreground, several U.S. Navy vessels are under construction.

Before World War II, Grebe produced sail yachts and powerboats for exclusive clientele. During the war, the shipyard built over 56 wooden boats for the U.S. Navy including GREBE yard minesweepers (also known as *auxiliary motor minesweepers*). These vessels were used in detecting mines laid by enemy submarines. Their wooden hulls helped prevent the activation of nearby magnetic mines.

*Courtesy of and by permission of Chicago Maritime Museum*



HENRY C. GREBE & CO., INC. • 3250 N. WASHTEWAW AVE. • CHICAGO 18, ILL.  
Telephone KEVrons 8300

## Designers and Builders OF Modern Cruising Yachts

GREBE yachts are built in many different sizes and types—power cruisers, sailing yachts, and motorailers—ranging from forty to one hundred ten feet and up. Each is characterized by that excellence of design, construction and finish which has made GREBE cruisers recognized as outstanding for beauty, comfort and performance.

Recent years have brought important advances in boat building by the introduction of new production methods and equipment, new design ideas, and the expansion and modernization of yard and shop facilities.

In this book can be observed this progress made in yacht building, much of it developed in the evolution of GREBE streamlined cruising yachts.

An important element in this evolution has been the fact that this company has never restricted selection to stock models. A GREBE-built boat is designed and constructed to the owner's individual requirements—often to his own specifications.

Usually we draw the plans but we are always glad to cooperate in building from the plans of some other naval architect, if owner so elects.



Let us work with you in the development of the ship of your dreams.

HENRY C. GREBE, *President*

*Mr. Grebe has been continuously engaged in the designing, building and servicing of all types of pleasure craft—also many naval vessels—since 1908. He pioneered many of the design ideas now regarded as characteristic of "modern" streamlined yachts.*





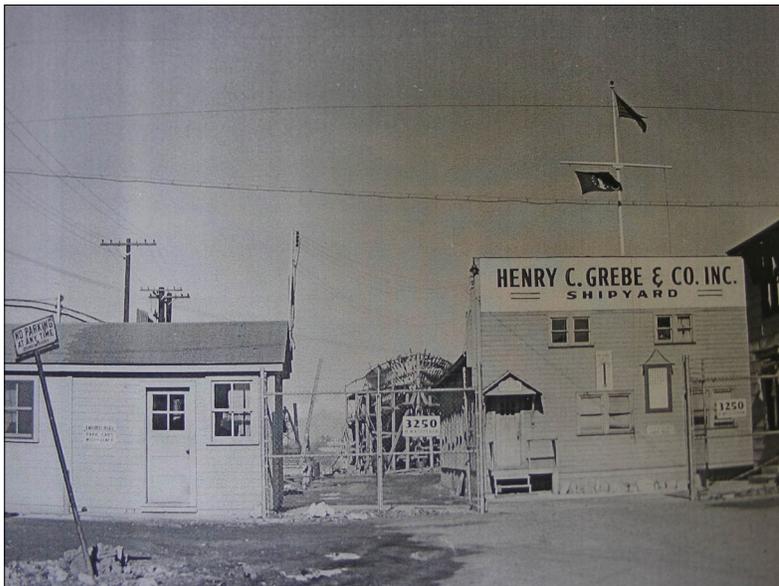
### — Built Naval Vessels

SERVE ALL OVER THE WORLD

During World War II, GREBE built for the U. S. Navy scores of steel tankers, tugs, wooden minesweepers, patrol boats and other vessels. Also numbers of GREBE-built converted pleasure craft proved their exceptional seaworthiness on Coast Patrol duty in the Arctic, the Atlantic and in the Gulf.



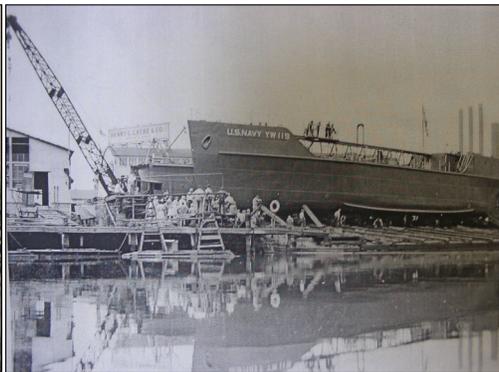
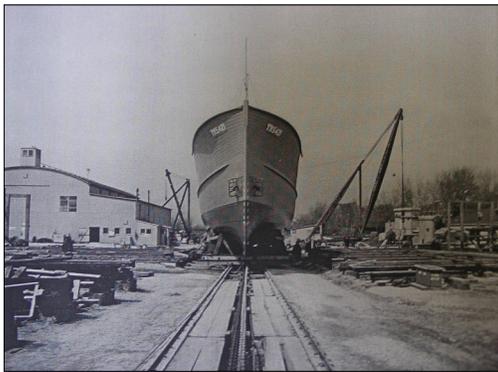
Courtesy of Hal & Diane Nachenberg



Henry C. Grebe & Company Inc. Shipyard  
3250 North Washtenaw Avenue  
Chicago 18, ILL  
The site is now occupied by the Belmont River Club  
townhouse complex.



Grebe Boat Yard Circa 1928 looking east across  
Chicago river.  
Notice Shoots the Chutes and The Bobs roller  
coaster rides at Riverview Park in the back-  
ground



*Photos courtesy of and by permission of Chicago Maritime Museum*

*Article from May 5, 1958 Sports Illustrated*

Over eight acres of Chicago's North Side, hard by the North Branch of the Chicago River, sprawls the Grebe boat yards. Here highly skilled craftsmen will build anything from a 19-foot runabout to a 150-foot, quarter-of-a-million-dollar yacht. Over this small nautical empire presides a woman, Peggy Grebe. Mrs. Grebe managed nothing more than her household until the death of her husband, Henry C. Grebe, who had made the yard his life's work. Then, against the counsel of friends, she refused to sell out and took over management. "The yard was all Henry and I talked about. I just knew I could do it." Peggy Grebe was right. She has expanded the yard to handle the sale of small, round-bottomed sailing boats and provide storage for more than 250 owners. With Foreman Corey Olsen she directs the building of the beautifully crafted large yachts for which people come to her from all over the country. "Can you blame me," asks Mrs. Grebe, "for not wanting to get out of the picture?"



Peggy Lockett Grebe

# The River, Porky, and the Lake

By Captain Toby Lindo

## Alpha and Omega

It started around 7 in the evening of August 20, 1988. The day was a reprieve and a harbinger. The summer had been a blaster – with more than a few days above 100. But that day felt like the first day of fall – crisp and cool with a clear blue sky and temperatures in the 70's. We took the little one – born three months before - down to the Lake to watch the boats and the fishermen. We drove to Montrose Harbor and walked along the shore down to Belmont Harbor. With the sun beginning to set, we retraced our steps. As we neared Montrose, we saw a double-end sloop gliding into the harbor. We stopped and stared as two old men brought her along the west wall and dropped sails. As the sun began to set over Chicago, we returned to the car and drove home.

Next morning I picked up the Tribune and did something I'd never done before - I went to the classifieds and turned to "Sailboats for Sale." There it was: Montrose Harbor – 25' Atkin double-end sloop *ESMERALDA* – built 1936. I called the number.

"Hello, I saw you sailing into Montrose Harbor last night. I'm not interested in buying a boat but out of curiosity, how much are you asking?"

"\$12,000, but I'll come down" said he.

"I'm not interested in buying a boat" said I.

"I'll go partners with you" said he.

I'm not interested in buying a boat, but I'd love to go for a sail" said I.

Often it is not obvious at the time that the step you are taking involves a banana peel. Sure enough we bought *ESMERALDA*, and then *ROBERT ALLAN II*, a 1936 Grebe sedan cruiser (now the oldest power boat moored in Chicago) and then *WILD GOOSE*, a 1929 schooner built in Gloucester, MA.



*WILD GOOSE*, 1929 Schooner built in Gloucester MA.

*ROBERT ALLAN II*, 1936 Grebe Motoryacht

Porky, the man from whom we bought *ESMERALDA* is gone now. He spent the last five years of his life in Thailand. We sent him there to protect him from himself. Therein lies a very long tale. These pages will attempt to tell his story and how that chance vision in Montrose Harbor changed my life and his life as well.

Porky died in August of 2012 after five fine years in Thailand , but he communicated with me for the last time July. This is how he did it:

I've been a devotee of Joseph Conrad for many years. Conrad is a craftsman especially of sea stories. Although I've read most of his novels, I never read his first, *Almayer's Folly*, and borrowed the book from Sulzer library in Chicago. Research tells me the Chicago library system holds close to 6,000,000 volumes. When I got home, I opened the book. Out of it fell a postcard addressed to Daniel C. Avers – Porky's legal name.

Porky was the nickname I gave him shortly after we met in 1988. Porky used the card as a bookmark, and he must have been the last person to borrow the book – ten years before.

A message from Porky: when he died in Thailand, his life was commemorated by a solemn Buddhist ceremony, after which half Porky's ashes were buried in the Gulf of Siam. Clem (you will hear more of him) brought the remainder of the remains back from Thailand and gave them to me. I intended to bury them in Lake Michigan, on the waters of which Porky spent the best part of his life. But two years had passed and I still had not done it. Later that summer, having received this most unexpected reminder from Porky, we buried the rest of his ashes near Belmont Harbor.

So with half his ashes in the Gulf of Siam and the other half in Lake Michigan, Porky can be honestly described as "girdling the Earth," in a way. He would consider that quite appropriate.

The rest of this tale is about what happened in between. Most of it is as improbable as the beginning and the end of my life with Porky.



Dan 'Porky' Avers hoisting an Old Style aboard *ESMERALDA*

## The Houseboat

Soon after meeting Porky, I visited the Houseboat for the first time. She was moored to the east bank of the Chicago River at the end of Belle Plaine Avenue just north of Irving Park Road. It was the last of 500 houseboats which had lined the banks of the North Branch since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A remnant of the Cap Streeter theory of how to live, these denizens of the water chose to live tied to land but in such an indefinite way as to evade the payment of property tax. This particular houseboat sat upon this spot since 1922. It was the size of a large house trailer and was prevented from sinking by a pool liner deployed beneath it – the bottom being somewhat worm-eaten with age. The main salon was furnished with a beat-up sofa, several chairs, a couple of tables and an oil-drum stove. The principal activity was gin-rummy, after the fire was lit and the cats and rats were fed. Porky made a stop there every day, and before heading south for the winter, Porky's best friend Howie would stop in for a few wasted hours playing gin. Whenever I found time to join them they would cheerfully draw lots with me for the first match and we would rotate through lazy hours of the afternoon. Of Howie, I cannot forget his most vivid interjection upon winning a game when his opponent would bemoan his fate: "it's better than a sharp stick in the eye."

Porky always claimed to be the "World's Greatest Gin Player." At one point we became immersed in a serious contest over several days playing for a dollar a point. After getting him down a bit more than \$5,000, he threw up his hands and surrendered. It became clear to me that if I held him to the nominal stakes, it would put a strain on our relationship. I offered him a choice: Either settle up in cash or give me \$100 and a plaque declaring me the "World's Greatest Gin Player." For some moments he put me in mind of the famous vignette by Jack Benny when accosted on the street by a thief who says "your money or your life." After the second louder repetition of the threat, Jack says "I'm thinking it over." Porky did think it over, but I wound up with \$100, the plaque and a friend for the rest of his life.

Porky was quite attached to animals of all kinds and took his obligation to feed them seriously. To my knowledge until the houseboat was no more, he visited daily to make sure the animal kingdom was well fed.

## Finding ROBERT ALLAN II

Now it's October 15, 1994, the last day of the boating season in the Chicago harbors. I was puttering around on Esmeralda in Montrose and spied a friend, Dietmar Solm on his sloop *SNUSKE* tied to the North wall. I motored over and rafted off to say hello. At the same time, another friend, Kevin Bowen was taking his final cruise of the harbors in his Lyman runabout *NEPENTHE*. I hailed him and he pulled over to raft off with us. Within a few minutes another friend came strolling down the promenade and stopped to chat. It turned out the Grebe yard was open for the last time to all comers to inspect the remaining boats in the yard which had failed to meet the minimum bid at auction. Having nothing better to do, we decided to have a look.

The Grebe yard was located just above Belmont Avenue on the west side of the North Branch of the river, and had been, from the late 1920's through the early 1970's, one of the premier yacht builders in the US. During WWII, they made their contribution by supplying mine-sweepers to the US Navy. As we strolled around the yard, we saw some fairly substantial vessels including a 60' Chris-Craft motor boat and a smaller Trojan. But nothing looked worth the effort of restoration which would be required. At the end of the afternoon, my friend Cleon Statton (Klingon to us) mentioned a Grebe sedan cruiser lying in another yard (Action Marine on the South side). Perhaps we would like to have a look? Having wasted most of the day, we decided to keep going to the end of it.



Toby Lindo at the helm of the *ROBERT ALLAN II*.  
*Photo courtesy of Seth Anderson*



*ROBERT ALLAN II* won the People's Choice award at Venetian Night at Navy Pier in September 2015 for its decoration based on Disney's "Frozen"

*ROBERT ALLAN II* lay under a canvas cover and as they removed it, we began to succumb to the lines of the boat. I would say we were done for within ten minutes. She too needed a lot of work, but the die was cast. As it happened Kevin had seen her some years before but did not feel up to taking it on by himself. We formed a group and bought her from the yard the next Spring. She had been under cover at Action for the past 8 years.

## Our Team and Howie Greene

Three days after buying *ROBERT ALLAN II* we received a letter from the yard stating that Action was closing on the last day of May. Nothing works to concentrate the mind better than a deadline. Our team included three of the original cartel – Dietmar, Dan Snyder III and myself. We also had a good deal of help from others including the Boatwright, Tony Finnevaro, his assistant Sari, and Howie Greene, a hillbilly from Tennessee who lived down the street. If he could be roused in the morning, he was a hard worker (in those days).

Although I have been a lifelong Republican, I've often felt the best example of a perfect Communist society is a boat yard, where it sometimes turns out to be "from each according to his ability and to each according to his need." We had the benefit of help (in the form of advice, tools or even a hand) from quite a few of those in the yard. I think they wanted to see the old girl back in the water almost as much as we did.

Howie was a special case. He was a prodigious consumer of alcohol and had the nose to prove it. He was thin and wiry. He usually looked like he had been in a bar fight the night before whether he had or not. He did not care for most safety precautions. If he could make it to the yard, he would usually put in a good day.

As we began work on the bottom, Howie took on the task of sanding all 300 square feet of it with a palm sander. He wore a green union suit but refused mask or gloves. At the end of 8 hours he was totally covered with a fine layer of green dust. At Action, the last thing you did was go over to the office and clock out. As we started to punch out, the owner came out of the office. As I introduced him to Howie for the first time, Joe took the hand of this green apparition with astonishment. "I'm glad to finally meet someone uglier than me," he said.

### **ROBERT ALLAN II – the Launch**

The day of the launch was, as promised, the last day of operation for Action Marine - May 31, 1995. Joe had operated the yard on the principle (so it seemed) that it would be most cost-effective if everything collapsed the day after it closed, or maybe a little before. For the last few weeks, it was increasingly difficult to find a trash barrel with room for any more trash. At any rate, after a last week of 10 and then 12 and then even a few 14 hour days, we were ready, and the travel-trailer came for us at around 5:30 in the afternoon in the old brick shed on Cermak Road. A fair number of friends and fellow stragglers in the yard gathered round as the travel-trailer moved into position and cranked the boat up onto pads for the trip to the crane. Dan Snyder and I were standing in the aft cockpit near the starboard stanchion and as the boat began to emerge from the shed, we linked arms in the Russian fashion with a proper glass of rum each and proceeded to toast the moment. At that exact moment a cable on the travel-trailer snapped and the boat fell about a foot on the starboard side at the stern – about where we were standing. This brought proceedings to a halt. As we climbed down to examine the damage, we noted the pad under that portion of the bottom had punched the hull in several inches – but not through the planking.

After milling around for a bit and finding the yard did not seem to have a solution, a gentleman who had been building a steel boat near us piped up: he still had his welding equipment at the yard and would bring it over shortly and repair the broken cable - which he did. After some anxious moments, they again cranked the boat into position and proceeded out the gate, down Cermak Road to the river and set us under the crane. Tony, our Boatwright, opened the rear cockpit hatches and examined the damage from the inside. Although there was a noticeable dent in the hull, no frames had been cracked. This was in a part of the hull where Dietmar and I had sistered most of the frames on both sides. Had we not done so, I believe the fall would likely have cracked the planking and broken through the hull. Tony gave us the go-ahead and down she went – slowly of course, but finally into the water for the first time in eight years. We noted water coming through the planking, but not by any means at an alarming rate. We judged (accurately as it turned out) that if we left her in the slings overnight, she would swell up and we would be ready to go in the morning and that is what we did.

After we were reasonably assured of success, about ten of us gathered around the aft cockpit to celebrate the end of a very long day. Among our group were Dan, Dietmar, Kevin, Tony, Howie Greene and his brother Joe, our dear friend Adele Arlitt, and myself. We broke out the beer and began to relax. Finally, overcome by the outcome and long days of strain, and a breakdown of all reserve, Dietmar rose and proposed a toast: "To boats – they're better than women!" As we looked at one another, we considered the truth of this statement but also gazed at Adele, seated directly to Dietmar's left. This was a little before such commentary would become a pretext for lasting scorn and social ostracism. After drinking to this proposition, we observed Adele getting to her feet and lifting her glass: "and they're better than men too..." she said. Adele got us through a very tight passage right there.

*To Be continued.*

*The beautiful and historic Grebe ROBERT ALLAN II played a starring role in the WTTW documentary "Chicago by Boat: The New River Tour". Geoffrey Baer hosted the architectural and historical tour of the Chicago River aboard the ROBERT ALLAN II with Captain Toby at the helm.*

Enjoy video at:

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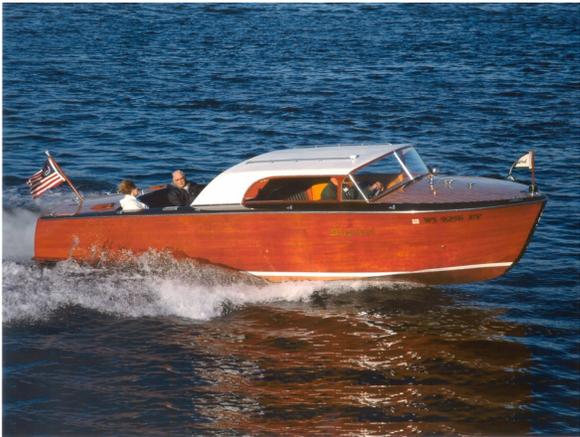
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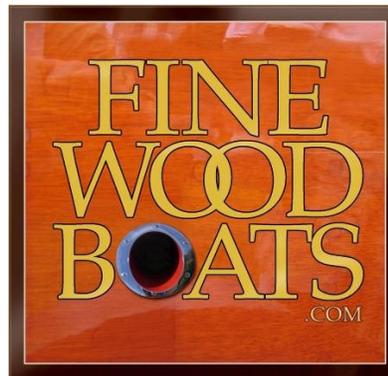
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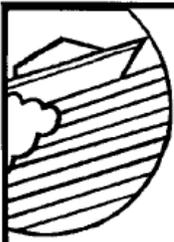
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Fri-Sun Sept 22-24, 2017	Geneva Lakes Antique & Classic Boat Show at The Abbey Resort
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