

FORMER LASER PERFORMANCE EXEC WANTS TO CHANGE SAILBOAT DESIGN

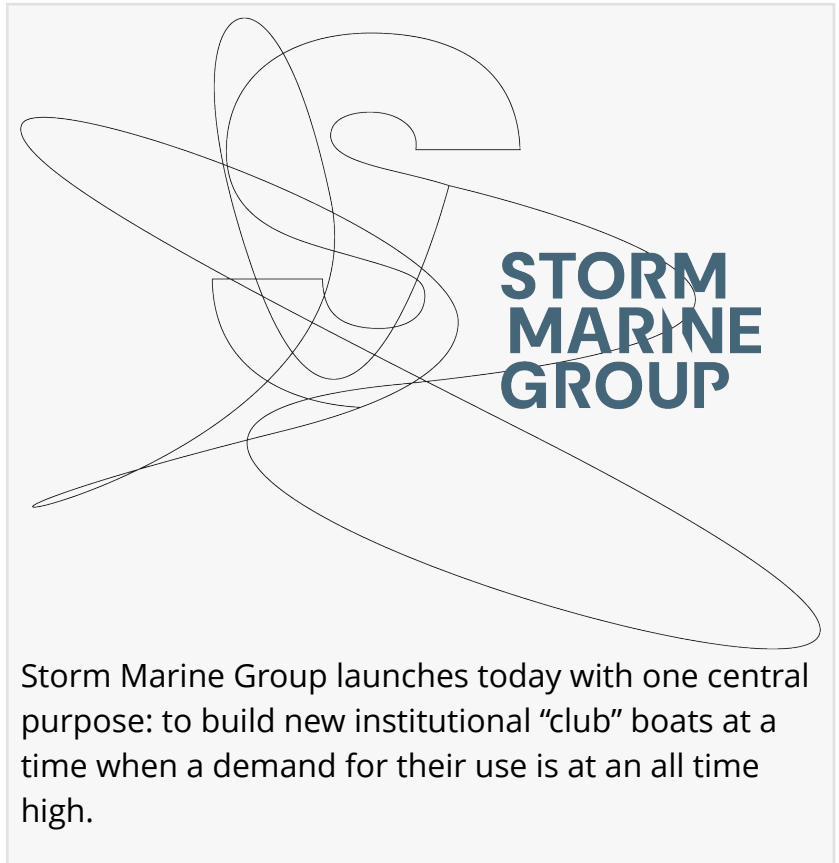
Bill Crane Launches the Storm Marine Group to Build Versatile, Affordable Institutional Sailboats

WESTON, CT, UNITED STATES, October 26, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Bill Crane and a group of influential marine industry experts and professionals today announced the launch of the Storm Marine Group (www.stormmarinegroup.com), a highly specialized organization that will dramatically change the approach to building and maintaining institutional sailboats in the United States.

"My partners and I have all grown up sailing and racing institutional boats," said Crane, who was the Chairman of the LaserPerformance Group and oversaw all aspects of popular small sailing craft such as the Laser and Sunfish boats. "Whether it be Ideal 18s, the Sonar 23 one design keelboat or various other classes, most of our time on the water has been sailing in club-owned fleets. We have a passion for these boats and want to build something that elevates the sport through new institutional boats that are affordable, durable, and easy to maintain."

Most institutional boats are designed for private clubs, public sailing centers and schools, and are built to accommodate two-five sailors. Many of the most historically popular classes are either no longer built at all, hard to replace and find parts for, or manufactured overseas at too high an expense for most US-based sailing organizations.

"We've all been the beneficiaries of institutional sailing all of our lives," says Storm Managing Partner Karl Ziegler, a longtime friend and sailing partner of Crane's from Darien's Noroton Yacht Club. Ziegler's background combines a long history in business management with an elite



background in international sailing competition and coaching. “If I was looking to get involved with a new business venture just to make a lot of money, this is not the choice I’d make. All of us see this as a mission and a passion and have a genuine desire to give back to the sport we love and help literally build its future.”

Crane and his two partners in this venture have been talking about this idea for several years, and then the recreational sports boom brought on by COVID changed the climate. Many of their influential friends in the industry and amongst the regional and national sailing community started noticing a surge of interest in learn-to-sail programs and in memberships at private clubs and public sailing centers.



Bill Crane and his two partners share a lifelong passion for sailing institutional "club" boats. He is pictured here (left) with both of them: Chris Daley (center) and Managing Partner Karl Ziegler (right) racing a club Sonar.

“COVID brought sailing back to Marblehead (Massachusetts) in a big way,” says regional sailing legend Robbie Doyle, who has distinguished himself in the sport sailing everything from dinghies and club boats to trimming main sails in the America’s Cup for Ted Turner (and as the founder of Doyle Sails). “I told Bill (Crane) about all the calls we were getting from people either interested in learning to sail or getting back into the sport, and they seemed more interested in joining clubs and using boats from house fleets rather than buying their own boat.”

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Feedback like this was coming from other similar friends in contacts all over the northeast and Florida, and from sources in California and the Great Lakes. A sport that has been challenged for years to grow beyond its traditional base and audience might finally have an historic opportunity to grow and attract new sailors (and make it easier for them to find learn-to-sail programs).

“I’ve been sailing with Karl (Ziegler) since we were kids, and we’ve experienced the sport at every level, from junior sailing lessons to top international competitions together,” said Chris Daley, SMG’s third partner. “We’ve spent years talking about what’s wrong with the current equipment,

and since all of us have ample experience in business and sailing, we think now is finally the time to do more than talk about it.”

While the power boat sales boom during COVID has finally peaked and started to slow down (in January, new boat registrations were down 23.6% from January 2022 according to Michigan-based Statistical Surveys), sailboat registrations were up 1.2% for the same period

(<https://www.tradeonlytoday.com/columns-blogs/sales-declines-continued-in-early-2023>). There are no studies yet to illustrate the boom public sailing centers and clubs are experiencing, but Crane and his team are getting calls from all over the country as these organizations really struggle with aging group fleets and replacement costs.



Yacht Clubs and public sailing centers throughout the northeast report a surge of interest since COVID, and as a result the demand on existing fleets is way up. Club boats provide the fastest gateway to learning to sail.

“We concluded that there is a fairly immediate need for versatile boats that can serve beginners learning to sail and fleet sailors that race every Wednesday,” says Crane. “They need to be relatively inexpensive, simple, stable and easy to sail, but also offer enough performance to surprise and delight the more experienced sailors.”

Crane also noted that boat design in all sizes has traditionally neglected the needs of women and the physically challenged, and that his team is developing ideas that will address those constituencies as well. The World Sailing Trust recently put forward several recommendations about meeting the needs of women sailors and is actively working with leaders in the industry to develop best practice guidance for gender equal design which Crane says SMG will participate in. Crane also says the company is working with officials at US Sailing and other experts on the needs of the adaptive sailing community.

During his tenure with LaserPerformance, Crane’s focus was on the global strategic direction of the company which included marketing, new product development, sponsorships, community marketing clubs, yacht club relations, global retail and/or distribution relationships, Olympic Sailing, Collegiate Sailing, High School Sailing, International Laser Class, International Sunfish Class, Club420 Class Association, World Sailing and the associated MNAs.

“We were able to make a real difference increasing access to dinghy sailing all over the world, especially in the Sunfish and Laser classes,” said Crane. “We did everything we could to support

both development programs and key regattas in all our classes. With Storm we want to do even more to support youth sailing, especially at the collegiate level.”

The company plans to formally announce details of its first major project in early November. For more information go to www.stormmarinegroup.com.

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