



Keith (left) and Capt. Chris (right) Wachter represent the third and second generation of American Marine's family run business that's been a fixture in the Commack area for over 30 years.

Local Review:

American Marine

Long Island's Key West Dealer

By Capt. John N. Raguso

Located on Jericho Turnpike in Commack, only a short cast from the crossroads of the Sunken Meadow Parkway in western Suffolk County Long Island, American Marine has been a special resource to north shore trailer boaters for over 30 years. As the Northeast's largest Key West boat dealer, American Marine has been supplying many of the sportfishing platforms used by locals as they ply their favorite fishing spots both on the nearby Long Island Sound and the Great South Bay, located approximately 10 miles south of the storefront.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Family owned and operated since 1973, American Marine has been servicing Long Island boaters for over 30 years. I recently spent some time with American Marine President, Capt. Chris Wachter, who first worked with his dad Richard when he initially graduated from high school. They started the business based on their common love for boating and the thought that it would be a great opportunity to have the chance to work at something that they both liked to do. A few years into the startup in 1978, they moved the operation to its present location at 2161 Jericho Turnpike, a convenient corner storefront operation that includes a secure outside storage area for about 15 boats, a complete mechanical repair facility, a parts warehouse, plus a small over-the-counter operation for marine parts, propellers and engine sales. After a short two-year stint at the NY Maritime College, Chris' son Keith decided to join in the family business, making it the third generation of Wachters to heed the call of the sea. Taking this family pedigree for careers in the boating world two steps further, Chris' brother Paul is also a Key West boat dealer, situated in New Bern, NC, and his younger daughter is currently a junior at the US Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY. They really do have saltwater running in their veins.

Chris Wachter's love for boating is more than just as a business. Capt. Chris has been a boater all of his life and has a 100-ton USCG Masters License. He constantly shares his local knowledge, passion and many years of valuable boating experience with his customers in a friendly and cordial atmosphere, which keeps them coming back. His passion for boating, personal attention to detail and commitment to quality have afforded American Marine the opportunity to continue to serve boating enthusiasts for four decades and counting.

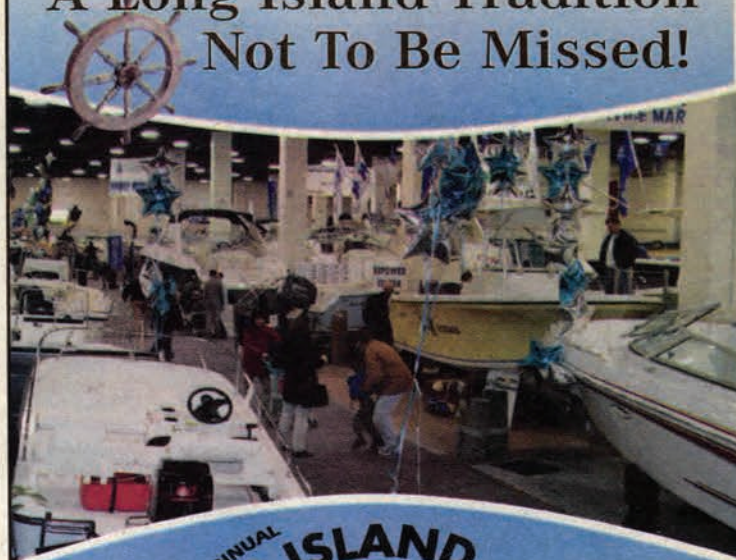
BUSINESS FIRST

While other larger and flashier boat dealerships have come and gone over the past 30 years on the Island, American Marine has flourished taking a slow, steady and consistent approach with its customer base, which is primarily Long Islanders. Their reputation for honest, prompt service is enviable in an industry that can at times have some opportunistic and unsavory characters. Their award winning service center features a fully stocked parts inventory for Evinrude/Johnson, Mercury, Yamaha, MerCruiser I/O and Volvo-Penta. Their retail store offers one of the largest parts inventories in the area for do-it-yourselfers.

THE "KEY" TO THEIR SUCCESS

One of the real "Keys" to American Marine's continued success and longevity in a business that can really have some unforgiving seasonal and cyclical ups and downs, was returning to the Key West sport fishing boat franchise in the 1990s. Key West boats have been manufactured in South Carolina since 1986, literally right across the street from the more famous Scout Boat facility. As a matter of fact, there is more than just a "coincidental" relationship of geographical proximity between these two boatbuilders. Hutch Holsburg, the owner of Key West Boats, is the brother of Scout's co-owner,

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who is married to Scout's President Steve Potts, the other co-owner. Although they don't share research or design concepts, it's my understanding that they may buy hardware, resin and fiberglass reinforcements from the same sources, thus creating some elementary and generic economies of scale that benefit both companies.

Key West manufactures over 1,000 boats per year in two plants and historically has focused on entry-level and moderately experienced boaters as their preferred target market segment. The current lineup for 2005 includes a total of 19 models from 15 to 23 feet, which includes dual consoles, center consoles, walkarounds, a trio of bay/reef boats, a Stealth flats boat, plus a deck boat. Key West currently offers pre-rigged engine packages from Suzuki, Mercury, Honda, Yamaha and Johnson, so matching up one of these hulls to your favorite brand or type of power, whether it is two-stroke or four-cycle, should present minimal impediments to your purchase process. From the reliable scuttlebutt I could gather at American Marine, Key West has been working on some larger hulls for their sport fishing fleet over the past few years that are VERRRRY close to being added to the product line. Capt. Chris Wachter showed me some photos of a prototype 29-foot center console model that he had sea-trialed recently down in sunny South Carolina. It was based on an overall length of 29-feet with a wide 9-foot, 6-inch beam. Rigged with a pair of Yamaha F225 four-strokes and set up on a beefy trailer, this package is planned to go out the door at a very reasonable \$110K, which compared to some other 29-foot CCs is a bargain. According to Chris, Key West is also working on a pair of wide-beam 26-footers that are also based on a 9-foot, 6-inch beam, with one offering a center console floor plan and the other to be based on a yet-to-be-determined cuddy layout, like an express or walkaround. The new 26CC is planned to make a tour of the upcoming winter boat show circuit and will probably make its debut at the Boston Boat Show in February, with a follow-up performance at the South Carolina Boat Show in March.

From a quality standpoint, all Key West boats are built to last over the long haul. Key West uses top-shelf fiberglass and composite components to construct their boats, eliminating the use of wood and offering a 10-year limited structural warranty. I recently tested a 225CC Key West and found that it offered a very functional layout, good fit and finish, plus plenty of room for a quartet of anglers to enjoy their sport. Rigged with a Yamaha F225 four-stroke, the 225CC produced a top end speed near 50 mph, with fuel efficient cruising speeds ranging between 25 to 40 mph. This allows the user to take advantage of existing sea conditions; either to pop the hammer down to reach the fishing grounds ASAP, or to slow it down to minimize bounces and spray. One of the best things about this boat was its price tag, which was in the low \$30s and clearly \$20K cheaper than some competitive craft that didn't offer too much more functionality or seaworthiness.

IN SUMMARY

Capt. Chris Wachter, his son Keith and the entire crew at American Marine are a model success story of how a small family business can grow and prosper in our changing local marketplace, create an identity for themselves through hard work and customer service, add value to the process over the long term and give boat owners and outboard buyers a really good reason to stop by and conduct business. If you're in the Commack neighborhood, why not stop by 2161 Jericho Turnpike and say hello, or give them a call at 631-543-6433. You can also visit their website at www.americanmarinecorp.com.

For more information on Key West Boats, contact them at 843-873-0112 or visit them on the Internet at www.keywest-boatsinc.com.

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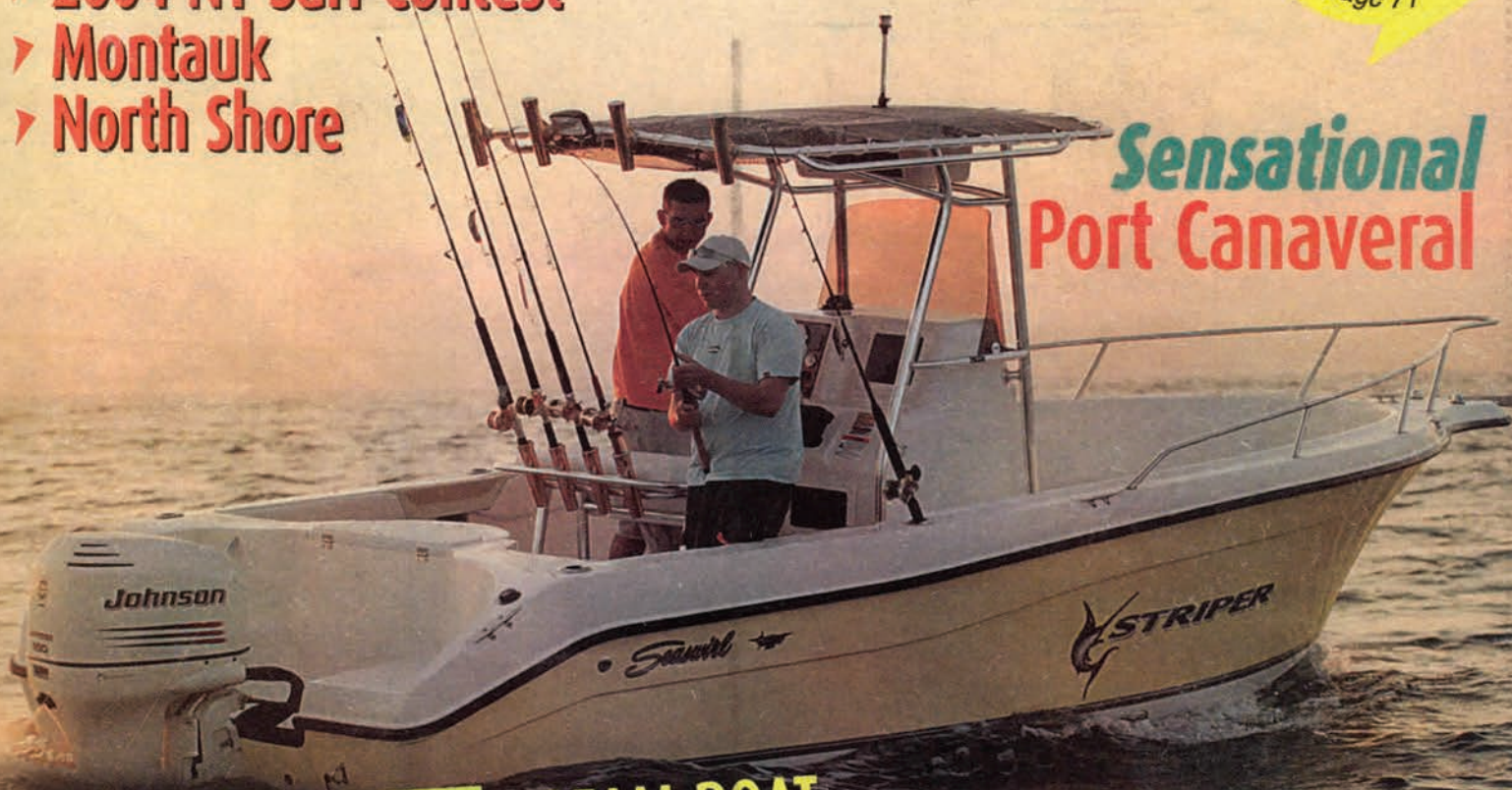
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