



# Trinity Triumphs

Tenacious. Tough. Thriving. Together. Today.

**M**ary P, Lady Linda and Mustang Sally aren't designated names for Hurricane Season 2006. They're three of the seven vessels ordered by customers of Trinity Yachts since Hurricane Katrina topped the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005.

With 18 yachts in backlog and 420 grateful employees redeployed in Gulfport, Mississippi, Trinity Yachts is an unstoppable, boat-building boomtown. While expansion was always front and center, it took a devastating hurricane to spearhead revolutionary growth. This manufacturer now has the capacity to fabricate eight to ten megayachts annually, under 19 acres of covered workspace at its two facilities, with a ceiling height of 90 feet, enough to accommodate five 5-deck yachts.

In a region whose people are still suffering after the worst natural disaster in American history, Trinity Yachts is a bonafide business case study in successful crisis management. Nine months later, Trinity has bounced back with vigor from a catastrophic event that crippled and closed thousands of businesses.

It wasn't easy. Words can't describe what the world's sixth largest custom yacht builder and its courageous, shell-shocked employees have been through. Their faces show signs of a harrowing nine months, where personal stress, physical fatigue and occasional depression have left their mark. They've lost weight, too. John Dane, President of Trinity Yachts, calls it The Katrina Diet. "If you wanted a tree trunk moved, you sawed it and lifted it yourself," Dane said.

With no electricity or cell phones, each day was a struggle. "After the storm, it was like living 100 years ago," said Billy Smith, Vice President. "We communicated face-to-face and left notes. But never once did we discuss throwing in the towel." He's proud of what the company's accomplished and is psyched about its future.

Only two months after Katrina, Trinity's presentation at the Ft. Lauderdale International Boat Show of the invincible *Zoom, Zoom, Zoom, Mustang Sally* (ex *Lady Florence*), *Big Easy* and *Mia Elise*, the largest steel hull motoryacht built in the United States in 50 years, made the yachting world stand up and take notice. Trinity's clientele, primarily American entrepreneurs now sprinkled with international customers from Canada, New Zealand, the Middle East and Indonesia, rewarded that achievement with new challenges. "It's not just who can build a boat at the best price, they want a Trinity," Smith says. "We have evolved from good, better, best. They know we can do this."

Trinity now builds Northern European-style interiors. Steel and aluminum yachts are produced in the new Gulfport headquarters, with the newly reopened New Orleans yard building aluminum hulls and decks to support the Gulfport yard. "We have 150 employees who used to work in New Orleans that haven't moved to Gulfport," Smith said. That will bring the company's employment to 670, exceeding the company's pre-Katrina



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numbers. The damaged New Orleans facility will be partially operational this summer, launching hulls with a 350-ton travel lift.

Gulfport is poised to build 100-meter yachts. "Anyone who thinks we're not planning on building more yachts in steel is mistaken," Smith says. "We're adding a 3,700-ton synchrolift for launching the steel yachts and are currently building a 180-foot long, 35.5-foot beam yacht. One of the reasons for our success is that we try to keep the yacht building experience enjoyable and pleasurable for the client."

Safe and sound in Charlotte, North Carolina after the hurricane, Felix Sabates, chairman, was the only one in the company with working telephones, fax and e-mail access. With 13 boats on order when Katrina hit, Sabates and Dane called each customer with the sobering truth: "We saved your boat. It's intact, but we have no idea when we'll get back

to finishing it." Twelve of the 13 customers reached out, sending money, airboats, equipment and supplies with well wishes. "People gave a damn about us," Dane says, still moved by the outpouring of support.

As a privately held company, Trinity was able to make decisions quickly. Each passing post-Katrina day would scatter their evacuated workforce farther across the map. They tracked down 90 percent of their employees within four days, using a clique system: "Call a buddy and tell them to get to work. Spread the word." An emergency website was implemented with a toll-free telephone number, so that workers who fled to other cities could check in.

The easiest decision John Dane made following the hurricane was finding another facility to build boats. "It's what I know how to do. Our employees needed their paychecks; some live week to week. Our customers were depending on us." On the other hand, his hardest decision was dou-

bling down his investment—betting \$20 million on the new Trinity. "Seven-hundred people and 13 clients were depending on me. I knew I had to do it as an owner."

"Our people needed jobs, a place to live and cash money in their pockets," Dane says. After the storm, having all the money in Fort Knox meant nothing because ATMs were down and no one had access to funds. No one anticipated the scale of the disaster. 80 percent of New Orleans flooded. Scores of workers evacuated with the clothes on their backs and many had nothing to go back to, except their jobs.

Trinity put \$1,500 in each employee's pocket after the storm and spent \$4 mil-



**"We all came into this world with nothing. And we'll leave with nothing. What counts is what we do every day in-between. We appreciate what we have today," says Billy Smith.**



Before Hurricane Katrina



After Hurricane Katrina



lion on mobile homes and trailers to house stranded families. The employees who manned the two yachts during the storm and those whose trucks were flooded received replacement vehicles from grateful owners. Management bought bicycles for displaced kids who'd lost their toys.

"To see a child come up on their bike and say, 'Thank you, Mr. John—' that makes me well up inside," Dane says. But the top dog definitely relates. Dane left his three-story waterfront home in Pass Christian, Mississippi with the hatches battened down and his boats secured. He recalls moving a box of his sailing mementos, carefully collected over 40 years by his father, to the third floor. Dane still kicks himself for passing by that box umpteen times, thinking it was safe. He never saw it again.

"We never expected to come back to this," he said, sitting on the slab of his former home. After hours of punishing hurricane-force winds and tornados, a 30-foot tsunami

consumed what was left of Dane's house and town. The force of the wind and floating debris peeled the bark off pine trees, still littered today with spinnakers blown hither and yond from his garage. Dane may be at the top of the totem pole, but he feels the same loss as his shipwrights. Looking at the Mississippi coast that was obliterated and the ghost-town of abandoned, flood-ravaged homes and businesses in New Orleans, he shares their grief.

Crisis can make or break people. The employees of Trinity Yachts have shown true grit. "Every person was tested to their limits," says Wayne Bourgeois, CEO and backbone of Trinity's reincarnation. "Office workers power-washed floors, engineers floated sheetrock." Everyone stepped up with a can-do attitude to make the new Mississippi site, also damaged from Katrina, a habitable, prosperous workplace.

Geoff Van Aller, chief designer, lived in one of the Trinity trailers for five months after losing all three of his family homes. When

a relative in Oklahoma asked if he needed anything, he requested only underwear and a razor. "Getting shaving cream was a bonus," Van Aller says. "Now, we only buy what we really need. The rest is all just stuff."

Many employees, like Jim Berulis, production manager, learned patience, building boats by day and repairing homes by night and weekends. The hurricane took its toll on his employees; stress initiated divorces. "Everyone suffered," Berulis says. "Everyone knows someone who lost everything. The hardest thing was Wayne keeping people focused on work when their minds were everywhere else."

But the employees of Trinity have good jobs building boats. And for this, they are extremely grateful. Many of their stranded neighbors, whom they may never locate again, are still unemployed, watching CNN reports of their devastated region from some dank motel in Podunkville. The best way to bring a community back after devastation is to create jobs and put money in pockets. Trinity's ac-



complished that, in spades. Its prosperity is both miraculous and well-deserved.

Dane is proud to have smart, capable partners. It allows him a break to go sailing occasionally, where he marks new achievements for a new memorabilia box. Dane just won the Bacardi Cup Regatta, beating nine other international competitors. In May, he won the Western Hemisphere Championships and is currently ranked first in the United States in the Star Class. At 56, he's training to represent the US in the Star Class in the Olympics in Beijing in 2008.

"I've sailed my whole life. I love to compete hard at it and concentrate." Sailing is Dane's salvation from stress and an unconscious stimulus of Trinity's rapid, mystical remobilization.

An experienced sailor like John Dane expects the wind against him. There's no way to always have the wind at your back. Sooner or later, you have to go upwind and tack. Tacking is strategy: reading wind direction, knowing your

boat, determining which way to go.

Dane's driven to cross the finish line first one way or another, be it a regatta or a corporate revitalization. It's his skill. It's God's gift. And his judgment has led Trinity through an epic rebuilding process with 18 yachts in production, a windfall from the hurricane.

Standing on his old pier, Dane remembers little wine and cheese parties, watching the sunset with his wife. He reminisces about the three boats he tied down before he evacuated. An 86-foot houseboat, aptly named *Showdown*, was the sole survivor, providing refuge for his family and friends for 13 weeks following Katrina.

The sun still sets in the west every evening, albeit sans wine and cheese soirees. But the real constant in John Dane's whirlwind of change is the employees of Trinity. They build yachts...come hell or high water. 🍷

**"Never once did we say, 'We're out of business.' If you take care of today, tomorrow will take care of itself."**

TRINITY YACHTS IN PRODUCTION	DELIVERY
Mine Games 164	2007
Carpe Diem 186	2009
Wheels 164	2009
Lady Linda 186	2009
Lady Linda 157	2006
Big Zip 142	2009
Mine Games 190	2009
Mustang Sally 183	2008
Mustang Sally 161	2007
Mary P 117	2008
Marsha Kay 135	2008
Unbridled 191	2008
Imagine 161	2006
Norwegian Queen II 164	2007
Anjilis 161	2008
Corrie Lynn 179	2008
Lohengrin 161	2006
Lady Michelle 163	2007