

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

Dick Lazzara of Lazzara Yachts is a man of many passions, but it's his zest for life, the ocean and the yachts he builds that's gotten him through life's unexpected surprises with flying colors.

Text by Lisa Knapp
Photos courtesy of Lazzara Yachts



Born with prime American yacht-building genes, Dick Lazzara enjoys everything the U.S. has to offer in and out of the water — whether he's cruising on his new LSX or riding one of his Clydesdales on his ranch.

When a man tells you he's the last of a dying breed and raises Clydesdales on a ranch, you might wonder who is really watching the barn while considering also who this person really is at his core.

Since the dude on the ranch in question is Dick Lazzara, you probably know he is watching the barn...and the store. He's one of the last yacht manufacturer/owners to design, engineer, build, sell, and race both sailing and power yachts. As the patriarch of a privately held, third-generation family company, his sons, Joey, Tony and Richie are niched in different disciplines.

While his progeny and their cousins run the yacht-building company that he started with brother, Brad, Lazzara is a proud papa for more than one reason. His Clydesdales are alive and kicking, too.

Mama Belle just gave birth in late March to Georgia. "Ray Charles' song was on when she was born," Lazzara says of the baby foal's namesake. The music wasn't playing when Georgia's older sibling, Heartbutt, was born. A white, heart-shaped birthmark and patch of hair on his rear end inspired his identity. You can't catch Georgia's birth on NannyCam, but you can relive the delivery on MareStare.com. "I tell the boys we ought to put horses on the company website. We get more hits for 'Legacy Clydesdales' than yachts. People all over the world watch. The last two horses have drawn a lot of attention — more than 100,000 hits recently."

Dick Lazzara is one of the last remaining yacht manufacturers/owners to design, engineer, build and sell both sailing and power yachts to a global market.



Dick Lazzara (left) is the patriarch of his privately held third-generation yacht-building family company, one that was founded when his father built his first fiberglass sailboat in 1954.

Lazzara's ranch in Lithia, Florida, spans 10 acres and he had quarter horses and Arabians before Clydesdales. The ranch and the horses are his hobby and refuge. "I lived a fast life for a lot of years, but being at the ranch is like the water in Key West," he says. "It is so peaceful and quiet out in the middle of nowhere with the stars out at night. It reminds me of the same serenity of the water to refresh the brain and keep coming up with innovative ideas for boats. It's a nice break."

He tiptoes through the tulips, too, the ones that the horses leave on the ground for him. Lazzara likes mowing pastures. They have a beginning, middle and end, so it's the type of contained project, albeit 10 acres, that you can envision completing. It's rather therapeutic. He enjoys the rural areas of Florida as much as the coastline. "I put on my overalls, get on the tractor and forget about the world out there. I like working in my shop with my woodworking tools. I built my gazebo and shutters. I'm at that stage of my life right now."

The solitude of the ranch provides him with the opportunity to clear his head every day. It means an hour's drive to his company's Tampa headquarters at 6 a.m. He leaves at 4:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m., depending upon the traffic and the day's duties. He winds down on his ride home. "Dad's the first one there in the morning and the last to leave at night," says his son, Joey. "He leads by example."

A tradition of pride and dedication to the pursuit of perfection is a Lazzara family tradition that Dick learned from his dad in Chicago, where his father built his first fiberglass sailboat in 1954. Lazzara, 56, started sailing and fishing at age three on Lake Michigan and traded in shoveling snow for sand at age nine when the family moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. He raced sailboats in the Southern Ocean Racing Circuit (SORC) and played football as a split-end at the University of Florida. Lazzara has an absolute love for the Bahamas, as his father once lived on Cat Cay.

Among his adrenaline-packed hobbies, Dick Lazzara raced sailboats in the Southern Ocean Racing Circuit. In 2001, his passion led to a horrific accident which left him barely hanging on for more than a month. Needless to say, he recovered and bounced back in full force.



In 1971, he was drafted by the Coast Guard and served in the North Atlantic during the Vietnam War and was assigned to the secret service in 1972 to a presidential support detail in Miami to protect President Nixon. Then he joined Pop in the family business, Gulfstar, building trawlers and motor sailers in 1974. "It was a fast indoctrination to yacht building with 400 other employees," he says.

The company merged with Viking in 1987, where Lazzara spent three years before opening Lazzara Yachts in 1991 with his brother and father. He grew up with icons in the industry, learning design purism from Olin Stephens, the execution of craftsmanship from Henry Hinckley and brokerage from Dick Bertram.

Dick Lazzara says he hopes his company leads the charge on more fuel-efficient and green boats, inspiring other yacht builders to follow suit in the process.

Lazzara is proud that his brother, Brad, and he have been in business for 35 years. He hopes it's still there 25 years from now, although

it might have a different outlook. He's the grandfather of four girls and wonders if the next generation of the company will be dominated by more estrogen. Regardless, he sees the company as being an innovator in design and manufacturing processes as it has been with the Lazzara Quad 75, a project in which his son, Joey, was a member of the design team.

Lazzara hopes the company is leading the charge on more fuel-efficient and green boats. The LSX does more with less: less fuel consumption, horsepower, vibrations, noise and emissions. "This is a new class for an American boat, but its time has come," he says. "We might be on the leading edge, but that's where our company's always been."

Lazzara's son, Joey, joined the company after Dick had a horrific accident in 2001 while racing offshore powerboats. "It was a long, tough road for my family and they really hung together," says Dick.

"They didn't know whether or not I would live for over a month after the accident."

It's hard to believe that a devastatingly handsome man like Dick Lazzara hovered near death for a month or suffered severe facial trauma. To the people who know him as a rancher, they'd be surprised to know he raced boats in a fast-paced lifestyle that his horses would whinny in disapproval at. "I crashed at 90 miles per hour and had life-threatening injuries, including a fractured sinus cavity. They said to expect blindness within three years. My jaws were wired shut, I had seven titanium plates, an optical metal screen and more than 400 stitches."

Lazzara was fortunate to survive the accident and come back to the yachts that are his passion, the company that he has nurtured, and the family that he loves. He is a relaxed, calm man who is happy as a clam with a lasagna dinner, a little merlot and his overalls. "God only gave us so many days on Earth," he says. "The ones at sea don't count against you." 🍷