

A \$20 million renovation transforms a marina into a megayacht destination



by Rob Preston

Palm Harbor Marina in West Palm Beach, Fla., completed a \$20 million renovation in November 2009.

The renovations at Palm Harbor Marina transformed a modest marina into one of the best megayacht facilities on the eastern seaboard. Palm Harbor Marina, a 200-slip facility in West Palm Beach, Fla., spent \$20 million on new docks, a new seawall, dredging, and a new yacht club facility. Remarkably, it finished the renovations in one year!

The old marina

Palm Harbor Marina has been run by Leisure Resorts, LLC, a division of Chase Enterprises, for more than 30 years on a lease from the city of West Palm Beach. Until about a year ago, the marina was an aging facility with fixed wooden docks, a small supplies store, and some bathroom and laundry facilities. The wooden docks weren't wired for cable, Wi-Fi, or slip-side pumpouts, and Cheryl Chase, executive vice president of Chase Enterprises, said the marina had started to look old and tired.

Its 30-year-old wooden docks and

seawall were falling apart in spots. Chase took this opportunity to not only improve the existing marina, which accommodated boats between 30 and 70 feet, but to transform it into one of the best megayacht marinas in Florida. "We saw that larger boats didn't have anywhere to go in Palm Beach. So we wanted to meet that demand," said Chase.

Chase made the decision to make Palm Harbor Marina the new home for these 50- to 250-foot megayachts. To meet the demands of that clientele, Palm Harbor needed to be dredged, it needed new docks, a new seawall, and a first-class yacht club building with every amenity these high-end boaters and their crews would want. Chase had one more requirement of this major renovation. It had to be done within a year. "We pressured ourselves to get this renovation done so we could re-open and take advantage of at least part of the November to May boating season," said Chase.

In March 2009, Palm Harbor Marina

This is what Palm Harbor Marina looked like before the renovation with its old wooden docks. ▼



closed down and broke ground on its renovation. The first steps were removing the old docks and dredging the marina.

Dredging

To accommodate megayachts, Palm Harbor Marina needed to be dredged to 11 feet. Chase Enterprises hired Murphy Construction out of West Palm Beach,

Fla., to do the needed dredging. Murphy Construction dredged 120,000 cubic yards of material from the marina, which was later used to fill in holes in the Intercoastal Waterway.

With any dredging project of this magnitude, Palm Harbor Marina and Moffatt & Nichol, an engineering firm that was hired for this project, both had to work with the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to get the needed permitting. As a result of the permitting process, Murphy Construction was restricted from dredging in a few small sections of the marina where there was seagrass and underwater utility lines.

Murphy was able to dredge the rest of the marina as long as the dredging was done mechanically with an excavator using a clam shell instead of using a hydraulic dredge. The Corps and DEP made this restriction because mechanical dredging wouldn't cause as much turbidity or cloudiness in the water as a hydraulic dredge would. A hydraulic dredge sucks water and sediment through a pipe to an offsite location.

Once the sediment was dredged, it had to be extensively tested for metal content, hydrocarbons, and pollutants before it could be used as fill in the Intercoastal Waterway. Once the sediment was found to be safe, the permits required Murphy Construction to use an excavator to put the sediment into the Intercoastal Waterway due to turbidity concerns.

The dredging process took about six months to complete. To save time, once Murphy Construction dredged a section of the marina, Marinetek North America began installing the new docks in that section while the dredging operation moved on to another section.

Concrete docks

Before Palm Harbor Marina was closed down for this renovation, Cheryl Chase and Bob Nathan, senior vice president of Moffatt & Nichol, had to decide what kind of docks to install. "Through my family's 30 years of experience in boating and an analysis we conducted with other boat captains and marinas, we came to the conclusion that a concrete floating dock system was the best option for our marina because of its strength," said Chase.

Nathan then found several concrete dock manufacturers and introduced them to Chase. One of those companies was Marinetek, a concrete dock manufacturer from Finland that had been looking for an opportunity to break into the American market. Chase gave Marinetek that opportunity when she awarded the company the contract to build and install the concrete docks for Palm Harbor Marina, provided the company would build a factory in the U.S. so they would be close by in case there were any problems.

With its first American project secure, Marinetek North America opened its first office in West Palm Beach, Fla., in March 2009, which created 150 new jobs for the area. "Within 45 days of the contract with Palm Harbor Marina, we had our tooling and factory set up and ready to go. We couldn't have entered the U.S.



Palm Harbor Marina keeps its new concrete docks well lit at night to prevent tripping hazards.



Palm Harbor Marina's fitness area is where boaters can come and use any of the eight stationary cardio machines.

market without this project," said Chris Clark, president of Marinetek North America. Marinetek built 200 concrete floating slips for Palm Harbor with steel pilings that go down 25 feet in the soil and three feet into the bedrock and pile guide wheels that allow the docks to fluctuate with the changing tide.

The docks took four months to install and per Corps and DEP requirements, they couldn't be within 100 feet of the Intercoastal Waterway to prevent any potential collisions with boat traffic. These new state-of-the-art docks were a major upgrade compared to the old wooden docks because of their strength and all the amenities that came with them. Those amenities included extra wide gangways and finger piers, more stability, a higher freeboard for bigger boats, single- and three-phase power with surge protection to accommodate megayachts, in-slip pumpouts, gates with key card access for added security, and high-speed diesel and gasoline pumps on the fuel dock.

Thanks to the stability of these new docks, Palm Harbor is



Palm Harbor Marina installed security gates and cameras during its multi-million dollar renovation to protect its boaters and their prized possessions.

now designed to withstand Category 3 hurricanes without boats, and boaters can more easily dock their boats in rough weather. The new concrete docks can also support the golf cart traffic used to transport boaters and their supplies throughout the marina. After the dredging was done and the new docks were in place, Murphy Construction began building a new concrete seawall at Palm Harbor Marina.

Seawall

Even though the old seawall was deteriorating, it couldn't be removed because there was infrastructure behind it that could be compromised if exposed to the elements. Therefore, Palm Harbor Marina decided to build a new seawall one foot in front of the existing seawall to protect the old seawall and the infrastructure behind it.

Palm Harbor Marina and Moffatt & Nichol considered two different materials for the seawall, steel sheet pilings and concrete. In the end, they chose concrete because it was more cost effective, and it was just as strong as the steel sheet piling, which used some concrete as well.

The dredging contractor, Murphy Construction, was also chosen to build the new seawall. Murphy drove the seawall into the seabed using concrete piles.

Unlike the other changes made to the marina, the seawall required minimal permitting because the Corps and DEP both determined that if the seawall was kept within one foot of the old seawall, then the marina would get an exemption, meaning that a permit wasn't required because the change was considered to have a minimal impact on the surrounding area.

Although the seawall project did get an exemption, Gabe Perdomo, coastal engineer with Moffatt & Nichol, said Palm Harbor Marina did the right thing working with the necessary

regulatory agencies instead of assuming the seawall would be exempt from permitting.

He recommends that marinas always involve regulators in any project regardless of the size to prevent problems down the road. "It's never a bad idea to check with regulatory agencies on any and all projects even if they meet the requirements for exemption," said Perdomo.

Now that the infrastructure was secure with the new seawall, it was time for the marina to build a new yacht club building.

Yacht club

In August 2009, Palm Harbor Marina worked with Glidden Spina & Partners, an architectural firm in West Palm Beach, Fla., to build a new yacht club to entertain boat owners and their crews. "Megayacht boaters have come to expect some of the perks of home at the marina, and they will choose a marina based on the perks that are offered," said Chase.

So Palm Harbor included a fitness area with eight stationary cardio machines and free weights, a kitchen with tables, chairs, and a microwave, an entertainment area with pool tables, an X-box, multiple flat screen TVs, and two Internet stations, four restrooms with granite countertops, stone floors, showers, and washers and dryers for boaters to do their laundry.

Remarkably the new yacht club building and the rest of the renovations were complete on November 1, 2009, and were commemorated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 25, 2010, one year after the renovation started.

Grand opening

Now that Palm Harbor Marina had been transformed into a top notch megayacht marina, the next step was getting the word out to boaters. So the marina held its ribbon-cutting ceremony on the same day as the beginning of the four-day Palm Beach International Boat Show, which was held next door to the marina. The boat show, which attracts about 50,000 boaters to the area, used one of Palm Harbor Marina's new megayacht docks, giving boaters a firsthand look at the new marina.

Chase said Palm Harbor Marina won't know the true impact of this exposure until next boating season, which starts in November 2010. The marina's new concierge service that can make reservations for boaters at restaurants or golf courses and can provide discounts at local businesses and the HMY Yacht Sales office that will open at the marina in September should help bolster next season's numbers, said Chase.

Palm Harbor Marina is in the process of getting its Clean Marina designation, which requires the marina to have slip-side pumpouts and abundant trash and recycling receptacles, among other requirements. The marina is also planning more dredging to allow easier access to the marina from the Lake Worth Inlet. "We are very proud of how far this marina has come in such a short amount of time. It is our hope that Palm Harbor Marina will be a megayacht destination for years to come," said Chase. ⚓