

History of Orleans Marina Tenants Association

The Orleans Marina Tenants Association (OMTA) evolved in 1986, as a result of concerns of marina tenants and for interactions with the Levee Board committee.

Briefly, with the completion of the South Shore Marina, in 1986, and a lack of tenants in the South Shore Marina, there was a move by the Levee Board Committee to have any vessel in the Orleans Marina which extended out from the end pilings of their mooring slip move to South Shore Marina.

About 60 Orleans Marina tenants, at a meeting at South Shore Harbor, left the meeting and, in the parking lot, formed the Orleans Marina Tenants Association. The aim was to ensure that the concerns of Orleans Marina tenants would be considered and represented in discussions with the Levee Board committee.

The OMTA board included a number of civil and naval engineers, naval architects, lawyers, and other professionals. They elected to provide a report of a survey of the Orleans Marina, which they would present with recommendations to the Levee Board committee. A great deal of effort was expended to measure accurately each slip in the Orleans Marina and the width of each fairway, using aerial photographs and actual measurements.

When presented with the document prepared by the Orleans Marina Tenants Association board which also had recommendations for relocating vessels in the Orleans Marina to more appropriate sized slips, the Levee Board committee gladly adopted the recommendations and moves to new locations within the Orleans Marina were accomplished without need for anyone to relocate to South Shore Marina. The recommendation of the Orleans Marina Tenants Association that no vessel should exceed the dimensions of the slip by more than 10% was also accepted. Fairway widths were also used to determine assignments so that vessels could enter and leave slips and turn safely.

The Levee Board commissioners also accepted the Orleans Marina tenants Association offer to provide advice on layout of the South Shore Marina, which included signage, slip sizes, fairway widths, addition of wooden bumpers to all concrete piers, and a strong recommendation that the peninsula be heightened to reduce tidal wave damage during storms.

As a result of the collaboration between the Orleans Marina Tenants Association and the Levee Board committee and, importantly, the harbormasters, there was little need for the Orleans Marina Tenant's Association to take an active role in the running of the Orleans Marina. One harbor master in particular, was outstanding and stayed during storms, had extra supplies of rope and, with colleagues, tied down vessels in need of better securing.

Following Hurricane Katrina, approximately 90% of the vessels in the Orleans Marina were fortunate to have survived virtually unscathed. This is in stark contrast to the total devastation of the South shore Marina and the Municipal Marina. However, significant issues arose regarding the Orleans Marina and friction developed between the Orleans Marina tenants and the harbormaster and staff.

Post Katrina, the political landscape significantly changed. As most are aware the State of Louisiana changed the structure of the Levee Boards, such that a regional Levee Board was created and split into flood and non-flood assets. In addition, the head of non-flood assets answered directly to the Commissioner of Administration for the State. Problems resulting from this new structure were significant to the Orleans Marina.

Unfortunately, after Katrina, the Orleans Marina was the only financial resource remaining for non-flood assets. Since boat owners' leases were on an annual basis the only way that non-flood assets could increase their revenue was to raise rents on the Orleans Marina tenants. The boat houses in the marina and the commercial establishments along the new basin canal all enjoyed long-term leases. This development created a need for the New Orleans Marina Tenants Association to become active again.

Under the new system developed by the legislature, all of the millages that non-flood assets had previously used to maintain the Lake Front, including the West End neutral ground and the parkway spaces in the various subdivisions between Robert E. Lee and the Lake Front, were transferred to flood assets. That resulted in non-flood assets being starved for cash. The results was that, in addition to raising annual fees to Orleans Marina tenants, services to the Marina were reduced.

An example: in the past, prior to Katrina, employees of the Orleans Levee Board maintained line for securing the vessels prior to storms. With the significant reduction of staff and money, those services were eliminated. Fortunately, a very generous member of the board of OMTA donated \$5,000 to supply line for tenant association volunteers to use in the event of storms.

During the years following Katrina the Tenants Association maintained an active board and worked with non-flood assets to stabilize rent and renegotiate our lease, the initial draft of which was very draconian.

Action of the Orleans Marina Tenants Association and close work with the present harbormaster has largely alleviated those concerns and the Association has turned to exploring other options to improve the amenities and safety of the Orleans Marina.

These include a survey of all electrical connections of all vessels in the Orleans Marina for potentially life threatening voltage leakage and identification of dangerous vessels, with their owners being alerted by the Association. Other advances are the installation of a Wi-Fi connection for use by all Orleans Marina Tenant Association members. Volunteers of the Orleans Marina Tenants Association also check vessels during storms and are prepared to secure loose or badly moored boats. The Association has also been working closely with the harbormaster to identify security changes and other improvements, which benefit tenants.

The board from post Katrina to today has worked very closely with the Harbormaster and Orleans Marina management to continually upgrade the Marina. As a result of the Airport being brought back online and the South Shore Marina being back online it appears that stability is in the future for us.

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