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BOAT SHOW NEWS

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A LOOK BACK ON 32 YEARS OF THE BOAT SHOW

It has been 32 years since nearly 60 manufacturers, distributors and dealers from the area teamed up to stage the first Michigan City In-Water Boat Show in 1980.

Founder Norm Schultz admitted when the show first opened the country and the boating industry were plunging into a recession.

“Many people were convinced the show wouldn’t survive its first year,” Schultz said, “but it not only survived, it thrived, and is recognized today as one of the most respected and well-attended boat shows in the country.”

At the time, in-water shows were very popular with boaters in many parts of the United States.

The Chicago region, however, lacked a major event of the like and in 1978 a handful of boat dealers partnered with the Michigan City Port Authority and asked Schultz and the Lake Erie Marine Trades Association – which produced successful shows on Lake Erie – to consider their city.

The location was deemed fit because it could serve boaters from Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.

The region’s harbor facilities were excellent and access from all points around Lake Michigan was convenient via major highways.

“There were a lot of spots on the Great Lakes that could have tried to start a show, but this one had the infrastructure and commitment from the port to support it over the long term,” said Schultz.

The success of the show has had a large positive impact on Michigan City.

The docks are put together by community members and the event is estimated to have pumped more than \$68 million into the local economy since its first year.

The Port Authority has used thousands of dollars in rent it receives to maintain and improve public access facilities and dredge the harbor, while the Michigan City Exchange Club operates a food stand at the event and puts its profits toward community service projects.

“This show has run nonstop through good times and bad, wind storms and brutal heat,” said current show manager Ken Alvey. “I believe it will still be here 30 years from now to provide a gathering place for future boaters.”

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