

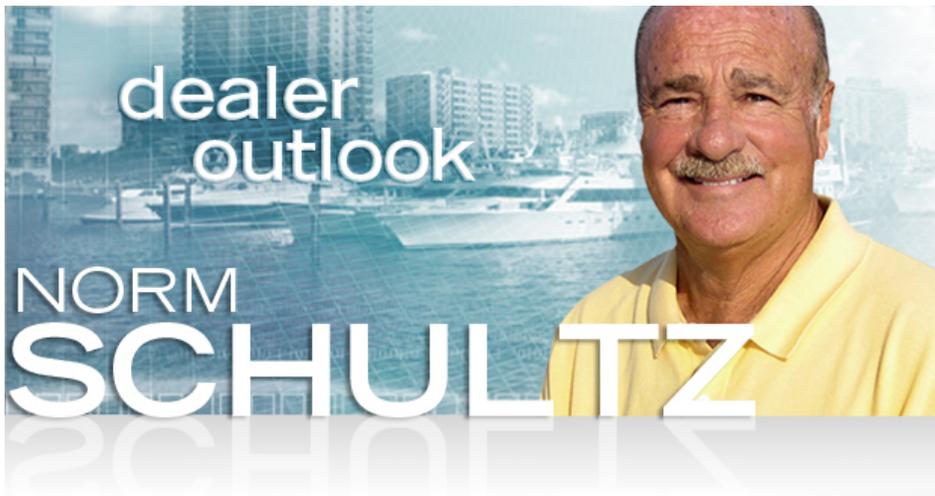


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Dealer Outlook

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[It's simple: They do what you can't](#)

Posted by Norm Schultz on December 19, 2013

After heading a marine trade association for 34 years, I could describe the value of membership to any dealer who'd ask. But actions speak much louder than words and there is no better example of the value of membership in a state or local trade group than to look at the Marine Trades Association of New Jersey.

As you read, please ask yourself this: If you were in a similar situation, could you accomplish any of this for yourself as a small business with just your voice?

It's just after dark on Oct. 29, 2012, when Hurricane Sandy, with winds extending out 175 miles from its eye, rips into the New Jersey coast pushing a life-threatening record-high storm surge made even worse by a full-moon's extra high tide. By dawn, inland dealerships have been damaged and once-flourishing marinas all along the coast are now sticks. Where does an owner turn?

The MTA/NJ answered. Under the tireless leadership of executive director Melissa Danko and her assistants, Chelsea Simkins and Eileen Cavanaugh (who retires this month), the association quickly moved to assist its members in ways they could never do for themselves. Here are just 12 of more than 20 major accomplishments:

1. Immediately began issuing member email alerts with important contact information for assistance, emergency info, Small Business Administration and FEMA contacts.
2. Created a Sandy Recovery Resources web page. Updated daily. <http://mtanj.org/sandy>
3. Created "Members Helping Members Program" to connect with suppliers, others wanting to help.
4. Met face-to-face with dozens of state legislators, plus representatives from the SBA, FEMA, N.J. Governor's Office, N.J. Economic Development, N.J. Department of Transportation, N.J. Dept. of Environmental Protection, NOAA, among others. Lobbied for financial resources, permitting relief and dredging of N.J. waterways.
5. Successfully obtained permitting relief for members needing to rebuild. Also got some permanent rule changes that will positively impact marinas for the long haul.

6. Conducted an assessment survey of all marine businesses, on the water and inland, and used it to demonstrate the significant impacts to the industry and the need for recovery support and funding.
7. Wrote an "Economic Analysis of the Importance of Maintaining Navigable Waterways" to ensure harbors and waterways would be cleared of all debris before the start of the next boating season.
8. Provided assistance and resources to the state DEP and DOT in the waterway cleanup effort and resulted in a number of private marinas receiving emergency dredging, too.
9. Established an IRS-approved charitable "Recovery & Relief Fund." Set up a grant program and made awards directly to member businesses. Brunswick Corp. donated \$25,000 while other organizations and trade groups also sent support.
10. Pursued the Robin Hood Foundation and the N.J. Sandy Relief Fund for additional funding and held fundraising events to benefit the "Recovery & Relief Fund."
11. Worked with N.J. Economic Development Authority to ensure marinas were eligible for grant funding under the "Stronger NJ Business Grant Program" as HUD regulations prohibited funding for marinas.
12. Set up workshops to help members through the grant and loan processes and get face-to-face time with the economic development authority's business advisers.

"With a new boating season not far off, we also realized the need for a program that would reassure all New Jersey boaters our waterways would be clear, open and safe for them," Danko explained. "So we created our GoBoatingNJ campaign (<http://goboatingnj.org/>)."

To do it, Danko and team headed out on the chilly waters in March to record and document that the waterways were open. Then they launched the GoBoatingNJ campaign with a comprehensive new website. They also issued news releases, wrote editorials and successfully sought out media assistance to help the New Jersey marine industry recover by raising consumer awareness that boating was alive and well again.

Seeking help wherever they could get it, Danko approached the governor's office to promote boating and allay the concerns of boaters and prospective boaters about the condition of the waterways. The result were stories statewide promoting New Jersey boating.

I have often said it's imperative that dealers hold membership of two industry associations, namely the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, which represents dealers on the national level, and your state or local trade group that does things for members that no dealer could get done alone. MTA/NJ represents the best of the latter and now you know what membership can really mean.

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Comments

2 comments on "It's simple: They do what you can't"

1. [Susan Swanton December 19, 2013 at 3:46 pm](#)

Norm -

As usual you are right on the money! A strong trade association is so important for so many reasons – responding to disasters like Sandy is just one of them. MTA/NJ is ever so fortunate to have Melissa and her team. When we decided that it would be good for us to hear from a Sandy 'survivor' at our annual conference it was Melissa who helped us engage Fred Brueggemann (MTA/NJ's President) and he did an amazing job of sharing his story. Kudos to Melissa, Fred & MTA/NJ for their significant accomplishments and contributions to the marine industry and thanks to you for sharing the story!

2. [Melissa Danko January 2, 2014 at 11:01 am](#)

Thank you so much Norm and Soundings for this article. Thank you Susan for your nice comments. I am happy that we were able to help you with your conference and share our experiences. I am very fortunate to have a great team with a hardworking staff and a truly dedicated group of board members all working together to support our members and grow boating in NJ. We hope to never see a storm like Sandy again but we are thankful to all those that provided support and assistance along the way and thankful to Norm for sharing this with everyone. Happy New Year!

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