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The Next Wave

For boating enthusiasts who love spending time on the water but don't want the hassle of boat ownership, **Carefree Boat Club of South Jersey** may be a dream come true.

BY MINDY TORAN

Nothing quite compares to a relaxing day on the ocean. Even so, given all the time, cost, and other sacrifices boatowners must make before and after a day on the water, some enthusiasts have second thoughts when they give serious consideration to owning a boat.

Enter Carefree Boat Club of South Jersey. Based in Avalon, New Jersey, the members-only club offers a hassle-free option for cruising without the constraints of slip fees, towing, maintenance and winterization, and repairs—in other words, the typical responsibilities required with boat ownership.

“All our members have to do is make a reservation, show up, and they're ready to go,” says Sean McNulty, Carefree Boat Club of South Jersey's membership director. McNulty's family has owned the Commodore Bay

Marina in Avalon for more than 20 years. He came across the concierge boating club concept about five years ago and thought it would be a great addition to the services offered to their clients.

The concept of “boating without owning” has become increasingly popular among people who love life on the water but may not be ready to purchase a boat of their own, or for former boat owners who no longer want to deal with the concerns and confines of traditional boat ownership. The cost of membership is typically one third the cost of owning a boat, according to McNulty.

“When you become a member, you get unlimited access to a fleet of high-quality, new, exceptionally maintained luxury boats,” he says. “These include center and dual consoles, bowriders, pontoons, skiffs, RIBs (rigid inflatable boats), and Jet Skis. Members can fish one day, go waterskiing the next, or just take a back-bay cruise to a popular waterfront restaurant and relax.”

Carefree Boat Club provides members with unlimited on-the-water training with staff members who are licensed captains and certified by the National Safe Boating Council as on-water instructors. All members must acquire a valid boating safety certificate, which they can do online or in person.

Marina Manager and Captain Adam Fox is always on hand to help members with their training and navigation. He began his marine career at the age of 10 at the Commodore Bay Marina, and has owned and operated a successful charter fishing and marine service business.

“On top of the training we provide to our members, all of our boats are equipped with GPS depth finders,” McNulty adds. “We also purchase a subscription for every member to an app called Wavve Boating, which provides an additional level of comfort via navigation tools to help prepare for a trip, plan your route, highlight areas to avoid, and find places to stop along the way, such as local fishing spots, beaches, and restaurants.”





Photos courtesy of Carefree Boat Club, some submitted by CBC members

Since its inception in Avalon five years ago, Carefree Boat Club of South Jersey has grown from six boats and 25 members to 27 boats and more than 150 members across three locations.

“Last summer we expanded our fleet into Ocean City at All Seasons Marina, bringing General Manager Dave Neville on board,” McNulty adds. “This year we’re about to open in Margate at Ray Scott’s

Dock, on Amherst Avenue. It’s a great location with easy access to local restaurants like Tomatoe’s, Steve and Cookie’s, Maynard’s Café, and Sofia Restaurant. All these provide members with a great place to finish their reservation and go out for an enjoyable dinner by the bay.”

With low member-to-boat ratios and an easy-to-use online reservation system, members can easily book a spur-of-the-

moment sunset cruise or fishing trip. In addition, members have access to boats at more than 125 Carefree Boat Club locations throughout the United States and Canada, as well as internationally, so families can enjoy boating while on vacation or when “snowbirding” in Florida or other warm-weather destinations during the winter.

Carefree Boat Club’s reservation system allows members to book up to four trips on the calendar at a time, in addition to offering options to book a boat at the last minute, if available. Boats are fueled and ready to go at the scheduled pickup time, with assistance from valet dock staff to help load everything up and get members on their way.

With 10 full-time staff members and an additional 50 to 60 summer employees, club members have no shortage of assistance. Last year Carefree Boat Club began offering a rent-a-first-mate program, making staff members available for offshore fishing, to help with navigation, or even take the kids tubing for the day.

“We can provide as little or as much handholding as our members want,” says McNulty. “From our members’ experience and service level, we really want our club to feel like a country club, not a timeshare. We also offer a variety of social events, educational boating, and fishing seminars, and incentives and discounts at many local businesses to enhance members’ experiences both on and off the water.”

While some boating clubs limit membership to people in the same household, Carefree Boat Club offers pricing for any two members, as long as they are 25 or older. This feature enables individuals to split their membership costs with a friend or another family member.

This summer, Carefree Boat Club will offer members a weekly kids’ camp to help their kids get comfortable on the water, learn about boating safety, go fishing, participate in water sports, go wakeboarding, and more. McNulty says more welcome news is on the horizon.

“We’re always looking to enhance our members’ experiences,” says McNulty. “We couldn’t be more excited to be expanding from Avalon into Ocean City and Margate, and we hope to be in Wildwood by the summer of 2024.” ■



Carefree Boat Club of South Jersey

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