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Friday, June 11, 2010

Slick business: Marine industry making the most of it

Tampa Bay Business Journal - by [Jane Meinhardt](#) Staff Writer

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The embattled marine industry faces new economic hurdles created by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Recreational boaters are rare in oil-slick water, and boundaries of fishing bans continue to expand in the Gulf of Mexico.



Yet some Tampa Bay area businesses are finding opportunities in the disaster.

Carl Morahan's employees are working overtime to meet the demand created by the oil spill for **Fiesta Marine Products**, and several marinas have figured

out ways to use the oil spill to fill empty dry storage racks with powerboats.

"I tell my friends that if someone is going to make money off this spill, it might as well be me," said Morahan, president of Fiesta Marine and its sister company, **Sightseer Marine LLC**. "The marine industry has been suffering. Now our phones are lit up."

He estimated that 50 percent of his current pontoon boat and aluminum catamaran production is for orders related to the oil spill. His two companies, both in Hudson, expanded production and work six days a week. The companies' 12 employees are working overtime.

Flat boats needed to carry weight

Morahan believes certain segments of the marine industry can benefit from the spill and find opportunities to assist in its cleanup and containment. "I know this will be temporary, but you take what you can get," he said.

Fiesta specializes in recreational aluminum pontoon boats for coastal areas and has been building boats ranging from 12 to 30 feet since 1978. Sightseer is a custom boat builder specializing in aluminum catamaran type boats for commercial use such as **U.S. Coast Guard**-certified passenger vessels and water taxis.

The largest boat is 45 feet long and 12 feet wide. Most have a draft of two feet or less.

"We've had a lot of inquiries about using our flat deck boats because they need big platforms that can carry a lot of weight, and they need boats that can go in shallow water for the clean up," Morahan said.

Many of his companies' orders are from large businesses that provide infrastructure support for the oil industry and do not have the types of boats now needed for oil cleanup, skimming and containment with booms. Some orders are from entrepreneurs who have figured out ways to make money.

One of the boats was ordered for use as a platform for a diesel steam pressure cleaner that will be used to clean the hulls of boats that have been in oil to prevent contamination of unaffected rivers and other bodies of water.

That's an example of some of the entrepreneurial thinking going on amidst the spill and its threat to the Gulf coast economy.

"I've had a lot of local people buy a boat to take over there to work," Morahan said. "I tell them I've talked to the Cajuns who think of them as outsiders and that it may not be a good idea."

Oil and boats don't mix



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Oil on boat hulls does more than contaminate clean water. It can stain hulls — sometimes permanently — or end up sucked into an engine intake.

Loggerhead Club & Marina is among several marina chains filling vacant dry storage space by offering boat owners a way to protect their investment by getting their boats out of the water.

Instead of requiring long-term leases for storing boats in a high-and-dry berth, marinas are waiving such commitments or making other deals.

Loggerhead Club in St. Petersburg, which has 143 wet slips and 327 dry storage racks in a hurricane-rated building, is offering the option of reserving a space for \$500 to dry dock if needed.

“You’re guaranteed a spot for your boat for six months,” said Braden Thurber, general manager. “There’s not a whole lot of space available, and we’ll try to accommodate as many as possible. The idea is to get boats out of the oil. We’re thinking about trying to use booms to block the oil from the basin if it comes here. If it does come here, we’ll all be hurting.”

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Carl M. 6 days ago

Just to clarify I said if anyone should make money over this tragedy why not my employees & companies. We are discounting off our standard pricing to assist in these clean up efforts.

Carl Morahan
Fiesta Marine Products, Inc.
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