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Marinas anticipate favorable winds for celebrations

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Boaters nationwide welcome August as the perfect boating month. Around here, it's steamy and tropical — a bit less than perfect for some.

But marinas will still mark National Marina Day the second Saturday of the month. No matter what.

Ask Jannette Healy, who manages Four Winds Marina on Pine Island for her boss, owner Michael Wisotsky.

In 2004, she had decorations bought, the band contract signed, food for 200 and prizes for the raffle. National Marina Day was to be Aug. 14th that year.

Then on Friday the 13th, Hurricane Charley mauled the marina, causing millions of dollars of damage to its dry-storage "boat barns" and its docks.

"A customer stopped by and said, 'I guess we're not having Marina Day, huh?' And I said, 'This is Marina Day. We're gonna clean up,'" Healy said.

And they did. Staff and customers, side by side.

Four Winds Marina again this year will mark the day — it's Saturday, Aug. 11. The theme this year is not the same as the one in 2005 — a We Survived Charley event. Healy and staff are planning a Summer of Love theme. But no one will overlook the lovely fact that another Charley hasn't come.

Elsewhere, marinas will do whatever themes they want to draw boaters to their sites.

National Marina Day is a grass-roots effort designed to bring local community attention to the valuable role marinas play in providing access to our waterways.

How do they do that? Put on a fun spread.

For example, Healy and her crew will have live music from a local band, Brotherly Love, set to go at noon. They're asking people to bring lawn chairs and coolers. Customers will get T-shirts, and the public can buy them at cost. BoatU.S. will provide safety info, a local Calusa Indian expert will do presentations and story-telling (remember the Calusas were great boaters), artists will offer their wares, Rib City will cater, and neighboring Lazy Flamingo will offer 10 percent off to any customers who've stopped in at Marina Day first.

The Association of Marine Industries created the Marina Day concept and provides assistance to marinas that want to put on customer-appreciation events.

It's kind of a tribute to customers, Healy said. "People love the water and love being on the water, and even with high gas prices they realize it's important and say, 'I'm still going to take my family out in the boat,'" she said.

Simply put, National Marina Day is about customers supporting local marinas, and marina owners and staff saying thanks back at them. It's about appreciating boating. And around these parts, it's a nice way to mark the anniversary of Hurricane Charley.

"We're celebrating that we're still here," said Healy, clenching her fists and hoisting them over her head victoriously.

— Betsy Clayton is a freelancer based on Pine Island and also is Lee County Parks & Recreation's waterways coordinator. Contact her at boatingbybetsy@yahoo.com

IF YOU GO

What: National Marina Day

When: Saturday, Aug. 11

Where: www.MarinaAssociation.org/nmd lets you look for events near you.

Note: One of Lee County's biggest events is at Four Winds Marina on Pine Island. Live music starts at noon, plus raffles, T-shirts, fish fry and more. Call (239) 283-0250 or go to www.fourwindsmarina.com

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