

SOUTHERN

BAYWATCH

by Gina Godfrey



Some say “April showers bring May flowers.” I say, “April haul-out keeps my boat afloat.” While the snowbird migratory return to the Chesapeake for the summer months has begun, farmers are planting their crops, and suburban homeowners are pruning their rose bushes, the cruisers of the Chesapeake are harvesting their winter supply of West Marine coupons to help offset the costs of varnish, sandpaper, bottom paint, compound and wax, contractors, and all the other expenses required for the spring haul-out.

Finding a contractor who specializes in anything you may need is a cinch on the Northern Bay. However, there are slim pickins on the Southern Bay.

Just compare the yellow page ads! Our first liveaboard summer here, with two children, two adults, and two dogs, the air conditioning unit stopped working on one of those muggy July, 105-degree days. I could not find a single marine contractor who knew anything about reverse cycle heat pumps. Even the dock master couldn’t give me a name. I ended up calling a guy who does home air conditioning to come down to the boat, and he fixed it for 50 bucks.

So what about diesel mechanics? Ha! I was so desperate that first year, I called Harvey Smith, who serviced our engine when we lived aboard in Annapolis. I honestly offered to put him and his wife in a hotel in Hampton if only he would come down here and service my engine. That should give you an idea how far some folks will go for a good diesel mechanic. At the extreme of this, an old sailing friend of mine in Miami had his girlfriend living onboard with him. It just so

happened that she flirted a little too much with a guy named “Ozone” who, as luck would dictate, was his trusted diesel mechanic. The result: my friend sent her packing. When asked why, his response was, “Hey, I can find a girlfriend anywhere. Try finding a good diesel mechanic.”

We really lucked out when a friend from Havre de Grace gave me the name of Gaston Saada, proprietor of Tidewater Marine Services, located at Sunset Creek Marina in Hampton, where he has two floating docks available for servicing. Gaston had replaced a broken stay for him while on the way south for the winter, thus rescuing him to continue his southern migration. Gaston’s sailing experience goes back to his teenage years as a member of a sailing club along the

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shores of the Mediterranean Sea. A graduate of the Israeli Naval Academy, he had years of service in the Israeli Navy before making his way to Hampton Roads in 1987. While Gaston is a “Jack of all trades,” his specialty is rigging.

Gaston was a godsend for sure. He introduced us to Rick Mounts (nicknamed Dr. Diesel) of Hampton Marine Services. Mounts learned his trade while in the U.S. Air Force’s Marine Branch when assigned in Florida to maintain the diesel engines of a fleet of 65-foot, aluminum-hulled Chris-Crafts.

Joan Conover, a trans-Atlantic cruiser herself, serves as cruising station host and Chesapeake Bay contact for the Seven Seas Cruising Association. In referring to Gaston, Conover says, “Our goal is to help the cruising membership, and as host, I make arrangements for assistance. Recently, a member’s boat cruising south for the winter had rigging and sail problems.

They motored all the way to Hampton where Gaston dropped everything he was doing (helping ralliers prepare for the Caribbean 1500), and gave the member his private slip. He then took care of the gooseneck and other repairs and brought in local sail experts from Doyle Sails to take care of the sail problems.

Gaston also introduced us to the Cobb Family on Little Creek in Norfolk. The Cobbs have been running a full-service quality marina for 50 years, and we’ve had our boat hauled there for 10 of them. The daughter of the original owners (who have passed away since we had the pleasure of meeting them), Peggy Cobb, runs the place, and her grandchildren do the sanding, waxing, and whatever else needs to be done. The Cobbs make

you feel like you are part of the family.

As well as helping locals like us and

transient snowbirds, Gaston and Mounts make themselves available for the Caribbean 1500. Cruisers know who to call if they need help when in Hampton Roads. Gaston has become an advisor and rigger extraordinaire to hundreds of cruisers on the Southern Bay. If he can’t fix it, he’ll find someone trustworthy who can.

So there you have it—it helps to befriend those in the trade. Let’s get the *Gina Marie* hauled, serviced, and back in the water for another season of cruising on our beautiful Bay!

About the Author: A cruiser for more than 30 years and a veteran liveaboard, Gina grew up on the Chesapeake Bay. Her Pearson 385 *Gina Marie* has been on the hook in just about every gunk hole from Chesapeake City to Pungo. Her cookbook, *The Galley Queen*, was published in 2003. Send Southern Bay story ideas to TheGinaMarie@aol.com.