

A new beginning for a resilient boating community

To say the Cayman Islands Yacht Club and its surrounding facilities were badly damaged in Hurricane Ivan is a study in understatement. Some of the most memorable photos of Ivan's vast devastation were taken at the Yacht Club. Large boats were wrenched from their trailers by the surge and deposited on Yacht Drive. Boats on the C Dock stacked upon each other like sloppily shuffled cards. A sailboat presciently named "Gone with the Wind" had its formerly elegant lines splintered.

After the immediate post-storm clean-ups, the property remained largely in a state of disrepair for the next seven years. Docks were made functional but remained unsightly, there were still submerged boats in the harbour and there was neither electricity nor fuel service.

In late 2011 Dart Realty acquired the Yacht Club as part of a land purchase of 690 acres that also included the former Courtyard Marriott. Ken Hydes, Vice President of Special Projects at Dart Realty, was charged with taking stock of the Yacht Club facilities.

"I returned from vacation, was handed a bundle of keys and directed to go see what needed to be done and make a plan for doing it," said Mr. Hydes. "Our immediate attention focused on health, safety and environment, and our first action was to speak to the staff and the tenants. The small yet resourceful Yacht Club team had kept the facility running with little support. The commercial boat operators were managing small businesses in a less than ideal environment. Before making any plans to bring the Yacht Club up to Dart standards, we wanted to hear from them, see what was needed and how to make that happen with as little impact to their businesses as possible."

Long term Yacht Club employees Sheldon Reid and Frankie Bradford-Whyti were integral in kickstarting the turnaround. With input from Dart's property management team, the less than glamorous work began. Lawns were mowed, manholes covered and roadways cleared. The restrooms were spruced up and security increased. The remaining Ivan boats were dredged, an act that symbolized the turning point for the Yacht Club.

"At this point we shifted from the triage of clean-up to consideration of what needed to be done to make the marina truly world class," said Mr. Hydes. "Whatever we undertake, we do to the highest standards."

It soon became apparent that the Yacht Club required more than an aesthetic refurbishment; the entire infrastructure needed to be replaced. After consulting with experts from the Department of the Environment to marina developers around the world, Dart Realty and construction manager DECCO decided to replace the entire dock and anchorage system with something more sustainable. They chose Poralu Marine for a network of floating pontoons that ensure minimal impact on the marine environment. The docks would be secured by Seaflex moorings, a self-regulating anchorage system that is gentle on the ecologically sensitive seabed while providing stability and comfort for boaters in all weather conditions.

The four main docks were renovated one at a time by local contractor MacIron Marine. The Poralu docks nearly doubled capacity, and the marina can now cater to up to 158 boats 30 to 80 feet long, with a draft of 6.5 feet.

Dockside amenities at the new facility include individual pump-out systems, water and electricity as well as a whip system to help dive operators refill their

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tanks without having to move them off the boats. The recently opened Anchors convenience store offers fuel for both cars and boats, provisions for a great day on the water and the perfect spot for a sundowner afterwards. Pro Yacht's new 7,000 square foot facility at the Yacht Club provides an array of services for boat owners ranging from vessel detailing and fiberglass work to engine servicing and electrical repairs and installations as well as captaining and boat storage. The marina's emphasis on sustainable design continues with landscaping featuring native plants and trees from the Dart Nursery as well as solar and LED lighting.

After two and a half years and nearly seven million dollars invested, the first phase of renovation at the Cayman Islands Yacht Club is complete. The proprietors of local and visitor favorite Morgan's Harbour will open a new restaurant at the Yacht Club, and Dart Realty has continued improvements planned for the surrounding area.

"We owe a big thank you to the boat owners and

operators who stuck with us through this long process," said Mr. Hydes. "As we near the 10-year anniversary of Ivan, we hope they feel they have a marina befitting the beautiful Governor's Creek location and gateway to the North Sound of which they can be proud."

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