



Frank Butler Inducted into the National Sailing Hall of Fame

The drive to be the best and produce an excellent boat at a fair price led Frank Butler, founder of Catalina Yachts, to constantly strive to improve the way boats were manufactured. He never stood still with doing something the same old way; there was always a better method to produce boats. He was once called the “Henry Ford” of the boating industry. Over 75,000 boats of all sizes have rolled down the assembly line since Catalina Yachts was formed in the late 1960s. The Catalina 22 was one of his first really big hits and is still one of the largest keel boat classes in the world, with almost 16,000 built. His reputation in the industry is legend, although Frank has always avoided personal recognition for his accomplishments. As witness to his lifelong philosophy of fair play and hard work, however, over 300 people came to pay their respect and honor him at a recent banquet during the Annapolis Boat Show. The whole boating industry, including his competitors, attended, paying up to \$1000 a table to be there and see him inducted into the “National Sailing Hall of Fame,” an honor well deserved.

In the early ‘70s Frank Butler was instrumental in the formation of the Westlake Yacht Club (of which I was also a member), now one of the senior clubs in Southern California. I had the pleasure of sailing against Frank and his wife Jean in those early years. Frank was a fierce competitor on the water and, as with everything he tackled, losing was not an option. But he never failed to congratulate anyone who came in ahead of him.

He was always very supportive of the club’s junior program, giving the club discounts on boats and sails to push the program forward. Although he was always willing to support kids, he believed in paying your own way. He encouraged his own grandchildren to earn the money to pay for their regatta fees and the summer program “Sail Eagle,” which Carol and I ran for the club in the early ‘90s. He seemed pretty tough on the outside but he was always fair as long as you were up front and honest with him.

Alyson Jolly and Mark Elliot, son of Allan Elliot, were avid C15 sailors, and when the Olympic Committee introduced a women’s division in a C470, Alyson was eager to start a campaign with friend Lynn Jewell. Frank paid for her custom built C470 to be shipped from New Zealand and completely rigged it with the latest and best hardware available. She went on to win the gold medal in the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, Korea. Frank has always been generous if he believed in your cause and felt you were sincere.

Frank has been true to himself, his family and his company, and I have been privileged to call him my friend. To me, the real measure of a man and his career is when your competitors stand up to honor you as the “Man of the Hour.”

Frank Butler and wife, Jean at banquet during Annapolis Boat Show.



Photo courtesy of Ed Arango