

The Hour

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OUTDOORS

A unique junior sailing experience

It all started from the back of a truck just three years ago. At that time, Mark McNamara, sales director for Landfall Navigation, had been receiving some nudging from existing customers that they wished there was more to offer for the junior sailors in the group.

Not one to ignore a customer's suggestion, McNamara set the wheels in motion and came up with a basic plan and a bare bones collection of junior gear, and decided to test the waters on his new idea at some of the area yacht clubs. Long story short, less than four years later, the Dinghy Locker is now an official sub-division of Landfall Navigation and offers a distinctly unique and all-encompassing sailing experience for the junior yachtsmen — and it's only getting better.

Most people may not be aware of this fact, but Fairfield County, Westchester County, and the waters of Western Long Island Sound are home to the largest concentration of Optimist sailors in all of North America. This is good news for the Dinghy Locker as their target market is right in their own backyard.

However, although the customer base is readily

available, McNamara and his staff will tell you that the formula for success is a lot more than just being in the right location — hard work, perseverance, a 24/7 presence, and outstanding customer service 365 days a year are, by far, even more important ingredients when it comes to making it or breaking it in business.

"I received a call from a client at 7 o'clock on a Sunday evening," shares McNamara. "Of course, by the end of the conversation, the customer had what they wanted."

Fortunately, McNamara is familiar with the character and lifestyle of a sailor, so he understands why a boat issue can be so important that late on a weekend evening.

"I grew up sailing," McNamara says. "Most of my customers today are contemporaries of mine. And now their kids are sailing, too."

The back-of-the-car approach to providing service has since evolved to include two full-size trailers (with a third on the way) and a 3,000 square foot impressive show-



KAREN JEWELL
Water Views

room at the Landfall Navigation location on Harvard Avenue in Stamford.

Bluemagic Opti's, BlueBlue International High Performance 420's, and Laser Performance Club 420's are just a few of the

top-of-the-line sailboats that are available from the Dinghy Locker. High quality and top name brands in gear, accessories, and clothing nicely compliment the boat inventory.

It has been said that the Dinghy Locker, in a short amount of time, has earned the reputation of being far and ahead of the rest when it comes to supplies and service in the industry. What truly sets them apart, though, is that they also have expanded to include a first-rate charter division.

As active supporters of the United States Optimist Dinghy Association (USODA), the Orange Bowl International Youth Regatta, US Sailing's National Sailing Programs Symposium (NSPS), and the Junior Safety at Sea Seminars, the Dinghy

Locker makes it their mission to provide the best in quality boat charter support.

What this means is that if a junior sailor is traveling from California to Florida to compete in an event, and the logistics of shipping his or her own equipment across the country is just not realistic, the Dinghy Locker will have a boat special ordered to the competitor's specs fully rigged and ready to go at the event site — plus all of the extra gear required — by the time they arrive. All the sailor has to do is grab the tiller, hit the start line, and do what they do best.

McNamara said this is only the beginning. Future plans promise continued growth, with a few unexpected surprises throw in along the way.

At the end of the day, McNamara will tell you that customer satisfaction is all that truly matters.

"The other day, I received a text from a client who wrote 'You rock!' That's when I know that I have done my job."

For more information about the Dinghy Locker and its services visit www.dinghy-locker.com

Karen Jewell's Water Views column runs Thursdays in The Hour.