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FORT LAUDERDALE WATERWAYS

THE BACKBONE OF LOCAL BUSINESSES

Each year, approximately 80 percent of international trade is transported by sea. Without a worldwide network of oceans, great lakes, rivers, and deep-water canals, global trade would not be possible.

Fort Lauderdale is an integral part of this shipping network. Our city was built upon centuries of reliance on our local waterways as a source of sustenance and transportation for the people who settled in the area. From the earliest Native Americans to the millions of residents that today call the Greater Fort Lauderdale region home, the New River and surrounding waterways were – and are – an integral part of daily life.

Port Everglades grew to become one of the most active ports in the United States and one of the busiest cruise ports in the world. The growth of this commercial marine hub has spurred numerous marine businesses in the region, providing countless jobs and economic contributions to our city. Today, our port is a vital part of our overall economy.

But it isn't just commercial traffic that helped Fort Lauderdale become the marine-centric metropolis it is today. Recreational boaters from all corners of the globe flock to our city, seeking reliably warm weather, easy to navigate waterways, and the services they need to complement their boating lifestyle. Meeting these demands with superior goods and services is how we earned the reputation as the Yachting Capital of the World. It is also what keeps our local economy moving forward.

Our world-class marinas and yacht clubs are some of the most high-profile marine businesses in the area. Boaters and non-boaters alike regularly patronize the upscale bars, restaurants, and shops situated within waterfront developments along the New River. Yachties come ashore for an evening of land-based fun. Families celebrate special occasions. Business deals are made. Activities that wouldn't be possible without the river, ICW and Atlantic Ocean.

Our boatyards are another telltale sign of the importance of these waterways to Fort Lauderdale. Local boatyards employ thousands and generate revenues that flow into our local economy. These employees in turn also make additional economic contributions, paying taxes and spending money in Fort Lauderdale shops, grocery stores, and restaurants.

There are countless smaller businesses intertwined with our marine industry, too. Necessary businesses that offer the goods and services that keep our marine industry afloat. Yet, these entities often go unnoticed, their economic contributions not immediately recognized.

Of course, they deserve as much recognition as their

larger, more visible counterparts.

From the grocers provisioning yachts to the manufacturers furnishing yacht interiors to the technology companies creating the websites these companies need to market their wares, these businesses all have one thing in common – their

existence relies on Fort Lauderdale's network of navigable waterways. Without the constant flow of boaters, many of our local businesses would disappear, along with their contributions to our economy.

One such company is Zeno Mattress and Marine Bedding, based in the heart of Fort Lauderdale. Family run for four generations, Zeno has been intertwined with the city's yachting scene for decades. "Our company got involved in the marine industry 40 years ago when Chris-Craft approached us looking for an innerspring mattress solution," notes Judi Zeno, the third generation to run Zeno Mattresses. "Today, 90 percent of our business comes from the marine industry."

Zeno notes the camaraderie that exists among small businesses like hers.

"We're one big family in the Fort Lauderdale marine industry, working together to ensure total customer satisfaction. If we can't solve your problem, we will find someone we trust who can," she said.

It is this spirit of teamwork that has allowed Fort Lauderdale's marine-based businesses to flourish. It is what has cemented our reputation as a world-class yachting destination. It is also what makes Fort Lauderdale such a great place to live and work.

None of this would be possible without our robust network of waterways. The next time you're on a boat, driving along the coast, or passing over a local bridge, take a minute to appreciate everything our waterways provide. It goes far beyond what you can see. 

