



# Boat Pittsburgh

by Deborah Weisberg

Pittsburghers of a certain age remember when coal barges were the only boats on the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers. They were as much a part of the region as the steel mills that lit up the night sky.

The air is now cleaner; even more so, the rivers. And while barges are still part of the local waterscape, so are bass boats, river cruisers and sport yachts as well as kayaks and canoes. Western Pennsylvania rivers have undergone a major renaissance.

“I’ve lived on the river since I was born,” said Sue Molnar, whose family owned Molnar’s Marina in Bunola on the Mon, “and I can tell you, in the past 20 years, the growth in boating has been unbelievable.”

David Kuchon’s family founded Aspinwall Marina on the Allegheny 50 years ago. “Especially with the economy the way it is now, people are staying local,” said Kuchon.

David Zahand, owner of Allenport Marina in Allenport on the Mon, agrees. “The economy has slowed things a little, but diehard boaters are diehard boaters,” he said. “In the past 10 years, people have been going to bigger boats and spending more time on them.”

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) statistics confirm Zahand’s observation. While Allegheny County’s power-boating population has declined from a peak of 29,358 in 2000 to 24,480, the county still leads the state in the number of registered boaters and in the number of boats over 16 feet. “That’s considered big for Pennsylvania. The other trend we see

is non-motorized watercraft. Kayaking has exploded,” said Dan Martin, PFBC director of the Bureau of Boating & Access.

Folks can paddle out of Three Rivers Rowing Association and Steel City Rowing Club on the Allegheny or rent kayaks and canoes from Venture Outdoors’ Kayak Pittsburgh near the Golden Triangle, where the Allegheny, Mon and Ohio come together.

Motor boaters can dock at dozens of marinas on all three rivers. Good fishing is an obvious draw, but the scenic beauty of the rivers was a big part of what lured the Bassmaster Classic to the ‘Burgh in 2004 and the FLW Forrest Wood Cup this summer.

“The rivers are a truly beautiful setting,” said Charlie Evans, president and CEO of the FLW. “That’s one of the reasons we decided to come to Pittsburgh. Heinz Field right along the water is where the world champs play.”

As sports fans, local boaters have a unique edge. Retired businessman Ron Cohen goes to games in his 37-foot cabin cruiser. “I’ll take it to a Pitt (football) game on Saturday, then stay overnight on the North Shore and go to the Steelers’ game Sunday,” he said. “I like to entertain and this is good way to do it.”

On nights when the Pittsburgh Pirates are in town, boaters—including many in kayaks—line up outside PNC Park, in hopes a catching an over-the-fence ball. On fireworks nights, the boating crowd swells.

“We go to the Point for events,” said Marylee Romick, who lives on a 65-foot houseboat with her husband John

at Oakmont Yacht Club. “There were 300 boats at the Point one year for a Kenny Chesney concert.” Point State Park is famous for its strategic location during the French and Indian War and as the geographic point where the Allegheny and Monongahela form the Ohio near Downtown Pittsburgh.

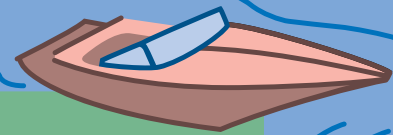
More than 40 species of fish have been documented in the three rivers, including those PFBC biologist Rick Lorson calls the big three—walleye, sauger and smallmouth bass.

Access, too, has gotten better, as the PFBC provides funding to renovate or expand motorized launches. Through the PFBC’s Boating Facility Grants program, more than \$4 million in matching grants have been awarded to municipalities, land trusts and watershed associations on the three rivers.

PFBC partnered with the City of Pittsburgh to overhaul Riverfront Park’s motorized launch on the South Side and to install a kayak and canoe launch at Fourth Street, both on the Mon. The PFBC also helped fund renovations to a motorized launch in Monessen on the Mon and a new ramp, docks and parking off Chestnut Street in Sewickley on the Ohio.

Sharpsburg Borough received more than \$300,000 in PFBC matching funds to expand a facility off 13th Street on the Allegheny that includes a double launch ramp, large picnic gazebo, free parking and a rock wall for shore fishing.

Through another program—Boating Infrastructure Grants—the PFBC has funneled almost \$1.5 million in federal funds to install transitory dockage for boats 26-feet or longer on the Beaver River in Bridgewater,



## Forrest Wood Cup

Pittsburgh will host FLW’s Forrest Wood Cup on July 30 through August 2, when 77 professional anglers and 77 “weekend warriors” ply the Allegheny River, Monongahela River and Ohio River for black bass.

Admission is free and will include displays, tackle giveaways and the chance for fans to meet their favorite bassin’ pro.



2008 FLW Forrest Wood Cup final morning.



photo-Dennis Tubbs

Pittsburgh’s Riverfront Park and the Southside Works.

Given the recreational boon, access on all three rivers continues to be a priority, according to Scott Bollinger, PFBC boating facilities program coordinator. “It would be good to have another motorized boat launch somewhere in Pittsburgh, although finding a location is a big challenge,” he said. “When cities were first developed, rivers weren’t the focus, and they are now. The shorelines are developed and the railroad tracks create issues, but we’re always looking, and where private property is involved, grant money can be used for acquisition.”

“The whole southwestern Pennsylvania community is focused on rivers,” agreed Martin. “When you think of Pittsburgh, you think of rivers.” ☐

