

## **Maureen Healey's Remarks to Monica Burguera Foundation**

Saturday, September 26, 2009

InterContinental Miami Hotel

8 to 9 p.m.

- Good evening everyone. Thank you, Ms. Salazar. Thanks to all of you for being here this evening. And a special -- heartfelt -- thanks to the Burguera Family for making this event possible to support such an important cause as boating safety.
- On behalf of the personal watercraft industry, and as a boating safety advocate at both the national and state levels, I am grateful to be invited to this event and truly honored, and humbled, to stand before all of you tonight to speak about the number one priority for **my** industry – boating safety.
- My name is Maureen Healey, and I am the Executive Director of the Personal Watercraft Industry Association. I also serve on the board of the National Safe Boating Council and will soon be serving on the board of the Water Safety Congress. I am also active with several other organizations dedicated to our shared interest.
- Since PWIA was created in 1987 we have worked across this country with state lawmakers and boating organizations to encourage the adoption of responsible regulations to govern our nation's waterways.
- I am so pleased that the Monica Burguera Foundation has made boating safety its top priority. We need all the help we can get in this campaign. I welcome the Foundation with open arms into our community.

- Before I begin, let me state the obvious to all of you Floridians: you live in the boating capitol of the world, and is there any wonder why boating is America's greatest pastime. There is nothing that can compare to spending the afternoon on the water.
- Another fact that should come as no surprise is that the State of Florida is the top boating state in the nation. Millions of boaters come to these waterways each – and every - year.
- But..... with more boats, comes more responsibility.
- And, let me be very clear about one thing: **Boats do not cause accidents.**
- There is an operator on every boat, and as law enforcement officials will tell you – it is irresponsible, reckless, or negligent boating behavior that is the cause of most accidents.
- The facts are simple – most accidents on the water can be avoided.
- That's why our industry's primary focus for boater safety is education.
- Every year, the U.S. Coast Guard reports that collisions are the leading cause of accidents – collisions with docks, channel markers, and collisions with other boats. And most of these accidents occur on boats where the individual at the controls has not completed a state-approved boating safety course.
- These classes are worth the time invested for every boater – new or experienced. In fact, my staff and I take a boating safety course every year before the boating season begins. Why don't all of you choose to lead by this example as well.

- This is one of the principle messages I convey at every opportunity, but especially when I meet with lawmakers. It is simple, boaters can avoid having a great day on the water turning to tragedy.
- **We can all do more to accomplish this goal.**
- For example, we do not think twice about getting behind the wheel of a car until we have a driver's license. It is not only illegal to drive without one, but it endangers others on the road. Doesn't it make sense then to apply the very same rules – the same COMMON SENSE - to our nation's waterways? I think so.
- To operate a boat in Florida, in any state across our nation – regardless if it is a personal watercraft, a cabin cruiser, or sail boat – everyone **should be required to take a boating safety education course**. Age and experience should not be factors as evidence has shown experienced, adult boaters are just as vulnerable to accidents.
- Fortunately several states, including Florida, have adopted some form of boater education and have seen meaningful and measurable declines in boating accidents and fatalities.
- Twenty-four states have enacted a boater education requirement. Eight states require courses for all boaters and four require courses for PWC operators. Several, however, only require boat operators born after a certain date to take a course, so this largely ignores the more mature boater population.
- U.S. Coast Guard data consistently shows -- on average -- those involved in accidents are 40 years of age. Thus, the majority of boating operators are not included in youth-based policies.
- We know education works and Florida is a great example of success.

- In 1996, Florida enacted into law a requirement that all boaters 21 years of age or younger pass an approved boating course before they could head out on the water. Since that law was passed, data shows the total number of boating accidents in this state has decreased by more than 48 percent, even while the number of registered boats has increased by nearly 25% .
- Imagine if Florida expanded its law to include all boaters. It might be inconvenient for some to go back to class for a few hours, but it's a worthwhile investment for Florida's waterways. And, the personal watercraft industry has been working hand-in-hand with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to try and achieve this landmark here in America's boating capitol.
- Mandatory boater education is a key pillar in my industry's model legislation that we advocate for all states to adopt.
- In addition to supporting boater education, the model bill supported and promoted by the personal watercraft industry encourages states to set a minimum age requirement of 16 years to operate a PWC (18 years of age to rent). The legislation also encourages PWC use only during daylight hours, it rules against reckless operation and operating at slow-no-wake speed within 100 feet of shore, near anchored boats, piers, or swimmers.
- The work of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is critically important -- critically important -- In addition to providing boating courses, they also provide "Vessel Safety Inspections." These inspections check to ensure boats have the necessary safety equipment and that all systems are functioning properly.
- A major problem for the entire boating community is that many boaters are taking to our nation's waters without the proper

gear. The Coast Guard reports that 90 percent of boaters who drowned in 2007 were not wearing a life jacket. According to this data, most boaters have life jackets aboard but simply are not wearing them. Look at it this way - A lifejacket is like a seat belt, it will not help if you are not wearing it.

- Additionally, I think every boat should have a Vessel Safety Inspection every single year.

## NOW

- I want to take a minute to applaud your Foundation's "***Need Help? Just Light the Way***" campaign. The distribution of important safety equipment, like flashlights, during a large event, such as the Columbus Day Regatta, is absolutely critical for safe boating.
- As I said earlier, we can prevent accidents. If we all do our part to help lawmakers better understand the situation so they, in turn, can enact responsible policies, we can prevent many of these tragedies.
- I am committed to doing my part and recognize that the work is never done. Our nation's waterway's can never be too safe.
- For instance, I have been working on a boating safety campaign for the past 4 years right here in Biscayne National Park. Currently, personal watercraft are the only type of boat not allowed to navigate the Intracoastal Waterway through the park's waters.
- It would be much safer for these small boats to be allowed to safely travel through the park along the ICW versus having to go around the park, which can put these boats 10 to 12 miles out from shore. This makes no sense and we have been working tirelessly to correct this problem.

- Even if one boater is spared from tragedy as a result of our efforts, the work will not have been in vain. Fortunately, the State of Florida, and other nationally recognized boating safety organizations, support this effort and are working with us to correct this current situation.
- Even though **WE ALL CAN AND SHOULD DO MORE** -- I am proud of the steps the State of Florida has taken to prevent boating accidents.
- Organizations, like the Monica Burguera Foundation, stand as great examples to us all on how to turn a tragedy into a positive force. Let this horrible accident be a clarion call to us all.
- Your mission and steadfast commitment **WILL** make a difference. Your work will be an inspiration to us all. And, the good that will come from all of us re-doubling our efforts will keep Monica's memory alive as a powerful beacon lighting our way.
- Thank you all and Please Keep up your hard work.
- I pledge my heart and soul to do everything I can to help to further promote boating safety. Thank you again, so much, for the privilege of being here tonight to launch a great effort that will help ensure such tragedies as this will never happen again.

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