

**TURN THE TIDE ON PLASTICS: REMARKS TO THE MARBLEHEAD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S "GREENING YOUR BUSINESS" EVENING IN COLLABORATION WITH SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD**

by

Corinthian Yacht Club Past Commodore

Robert L. Howie, Jr.

25 April 2019

IT WAS MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO, IN THE 1960s, THAT PLASTIC 6-PACK RINGS, OR YOKES, WERE INTRODUCED FOR BEVERAGES. I REMEMBER MY FATHER, BEFORE DISPOSING OF THE PLASTIC, WOULD TAKE A PAIR OF SCISSORS AND CUT THE YOKES. I ASKED HIM WHY, AND HE SAID IT WAS SO THAT BIRDS AND FISH WOULD NOT GET TRAPPED IN THE RINGS. HE KNEW BACK THEN THAT THESE WOULD END UP IN THE OCEAN, WITH DEADLY RESULTS. IT WAS A LESSON THAT I NEVER FORGOT. HE WAS AN ENVIRONMENTALIST BEFORE THE TERM WAS COINED.

A FRIEND ONCE TOLD ME THAT HE'D SEEN MY FATHER FROM A DISTANCE BEND DOWN TO PICK UP A PIECE OF LITTER AND DISPOSE OF IT PROPERLY. THAT HE DID SO WHEN NO ONE WAS LOOKING WAS, MY FRIEND SAID, THE VERY DEFINITION OF CHARACTER. IT CERTAINLY WAS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY, FOR HIMSELF, AND FOR OTHERS, IN NUMEROUS SMALL WAYS. IT WAS ANOTHER LESSON FOR ME. MANY DECADES HAVE COME AND GONE, AND I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT I'VE BEEN A RESPONSIBLE STEWARD OF MY ENVIRONMENT IN MANY SMALL WAYS. I ADMIRE THE PHRASE ASCRIBED TO CALVIN COOLIDGE: "USE IT UP, WEAR IT OUT, MAKE IT DO, DO WITHOUT."

BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT I'M PROBABLY MORE LIKE MANY OF US WHO HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS BUT FOR WHOM SUSTAINABILITY, WHILE A WORTHY CONCEPT, IS NOT ALWAYS A CALL TO PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. LIKE MOST OF US, I'VE CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN MY FAIR SHARE OF PLASTIC LITTER IN MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE. I RESERVE, HOWEVER, THE RIGHT TO GET SMARTER AS I GET OLDER!

LAST JULY, WHEN I WAS COMMODORE OF THE CORINTHIAN, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET CORINTHIAN INTERNATIONAL MEMBER DEE CAFFARI, ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST ATHLETES AND THE ONLY FEMALE SKIPPER COMPETING IN THE 2017-2018 VOLVO OCEAN RACE. DEE WAS ALSO SERVING AS THE UNITED NATION'S AMBASSADOR TO THE GLOBAL SAILING COMMUNITY FROM ABOARD HER BOAT *CLEAN SEAS: TURN THE TIDE ON PLASTIC*, A VOLVO OCEAN 65 DESIGNED TO TAKE OFFICIAL WATER SAMPLES TO MEASURE MICORPLASTIC CONCENTRATIONS ACROSS THE WORLD'S OCEANS DURING THE 45,000 MILE, ROUND-THE-WORLD RACE. DURING A STOPOVER IN NEWPORT, I HAD THE PLEASURE OF DOING A VIDEO INTERVIEW WITH DEE, NOT ONLY ABOUT HER SAILING ACHIEVEMENTS, BUT ALSO ABOUT HER ROLE IN THE UN'S CLEAN SEAS CAMPAIGN. I WAS STRUCK BY WHAT I LEARNED.

OUR OCEANS ARE AWASH WITH PLASTIC LITTER. SOME 13 MILLION TONS OF PLASTIC LEAK INTO THE OCEAN EVERY YEAR, AND THE NUMBER IS GROWING. PLASTIC BREAKS DOWN INTO MICROPLASTIC, WHICH IS INGESTED BY MARINE LIFE. AT LEAST 267 SPECIES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED; 100,000 MARINE ANIMALS ARE KILLED ANNUALLY BY PLASTIC BAGS ALONE. ONE IN THREE LEATHERBACK TURTLES ARE FOUND WITH PLASTIC IN THEIR STOMACHS, WHICH THEY MISTAKE FOR JELLYFISH. IT'S ESTIMATED THERE WILL BE MORE PLASTIC THAN FISH IN THE OCEANS BY 2050.

IN 2017, THE UNITED NATIONS LAUNCHED THE #CLEANSEAS CAMPAIGN, A FIVE-YEAR EFFORT TO CREATE GLOBAL AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT, AND A COMMITMENT TO ACTION ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENTS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS. AS A RESULT, MORE THAN FIFTY NATIONS HAVE MADE SPECIFIC

COMMITMENTS TO PROTECT OCEANS, ENCOURAGE RECYCLING, AND CUT BACK ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS. THOUSANDS OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS HAVE DONE THE SAME.

WHEN I RETURNED TO MARBLEHEAD I COMMITTED THE CORINTHIAN YACHT CLUB TO BECOMING A FULL PARTNER IN THE UN PROGRAM. THIS MEANS THAT WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CREATING AWARENESS AMONG OUR MEMBERS AND ENCOURAGE THEM AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO HELP TURN THE TIDE ON PLASTIC. SPECIFICALLY, HERE'S WHAT THE CORINTHIAN COMMITTED TO DO, AND HAS NOW ACTUALLY DONE:

- TAKE THE PLEDGE IN SUPPORT OF THE #CLEANSEAS CAMPAIGN
- LAUNCH AN EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO CREATE AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, AND A COMMITMENT TO ACTION AMONG OUR MEMBERS
- REPLACE PLASTIC BAGS WITH PAPER ONES FOR RETAIL MERCHANDISE IN THE SHIP'S STORE
- INSTALL A REFILLABLE CHILLED-WATER BOTTLE STATION ON THE LOWER LEVEL OF OUR CLUBHOUSE TO ELIMINATE SINGLE USE PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES
- REPLACE PLASTIC SWIZZLE/SKEWER STICKS AT OUR TWO BARS WITH BAMBOO ONES
- REPLACE PLASTIC STRAWS AND CUPS WITH VEGETABLE-BASED, BIODEGRADABLE POLYMER ONES
- REPLACE PLASTIC FLATWARE (FOLKS, KNIVES, SPOONS) IN THE CANTEEN WITH PLANT-BASED ONES
- CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR WAYS TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE
- ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE TO BUILD ON THESE INITIAL STEPS AND CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR OTHER WAYS TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE

IT'S BECOME SUCH A HABIT TO USE PLASTIC THAT YOU JUST DON'T THINK ABOUT IT. IT TAKES TIME TO CREATE NEW HABITS. THE CORINTHIAN HAS APPROXIMATELY 600 MEMBERS, OR ABOUT 1,200 COUPLES. IF TWO MEMBERS OF EACH FAMILY TOLD THREE PEOPLE ABOUT THIS PROBLEM AND ENCOURAGED THEM TO DO HIS/HER PART IN SOLVING IT, WE WOULD REACH 3,600 PEOPLE. I INVITED MEMBERS TO JOIN ME IN GETTING THE WORD OUT, AND IN DOING THEIR PART AS INDIVIDUALS TO HELP TURN THE TIDE ON PLASTIC:

- TAKE THE PLEDGE PERSONALLY AT [WWW.CLEANSEAS.ORG/TAKE](http://WWW.CLEANSEAS.ORG/TAKE) ACTION
- TELL YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ABOUT THE PROBLEM
- CHOOSE PRODUCTS WITH LITTLE OR NO PLASTIC PACKAGING
- AVOID BUYING DRINKS IN A SINGLE-USE PLASTIC OR STYROFOAM CUPS
- USE A REFILLABLE WATER BOTTLE
- JUST SAY NO TO PLASTIC STRAWS AND SWIZZLE STICKS, AND
- REMEMBER YOUR REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

THE REACTION FROM THE MEMBERSHIP WAS OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE. MEMBERS WROTE THAT THIS WAS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS THAT EVER HAPPENED AT THE CLUB, AND ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS DONE ON MY WATCH. OUR GENERAL MANAGER EMBRACED THE EFFORT, FOUND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVES TO PLASTIC, AND RETRAINED THE STAFF TO USE THEM. I ALSO ASKED MY FELLOW COMMODORES AROUND MARBLEHEAD HARBOR TO JOIN ME IN THIS EFFORT, AND THE STILL WIDER SAILING AND BOATING COMMUNITY.

AT THE CORINTHIAN, WE REPLACED ALL SINGLE USE PLASTIC WITH BIODEGRADABLE MATERIAL. WE STARTED WITH PLASTIC CUPS FROM "FABRI-KAL'S GREENWARE" LINE. THEY ARE COMPOSTABLE AND MADE FROM PLANT-

BASED MATERIAL. THEY LOOK AND FEEL A LOT LIKE PLASTIC, BUT THEY'RE NOT. THEY ALSO MAKE A WIDE VARIETY OF FOOD CONTAINERS USING THE SAME MATERIAL.

THEN, IN OUR CANTEEN BESIDE THE POOL WHERE WE USED PLASTIC FLATWARE—FORKS, KNIVES, SPOONS—WE REPLACED ALL THOSE WITH FLATWARE MADE FROM PLANT-BASED COMPOSTABLE MATERIAL FROM A COMPANY CALLED "GREEN WAVE" IN BROOKLYN. THEY COME IN BLACK OR WHITE. NEXT CAME STRAWS, ONE OF THE BIGGEST KILLERS WHEN INGESTED BY SEA CREATURES. WE WENT TO AARVARK IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA, AND GOT BIODEGRADABLE PAPER STRAWS. AND AT THE TWO BARS IN THE CLUB, WE SWITCHED OUT THE PLASTIC SWIZZLE OR SKEWER STICKS IN FAVOR OF THESE BAMBOO ONES, AVAILABLE FROM ROYAL PAPER IN HANAHAN, SOUTH CAROLINA.

WE ALSO ESTABLISHED A SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE AT THE CLUB, CONSISTING OF FIVE MEMBERS WHO MEET BIMONTHLY, WITH A CHARTER TO BUILD ON THIS BEGINNING AND TO ADVANCE THE FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY AS FAR AS THEY CAN IN THE COMING YEARS. THE COMMITTEE HAS RUN WITH THE BALL, USING MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS—EMAILS, SIGNAGE, SOCIAL MEDIA, WEBSITE—TO CREATE AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, AND A COMMITMENT TO ACTION.

WE NOW HAVE THREE CATEGORIES OF DISPOSABLES—TRASH, RECYCLING, AND COMPOSTING. LAST YEAR, EVERYTHING WENT INTO THE TRASH. JUST THIS MONTH WE BEGAN COMPOSTING AT THE CLUB, WORKING WITH BLACK EARTH COMPOST, LLC OF BOSTON. THERE'S AN ONGOING NEED OF COURSE TO EDUCATE MEMBERS AND STAFF ALIKE THAT COMPOSTABLE MATERIAL NEEDS TO GET TO THE COMPOST PILE. AND IT ISN'T JUST PLASTIC ON WHICH WE'VE FOCUSED.

THE SHOWERS IN THE MEN'S LOCKER ROOMS AT THE POOL HOUSE NOW HAVE TIMERS ON THEM—AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES THE SHOWER HEADS START DELIVERING COLD WATER! KIDS TEND TO LEAVE THEM ON OR LET THEM RUN FOR A LONG TIME, SO THIS SHOULD BE A BIG HELP. THE WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM WILL BE NEXT. IN THE CLUB'S KITCHEN, INCANDESCENT LIGHTING WAS REPLACED WITH LEDs, WITH THE RESULT THAT WE'RE USING 35-40% LESS ENERGY. SCREENS HAVE BEEN PUT BACK ON IN THE DINING ROOM WINDOWS TO TAKE SEASONALE ADVANTAGE WHEN THE OUTSIDE AIR IS IDEAL—ESPECIALLY IN MAY, JUNE, SEPTEMBER, AND OCTOBER—REDUCING THE USE OF AIR CONDITIONING WHEN WE CAN.

WE'VE BECOME PROACTIVE IN KEEPING LITTER AND PLASTIC OFF THE SMALL BEACH BESIDE THE POOL BY USING KIDS VOLUNTEERING TO HELP CLEAN IT UP PERIODICALLY. THE EFFORT IS LED BY A SCIENCE TEACHER WHO SHARES SOME USEFUL IDEAS WITH THEM, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME INSTILLING THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTION. LOOKING FURTHER AHEAD, WE WOULD LIKE TO FIND A WAY TO USE SOLAR PANELS TO HEAT THE POOL, WHICH IS A BIG ENERGY CONSUMER. WE SPEND \$3,000 FOR GAS IN THE SPRING JUST TO GET THE POOL BACK ONLINE, SO YOU CAN IMAGINE THE ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND COST REDUCTION WE COULD GAIN.

SUSTAINABILITY IS JUST GOOD BUSINESS, AND GOOD FOR BUSINESS. IN A COMMUNITY LIKE MARBLEHEAD, WHERE THE OCEAN DEFINES SO MUCH OF OUR HISTORY. QUALITY OF LIFE, AND WHY WE CHOOSE TO LIVE HERE, WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT IT. THE FIRST STEP IS TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. I PERSONALLY TOOK THE UN'S CLEAN SEAS PLEDGE, AND BROUGHT THE CORINTHIAN PROUDLY ALONG. I INVITE YOU AND YOUR BUSINESSES TO DO THE SAME. THANKS VERY MUCH.