



ESTABLISHED 1872

SANTA BARBARA YACHT CLUB

Jack Byers, Commodore 2011

To look at Jack Byers, one would think he was born and raised on the ocean. Actually, his early life was spent in Tucson and Phoenix, AZ. His introduction to California came when, as a 10-year-old, he joined his family on a summer road trip to visit all the missions. Although learning about his neighboring state's history was interesting enough, he found himself fascinated by the Pacific Ocean. In fact, he said, "I had to verify it was salt," by tasting it! Two years later, his father, who worked for Mobil Oil, was transferred to San Diego. The family bought a house that "came with a surfboard". Jack soon learned how to surf, sail and fish.

While living there, he would often watch the tuna clippers going into and out of San Diego Harbor. In the summer of his 13th year, he experienced the first real adventure of his life—a 90-day trip to Chile on a 250-foot tuna clipper. He learned maritime skills like celestial navigation and how to make bamboo poles, tackle and jigs to catch tuna, as well as less-glamorous competencies like washing dishes and swabbing decks. He returned home to Point Loma, a.k.a. Tunaville, after school had resumed, with fish tales his friends could only have dreamed about! An item of note, though, that speaks to this commodore's character, was that he used some of the money he earned that summer to buy his sister a prom dress.

After high school, Jack joined the 82nd Airborne and was deployed to Germany. Honorably discharged as a staff sergeant in 1960, he then returned to the States. In 1962, he got married. His wife came with a 2-boy package, aged 4 and 6. Although the marriage didn't last, he is still very close with his now-grown sons and their families. Jack graduated from the College of Oceanering in Wilmington, CA, and began his career as a commercial diver. In 1976, a buddy introduced him to UCLA Arts and Education graduate Karen Hatsumi Matsushita. He proposed within months. "When I met Karen, everything turned magic. It's still magic." The couple moved to Santa Barbara where, on their 1st anniversary, Jack bought *PK*, a 28' Monterey fishing boat previously owned by George Castagnola. When he wasn't diving, Jack used the *PK* to trap rock and spider crabs which he sold for extra cash.

In the mid-70s, working for Solus Ocean Systems, Jack's diving jobs included dam work at the Oroville and Cholo Power Plants, laying 12'-diameter pipe at Ewa Beach, HI, working underwater construction at Diablo Canyon and San Onofre, supporting 600'-depth drilling operations on a drilling ship in Alaska, and making the first 600' saturation dive in the Santa Barbara Channel to re-establish guy wires to a well head.

From 1980-1988, his knowledge and positions allowed him to manage diving contracts for Solus and Cal Dive while living in East and West Malaysia, Borneo, Rio de Janeiro, and Singapore. His contracts also included work in Japan and Indonesia.

Back in Santa Barbara, he started a small construction business, Jack N' Tool Box, Inc., as a retirement job. He returned to private boating and bought *Chucklin*, a 43' Matthews powerboat. When he told Staff Commodore Cork Otis (1978) he wanted to join SBYC, Cork retorted, "Byers, you're an industrial seaman; you're not a yachtsman!" But he'd had boats, knew how to sail, and enjoyed racing with Staff Commodore Bud Toye (2007). Fortunately for us, Cork agreed to let him in, and Jack and Karen quickly became entrenched in Club activities. In 2008, he was selected to go through the chairs and become commodore. "I just wanted to help, be a good member, do my duty."

As far as Jack's contributions to SBYC go, there are many. He donated his time and that of his employees to build the Cook Pavilion in honor of Staff Commodore Noel "Pinky" Cook (1966), reroof the storage sheds, organize and install The Landing, add copper roofing, and so much more, not to mention an extensive whole-club remodel and expansion in 2007-08. The galley, safety additions and more are enduring legacies of his commitment to the club.

It wasn't all hard work and no play, though. Jack and Karen have gathered many good friends during their years at SBYC. "It's a great place to spend our time both on the water and on land with great people; just a second home, really. Who could ask for a better second home than this? We're sitting here listening to the ocean," he said as he gestured out the window by our corner table in the Ocean Room. I asked if he had any final thoughts to share about our club. "Meet as many others as possible. Get to know them well and you will be blessed."

By Sabrina Papa