



Winn Willard

The Director of Hunt Yachts and VP of Hunt Associates, has been with the company since 1970 and is responsible for some of Hunt's most influential designs.



Hunt Yachts, founded by Raymond C. Hunt in the mid 20th century, is probably best known for its “deep-V” hull, a feature long revered as its signature. The business originated with the design of speedcruisers and motor yachts, evolving into military and commercial markets. Winn Willard, Director of Hunt Yachts and Vice President of Hunt Associates, spoke with Maritime Reporter on Hunt’s tradition, industry presence and outlook on future building markets.

By Eric Haun

What advantages do you reap from having three companies under the Hunt name?

■ We’ve worked hard to expand the Hunt brand while continuing to carry out Ray’s life mission to always be innovative. Ray was never afraid to try a design just because it was different. To Ray, that was all the more reason to give it a shot.

When we decided to start Hunt Yachts, we had a beautifully designed Surf-hunter. Still, some thought a design firm would never succeed at also building yachts. It was a risk. Today, Hunt Yachts offers 18 highly-customizable models, including day cruisers, coastal cruisers and express motoryachts. It

broadened our customer-base, created a new line of business, and more importantly, offered additional revenue. The same is true for Hunt Marine Services. We saw a gap in the market to bring the same elite customer experience offered in our design and boat building process to the service sector. Creating a new business is a risk, but ironically, those risks have now diversified our business, allow the Hunt brand to grow in a time other brands were forced to fold.

What benefits do you gain from designing in both commercial and consumer markets? Are there drawbacks?

■ From a business perspective,

a major benefit is having a diversified client base allowing us continuity. We have never had a layoff. Quite often the commercial and the pleasure sides are on different business cycles. Then there are concepts, details and practices that one sees in each market that can be applied in the other. For example, a major draw for our larger pleasure craft customers, such as the Hunt 44, 52 or 68 Express Motoryacht, is knowing that the hull on their yacht is virtually identical to the hull on the Hunt-designed pilot boats servicing our ports. Pilot boats must perform at a high level, regardless of the weather conditions, which provides our consumer customers with peace of mind to tackle foul weather conditions. On the downside

I see a lot of opportunities worldwide that we can’t always chase or concentrate on. There are only so many hours in a day.

What portion of your business is commercial?

■ Right now, about 65-75%. There are signs of a comeback in the consumer markets, but it is very spotty and not strong yet. The commercial side is also slowing, in particular the military and quasi-military segment. We’ve been very fortunate to develop a reputation for reliability and dependability in the safety and security and pilot boat communities, in particular. Hunt pilot boats are used in more than two dozen



of the busiest ports throughout the nation. Law enforcement agencies, the Coast Guard and Navy also use many Hunt designed boats to patrol oceans, rivers, lakes and even war zones.

What do you consider to be the most interesting commercial project you've recently worked on?

Probably the two sizes of new, very fast and multifunctional patrol response boats for the NYPD. The first of them will be launched later this year. They will be capable of 40 knots, use waterjet propulsion and carry all the latest high-tech gear for disaster and terrorism response. Although we are unable to talk about it in detail (for obvious reasons) our extensive work in the homeland defense sector over the years is quite exciting.

Briefly discuss your business since the global economic trouble of 2008. How do the coming 12-24 months look?

The pleasure boat market ground to a standstill in 2008-2009. Many companies are gone. Survivors are half their former size, and there is still too much capacity, so more may go yet. However, Hunt Yachts has actually tripled its business since 2009. We've used a zero-debt business model and an investor-backed system for rolling out new models to escape the crippling overhead which doomed other boat builders. At Hunt Design, we survived being small and flexible, the benefit of being in both the consumer and commercial markets. We had a big surge in the patrol boat market when the Navy, Coast Guard and local law enforcement geared up with new boats filling

a long neglected void. Now that market is well satiated, so it will be mostly replacements and service going forward. We believe this will be an opportunity for Hunt Marine Services which further demonstrates the advantage of being such a diversified business.

Economic, legislative, competitive – looking ahead, what do you consider to be the biggest challenges to your business, and why?

The worldwide general economic malaise has left little enthusiasm for fun of new business. To overcome this, Hunt must continue to innovate across all three business entities. Whether it be maximizing our commercial opportunities at Hunt Design, offering unique, owner-centric programs such as our two-year Carefree Purchase

Program at Hunt Yachts, or finding new ways to add value for our customers at Hunt Marine Services, the most successful companies always tend to be ones where "innovation" is more than just a buzzword. Ray Hunt was always up for a challenge, designing and racing sailboats and powerboats in a style that no one could ever imagine at the time. Hunt will continue to look for new ways to carry on this tradition.

Winn Willard, Director of Hunt Yachts and Vice President of Hunt Associates, graduated from Babson College with a degree in Business Administration and Economics. He studied naval architecture at the University of Michigan, is a member of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers (SNAME) and has been with Hunt Associates since 1970.

