



NEWS From -

Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing

C-PORT Elects 2024 Board of Directors

The Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing, C-PORT, held its 2024 Membership Meeting on November 7, 2023, during the 37th C-PORT Conference. The meeting was held at the Hilton St. Petersburg Bayfront Hotel, St. Petersburg, FL. Along with committee reports and industry issue discussions, the membership elected its 2024 C-PORT board of directors.

Tina Cardone, executive director remarked, "C-PORT continues to represent professional marine assistance companies throughout the nation. These individuals bring decades of experience and vision to the board, each with their own unique perspective."

Two directors were re-elected to serve another term, and two members were elected to serve on open seats. Seats open included Chris Day, Marine Demolition and Spill Response, TowBoatU.S. Logan Martin, who will step off the board at the end of 2023. Chris remains committed to promoting safety and education for the assistance industry. The seat left vacant by Rob Butler, Big Bay Marine Services, TowBoatU.S. San Diego, when his term limited last year, was also filled.

Re-elected to serve is Richard Paul, Marine Towing & Salvage of SWFL/TowBoatU.S. Cape Coral. Rich serves on a number of C-PORT committees including Government/Legislative Affairs and Programs and Education. Rich was selected by the board of directors to serve as Treasurer at its recent meeting.



Rich's desire to work on the water is a dream come true. Growing up in Florida, and spending endless weekends on Little Gasperilla Island, he knew his love of the water would eventually lead to a career on the water. In 2005, Rich received his 50 ton Masters License with a Towing Endorsement. While attending the Captain school, he learned the local TowBoatU.S. company was for sale. After a 25 year career, Rich retired from Publix Supermarkets and bought TowBoatU.S. Cape Coral, where he began a new career on the water.

For the last 18 years, Rich has been very dedicated and committed on working to change the perception of the marine towing and salvage profession. "We are professional business owners, not a band of pirates."

Also re-elected to serve is Harold "Smitty" Smith, Miller's Towing & Salvage/TowBoatU.S. Sandy Hook. Smitty is the Vice chairman of C-PORT and serves on a number of C-PORT committees including USCG Focus Group and Programs and Education.



Harold Smith, better known in the industry as Smitty, lives in Middletown, NJ with his wife Sissy of 37 years. They have 3 grown children and 2 granddaughters which are the absolute light of his life. They are lucky enough to live on an 11 acre farm where they house their horses.

Smitty has been working on boats all of his adult life and has had his USCG credential for more than 35 years. He holds a 200 ton masters license and a master of towing credential. Smitty started right out of high school working on tug boats in NY Harbor. After starting a family, the schedule was tough. Smitty went to work for the Fast Ferry industry becoming a senior Captain, and stayed there for 10 years. In 1998, he joined Millers Launch, the largest oil spill response company in NY Harbor as a supervisor. When they acquired TowBoatU.S. Sandy Hook, Smitty took the management lead running the day to day operations.

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Newly elected is David LaMontagne, Pacific Towing LLC/TowBoatU.S. Newport Beach. David served on the original C-PORT board of directors in 1987, and graciously accepted the nomination to return to the board.



In 1984, David founded Vessel Assist Association of America. He is also a founding member of C-PORT and was instrumental in establishing C-PORT's first minimum level of equipment recommendations for the assistance towing industry.

David traveled the US, Canada, and Mexico extensively from port to port to grow Vessel Assist nationwide to approximately 200 contract stations and 500 rapid response boats. He partnered with West Marine to pioneer sales of "towing in a box" in all West Marine stores and partnered with West Advantage to include towing coverage. He established a nation-wide centralized VHF Dispatch system via internet connect for response towing with sites in the Chesapeake Bay, Florida's Gulf Coast, Florida's Gold Coast, the Pacific Northwest, Northern California's Bay & Delta, and Southern California. He sold the Vessel Assist entities to BoatUS and maintains ownership of the Newport Beach CA Vessel Assist/TowBoatUS License from industry inception (39 years).

David has owned numerous personal vessels throughout his life. He has extensive racing experience along the Southern California coast and cruising sailing experience including 2023 from Bahama's to Chesapeake Bay, 2022 from BVI's to Bahama's, throughout the Tahitian Islands and the Caribbean to South America in the 90's and sailed to Hawaii in 1984. He is an active member of Balboa Yacht Club, Newport Beach, CA since 1998.

David said, "It's been a long while since I have been on the C-PORT Board, and as one of the few original founding members of the industry, I bring a long journey of industry history, business sense, and industry institutional knowledge to C-PORT. I care about C-PORT and this industry. I believe it's my turn to serve the industry again.

Also newly elected to serve on the board is Michael Tucker, Texoma Destinations/TowBoatU.S. Lake Texoma.



Michael has a long-standing affinity with being on the water. He spent his early years playing in the Corpus Christi surf and got his first boat at 15, begging his dad to take him to the lake so he could fish and wakeboard. He spent 17 years in the entertainment industry, but always found his way back to the water, including learning to sail during his 7-year stay in Los Angeles.

When he found his way back to Texas, he was presented with the opportunity to become one of the owners of Lighthouse Resort and Marina. Alongside his father, he has successfully grown that business to a large operation that encompasses the resort and marina, a charter fleet, a rental fleet, multiple campgrounds, a park, a tackle store, and most recently, a marine dealership and boat club.

That path took him to getting his captain's license to operate the charter boats and as a towboat captain for TowBoatUS Lake Texoma. During the next 11 years, he found a true calling for assistance towing and salvage. He bought the towing operation in 2022, which was an obvious fit for the businesses he owns and operates. Michael brings a great deal of experience, passion, and leadership to the local towing business and is excited to carry that through helping to represent the towing and salvage industry.

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Since the member vote, the board of directors met to select its executive committee. Serving on the 2024 C-PORT board of directors and executive committee are:

2024 Officers:

Phil LeBlanc, Safe/Sea, TowBoatU.S. Narragansett Bay; Chairman
Harold "Smitty" Smith, Miller's Towing & Salvage, TowBoatU.S. Sandy Hook; Vice chairman
Richard Paul, Marine Towing & Salvage of SWFL, TowBoatU.S. Cape Coral; Treasurer
Jake Dunfee, Rescue Marine, TowBoatU.S. Port Clinton; Secretary

2024 Directors:

David LaMontagne, Pacific Towing LLC, TowBoatU.S. Newport
Richard Lenardson, Great Lake Marine Services, TowBoatU.S. St Joseph
Michael Tucker, Texoma Destinations, TowBoatU.S. Lake Texoma
Terry Hill, Potomac Marine, TowBoatU.S. Potomac; regional director, president of Chesapeake Marine Towing & Assistance Association

C-PORT was founded in 1985 to act as a liaison between the marine assistance industry and public agencies and organizations involved with boating safety, marine assistance, marine salvage, and other marine-related operations. Our members are dedicated to providing prompt, professional and timely assistance to all boaters and to actively partner and cooperate with local law enforcement and U.S. Coast Guard.

C-PORT proudly holds a long-standing Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Coast Guard, and a decade long MOU with the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). Our members are honored to be included by the Association For Rescue At Sea (AFRAS) prestigious maritime lifesaving awards.

For more information, contact C-PORT at (954) 261-2012 or visit <https://cport.us>.