

Katrina survivors join Delta Boat Parade

Barry Statia stepped onto a boat Saturday for the first time since Hurricane Katrina tore through his life. These days, boating on Louisiana's delta and bayous is only a sweet memory for him.

But today, he'll fly home with new, joyous memories of being on the water - albeit on another delta, one he didn't even know existed - after taking part in the Opening Day on the Delta Boat Parade. The annual parade is held on the first Saturday in April by the Stockton Yacht Club.

"Stockton Yacht Club, for us, will always be just a smile away," Statia said, choking up.

Statia, 55, is the commodore of the Tammany Yacht Club in Slidell, La., a town about 25 miles northeast of New Orleans that was devastated by the monster storm. He and 12 other members of the Tammany club accepted an invitation to serve as grand marshals for the parade, which celebrated their participation with a Mardi Gras decorating theme for the boats that entered the parade. A total of 49 boats from all over the Delta joined the parade, cruising through downtown Stockton on the Deep Water Channel.

Boat parades used to be commonplace for the Tammany club members.

Used to be.

"We had them for everything: Christmas, Mardi Gras, St. Patrick's Day," Statia said, sighing wistfully.

The Tammany club's main building sustained major hurricane damage, which Statia estimated will cost at least \$35,000 to repair. That doesn't include the numerous member boats that were damaged or destroyed.

"If you were standing (at our club), you'd see capsized boats, sunken boats, boats half in and half out of the water," Statia said. "A boat had to be taken out of the second story of a house."

Just before the hurricane, Statia had sold his boat and was about to buy another. But now, leisure time is nonexistent - a pre-Katrina era occurrence - as Statia and his friends struggle to rebuild. Taking a break to come to Stockton was worth the approximately \$600 cost (plane and hotel) of the trip, Statia said.

"You get so eaten up with the everyday, between work and rebuilding your home and trying to help other folks, the time flies by before you even realize it," he said. "It was worth every dollar to be here."

He swallowed hard and blinked away tears while talking about Stockton club members, who, after Katrina, sent \$1,000 to his club, which Stockton club member Jill Alley had searched out on the Internet. The money was used for a Christmas party.

"It gave us something to be happy about, just happy," Statia said.

From the entry fee (\$10) for boats and other donations, parade co-Chairwoman Myrna Bronner anticipates sending \$2,200 to \$2,500 to the Tammany club.

"They look so happy today on the Delta," she said. "They said how good it was to look out and not see any FEMA trailers and piles of debris. You know, everybody ought to give back. Besides, we understand what having a levee in your back yard is like."

A similar thought had occurred to Statia.

"The first thing that crossed my mind when I got here was 'How strong are those levees?' " Statia said.

Back home, Statia lives in the cramped, makeshift lair he's put together in the master bedroom on the top floor of his two-story house, which was flooded by 5 feet of water.

When the retired Marine returned home after Katrina, he had to chase water moccasins out. He has electricity now and, thanks to the new water heater, hot water for showers. But with nothing in his room to cook on, he eats out of cans and boxes and only gets warm food when he goes to work, as the visitor services manager at The National D-Day Museum in New Orleans.

His house, which he estimates was worth about \$350,000 (at least before Katrina), sustained more than \$100,000 in damage, much of which was, fortunately, covered by insurance.

For Saturday's parade, he and other Tammany club members rode in the lead boat, the 46-foot Californian called FantaSea, owned by previous Stockton club Commodore Dave Rader.

"These people, the stories they had to tell, it's devastating what they've lost," Rader said. "But we all had a great time today. We made some new friends."



CLIFFORD OTO/The Record

Boaters participate in Saturday's Opening Day On The Delta Boat Parade down the Stockton Deep Water Channel. Hurricane Katrina survivor Barry Stasia, below, and other members of the Louisiana yacht club serve as grand marshals and ride the lead boat in the parade.

PARADE WINNERS

Best-decorated boats in the annual Opening Day on the Delta Boat Parade, with a Mardi Gras theme, judged by three members of the Stockton Yacht Club.

Big boats

35 feet and longer:

1. **Volare** - Don Webb, Ox Bow Yacht Club
2. **Meyer Haven** - Herman Meyer, Village West Yacht Club
3. **Justavacation** - Ron and Joan Malmquist, Stockton Yacht Club

Small boats

34 feet and smaller:

1. **The Brat** - Dean and Joann Baker, Stockton Yacht Club
2. **Delta Garland** - Gary and Linda Gordon, Ox Bow Yacht Club
3. **Unnamed** - Pat and Barbie Carson and Bob Noggin, Stockton Yacht Club and Village West Yacht Club, respectively