



Huge tax hikes threaten Florida marinas

Boating Industry
Friday September 8, 2006

PALM BEACH, Fla. - A group of marina and boatyard owners in Palm Beach County, Fla., facing another year of triple-digit tax increases, have teamed up to challenge the way their properties are appraised, pooling tens of thousands of dollars to hire a team of experts and taking their pleas to county and state officials, the Palm Beach Post reported in a story yesterday.

The effort comes in response to the 2006 property assessments sent out last month. Several marinas saw their tax bills double, even triple, for the second year in a row, frustrating an industry already threatened by climbing insurance costs, hurricane repairs and development pressures.

"These guys are just putting us out of business," Ray Graziotto, president of Jupiter-based Seven Kings Holdings, which owns four marinas in Palm Beach County, told the newspaper. "This is really self-preservation. Any profit that any of us were making is gone if these assessments stand.

"None of us is expecting a free ride, but how can you endure 400 and 500 percent tax increases over the course of a few years?"

Eight marine business owners formed the group, calling themselves the Save the Working Waterfront in Palm Beach County Committee. Graziotto is its chairman, the Post reported.

Working with the Marine Industries Association of Palm Beach County, they're asking other marine businesses to join the effort. The initial members have committed \$10,000 each, and are hoping to raise more money from others.

According to the marine group, total taxes for county commercial slips that are open to the public were about \$1.38 million last year, up from \$914,000 in 2004. That jumped to \$4.37 million for 2006.

Several marine businesses plan to file appeals next week, the newspaper reported.

If property values make it impossible for marinas and boatyards to be profitable, they'll sell their prized land to condo builders, said John Sprague, co-owner of Everglades Adventures marina and legislative chief for the Marine Industries Association of Florida.

"There isn't a single small business in Palm Beach County that can take that kind of hit. You can't budget for it," Sprague told the Post. "Unless something's done, you're going to lose every public marina."