

A Shore Home on the Bay

Paul Suzdak and the Community Spirit of the Raritan Yacht Club

*By Pat Craddick-Irwin
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The Raritan Yacht Club



Paul Suzdak, RYC Membership Chair

Perth Amboy, NJ— On the edge of the Raritan Bay, where the waterfronts of Perth Amboy and South Amboy meet the steady rhythm of tides and sailboats, one of New Jersey's oldest maritime institutions continues to thrive. The Raritan Yacht Club has been a gathering place for sailors, neighbors, and waterfront enthusiasts for more than 160 years, long before nearby luxury waterfront residences and the emerging ferry terminal in South Amboy began reshaping the shoreline.

Today, RYC remains a welcoming hub on Raritan Bay—offering everything from competitive sailing and cruising adventures to lively social gatherings that bring members and guests together throughout the year.

For longtime member **Paul Suzdak**, the club represents something more than sailing. It's a community, a tradition, and a place he hopes more new residents along the Raritan River—especially those living at luxury developments like Station Bay and The Pearl in South Amboy—will discover.

A Legacy on the Waterfront

Founded in 1865, the Raritan Yacht Club began with a focus on canoeing and rowing before transitioning into sailing in the late 19th century.

Though its clubhouse location changed several times in the early years, the club has always remained rooted along the Perth Amboy waterfront.

After a devastating fire destroyed the clubhouse in 1915, the club relocated in 1916 to the historic Cooper Mansion, where it remains today.

Over the decades, sailing at the club evolved alongside the sport itself. The 1950s and 1960s saw fleets of small sailboats fill the harbor, while larger handicap racing boats joined the scene in the 1970s through the 1990s.



The Raritan Yacht Club, Cooper Mansion, Perth Amboy, NJ

The Corinthian Spirit

The culture at the Raritan Yacht Club is deeply rooted in what sailors call the **Corinthian spirit**—a tradition emphasizing sportsmanship, volunteerism, and camaraderie.

“It’s a highly collaborative environment,” Suzdak explains. “Members pitch in to help run the club, whether it’s maintaining boats, organizing races, or planning social events.”

That shared sense of ownership creates a welcoming atmosphere where experienced sailors and curious newcomers alike find common ground. Even members with little or no boating experience quickly discover that the love of the water is enough to connect them.



The Season Begins with Spring

As the weather warms, the energy along the waterfront begins to build.

Spring marks the start of membership season and the return of sails to Raritan Bay. Boats come out of winter storage, docks fill with activity, and racing begins in early May.

This year promises an especially exciting lineup. The club will host national racing events for the Flying Scot and J/105 fleets, bringing sailors from around the country to Perth Amboy. In July, the British Virgin Islands Tourist Board will sponsor a lively Caribbean-themed celebration at the club. Later in the summer, the cruising fleet plans a multi-stop adventure through Long Island Sound.

For members, it’s the beginning of a season filled with sailing, friendship, and long evenings overlooking the bay.





A Club for Boaters—and Non-Boaters

One of the most common misconceptions about yacht clubs is that you must own a boat to belong. At the Raritan Yacht Club, that couldn't be further from the truth.

“Some of my favorite things about the club have nothing to do with sailing,” Suzdak says.

Throughout the year, the club hosts an active calendar of social events, including seminars, guest speakers, game nights, wine tastings, chili cook-offs, and the club's famous pig roast. Members gather for themed dinners like Oktoberfest and Paella Night, and summer evenings often bring live music on the deck overlooking the harbor.

There's also an on-site restaurant open for weekend lunches and dinners, making the club a casual gathering place for members and their families.

Even non-boaters are welcome at race days and regattas, where the excitement of the sport unfolds just offshore.



Tradition Meets Innovation

Like many yacht clubs with deep histories, the Raritan Yacht Club balances long-standing traditions with evolving programs.

Ceremonies, flags, burgees, and naval-inspired customs remain part of the club's identity, reflecting the maritime traditions that shaped yacht clubs in the 18th and 19th centuries.

At the same time, modern programs have expanded access to sailing.

One of the most successful initiatives is the club's shared boating program. It began in 2013 with a single Colgate 26 sailboat shared among 11 participants. Today, the fleet has grown to six Colgates and a Catalina 250, serving nearly 50 members who enjoy guaranteed access through a managed schedule.

For many participants, the program offers an entry point into sailing without the expense or responsibility of boat ownership.

And it comes with its own traditions—like “Pork Chop Tuesdays,” when sailors gather after evening sails for food and drinks at the club's waterside bar.

More Than a Marina

Suzdak often describes the Raritan Yacht Club with a phrase that resonates with newcomers.

“It’s your shore home,” he says.

Unlike a gym or traditional social club, membership connects people to both the water and a network of nearly 300 families who share a passion for boating, outdoor activity, and community life.

Members race sailboats, cruise to distant harbors, learn new skills, or simply relax on the deck as the sun sets over the bay.

One of the things many people discover after joining the Raritan Yacht Club is that the community extends well beyond sailing. The club maintains an active calendar of educational programs, social gatherings, and guest speakers that bring members together throughout the year.

Recent highlights have included an educational seminar on **Navigating NYC**

Harbor (https://www.ryc.org/default.aspx?p=.NET_ArticleView&tview=0&pluginid=301&ssid=&qfilter=RSC1&itemID=50326), where members explored the complexities of sailing through one of the busiest waterways in the world.

Newcomers are welcomed through events like the **New Member**

Mixer (https://www.ryc.org/default.aspx?p=.NET_ArticleView&tview=0&pluginid=301&ssid=&qfilter=RSC1&itemID=50321), designed to help residents quickly connect with fellow members and feel part of the club community.

Social traditions are equally important. Events such as the crowd-favorite **Chili Cook Off**

(https://www.ryc.org/default.aspx?p=.NET_ArticleView&qfilter=RSC1&tview=0&itemID=50316&chgs=&ssid=) and relaxed **Wine Tasting**

Evenings (https://www.ryc.org/default.aspx?p=.NET_ArticleView&qfilter=RSC1&tview=0&itemID=50305&chgs=&ssid=) give members opportunities to gather, share stories, and enjoy time together on the waterfront. The club also hosts unique guest speakers, including a recent presentation from a **NASA Solar System**

Ambassador (https://www.ryc.org/default.aspx?p=.NET_ArticleView&qfilter=RSC1&tview=0&itemID=50275&chgs=&ssid=), offering members the chance to explore topics that reach far beyond the bay.

Together, these events reflect the spirit of the club: a place where learning, camaraderie, and waterfront living come together in a vibrant community.



From “Movable Ballast” to Skipper

Suzdak’s own journey with the club began in 2008 when he was living and working in Jersey City and looking to reconnect with sailing.

After discovering the Raritan Yacht Club, he struck up a conversation with members in the boatyard and was soon invited aboard a racing boat known affectionately as “Mad Cow.”

“My first role was basically moveable ballast,” he laughs. “An extra pair of hands—and most importantly, trying not to get in the way.”

Season by season, Suzdak learned the craft. Today, he serves as the primary skipper and co-owner of the boat, a transformation that reflects the club’s culture of mentorship and shared learning.

“Sailing is one of those sports where every time you go out, something new happens,” he says. “You’re always learning—about navigation, weather, routing, or just the experience of being out on the water.”



Signature Events on the Calendar

The coming season offers plenty of opportunities for new members to get involved.

Two open houses—March 28 and May 16—invite prospective members to tour the club and meet the community. The season officially begins on Memorial Day with the club’s traditional opening ceremony and dinner.

Summer highlights include the Flying Scot National level event in June, the J/105 racing event in July, and the Caribbean celebration hosted by the British Virgin Islands Tourism Board.

The season closes with the club’s beloved pig roast, a festive gathering in the club yard that captures the spirit of the waterfront community.

An Open Invitation to the Waterfront Community

As South Amboy's waterfront continues to grow, Suzdak hopes more residents will discover what has been quietly thriving just across the river for generations.

New members are paired with mentors and encouraged to join committees, participate in events, and become part of the club's collaborative culture. Monthly gatherings help newcomers quickly meet fellow members and feel at home.

For anyone living along the Raritan River, the invitation is simple.

"If you love living by the water," Suzdak says, "the club gives you a way to truly experience it—sailing, cruising, fishing, or just spending time outside with people who will go out of their way to make sure you're included."

After more than a century and a half, the Raritan Yacht Club remains exactly what it has always been: a community built around the water, where tradition, adventure, and friendship meet on the bay.



**NEW MEMBERSHIP
OPEN HOUSE
MARCH 28TH (1-4PM)
160 Water Street
Perth Amboy, NJ. 08861
Email: membership@ryc.org**

The Raritan Yacht Club
160 Water Street
Perth Amboy, NJ. 08861
www.ryc.org
732-826-2277

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