



Richard Stanczyk pioneered daytime swordfishing in the Florida Keys.

THE REAL DEAL

TIRELESS AND DRIVEN, RICHARD STANCZYK USED TO FISH SO HARD HE BURNED OUT CAPTAINS, CREWS AND FRIENDS

Richard Stanczyk is growing impatient. We haven't caught a bonefish. "One thing I have not figured out in 67 years of fishing is how not to catch fish and still have a good time," says Stanczyk, his nose smeared in the trademark zinc oxide he uses to protect against skin cancer, which has dogged him lately.

A stiff wind is blowing onto the beach, and the shallow water is a milky green. It's muddy. Stanczyk, owner of Bud N' Mary's Marina, an icon of Florida Keys sport fishing, says the dirty water could stymie us, adding optimistically that bonefish aren't as canny when they can't see the bait well. Besides, Stanczyk knows these waters and these fish. If bones are around, this is where they'll be. He also knows there's no point in fishing if you don't think you're going to catch anything.

Stanczyk has anchored the 18-foot flats boat along a grass line about a mile north of Bud N' Mary's and 150 yards off Islamorada's big beach houses, where Bass Pro Shops' Johnny Morris and other notables get away. Fishing with spinning gear and live shrimp, we've caught some bonnet sharks and small jack crevalle, even a cowfish, but no bones. Stanczyk has owned Bud N' Mary's for 38 years, and for 25 of them he guided for bonefish. "I've caught probably 2,000 bonefish with a fly rod," he says. He was guiding longtime friend Vic Gaspeny in 1985 when Gaspeny caught a then-world record 14-pound, 6-ounce bonefish on 12-pound tippet.

Stanczyk is a self-taught fly fisherman and

proud of it — but not too proud. He tells of guiding Joan Salvato Wulff, the grande dame of fly-fishing, about 25 years ago. Maybe more. "She hadn't caught a saltwater fish on a fly, and I was going to give her a lesson," Stanczyk says. The lesson was short-lived. She let loose with a 100-foot cast and hooked a cobia.

Impressed, Stanczyk made a cast, and Wulff said, chuckling, "Richard, if you took some lessons, you could do this."

The two are good friends now. He lives in her former condominium on Florida Bay. Its balcony is his window to paradise. "I can see across Florida Bay to Flamingo," he says.

Stanczyk, who is 70, once fished for "grey ghosts" a couple of hundred days a year. "I fell in love with bonefishing," he says. It was an obsession that faded 15 years ago, when Florida Bay became too salty, grasses began to die and the bonefish population dwindled. "We had the most fabulous bonefishing in the world here," he says.

The walls of Bud N' Mary's office and adjoining café, where anglers gather at dawn for coffee and homemade biscuits and gravy, attest to Stanczyk's obsession and to these past glories. Framed photographs show Sam Snead, Stu Apte, Jimmy Stewart, Larry Csonka and a host of other celebrities with their catches — mostly bonefish and swordfish — and record for posterity the marina's history as a home port for such fishing legends as Cecil Keith, George Hommell and Jimmie Albright.

Stanczyk and Gaspeny, a legendary guide in his own right and Stanczyk's fishing

“I was obsessed with fishing. It was ingrained in my life and the only constant thing in my life.”

buddy for 48 years, pioneered daytime swordfishing off the Florida Keys more than a decade ago, after the bonefishing waned. “We caught swordfish 53 trips in a row over 13 months,” recalls Gaspeny, who is 67. “We caught at least one every time we went out.”

Swordfishing became Stanczyk’s new *raison d’être*. He was fishing offshore so often and so long he began to wear captains out. “They’d see me coming and go the other way,” he says.

But that’s the past, and Stanczyk remembers it well. He has a million stories about those days, and he doesn’t have to be asked to tell them, with relish. (His boys say the fish get bigger with every telling.) But he’s not stuck there. He has moved on, yet still fishes every chance he gets. “If it’s in your blood, you’re stuck with it,” he says.

He has passed his zeal for fishing on to sons Nick, a top Keys swordfishing captain, and Rick, a crackerjack backcountry guide and computer wizard. Rick has taken Bud N’ Mary’s digital and introduced its tagline, “Sportfishing Capital of the World,” to a new generation of anglers on social media.

Stanczyk is gradually turning over the reins of the business to the boys and Nick’s wife, Sara — an artist, photographer and small-boat captain who lobsters, snorkels and fishes, of course — but he still comes in daily to do the books. A University of Miami graduate in accounting, Stanczyk says he enjoys the work and keeping a hand in the business.

“He’s still going strong,” says Nick. “He may stay another 20 to 30 years.” But that’s only as long as he has time to fish.

Keep it Simple

On this evening Stanczyk’s girlfriend, Joanne Aromandi, and this writer — neither of whom are virtuosos with a fly rod — fish with spin tackle while Stanczyk guides. Belying his 70 years, he sits at the bow watching over four lines, managing two himself. Stanczyk is alert, eyes darting from one rod tip to another, as he coaches us. He is in perpetual motion, his movements quick and efficient as he checks lines, rebaits, casts, moves the boat. As the sun sinks beneath the palm trees in classic golden Keys fashion and frigate birds glide on thermals overhead, it looks as if we’ll be skunked, which is just when we catch our first bonefish, a 3-pounder.

“Remember, your next cast can make you a hero,” Stanczyk says. It’s one of his favorite sayings. Dusk settles in, and Aromandi reminds Stanczyk that it’s time to head home. But he wants to fish a little longer, and the extra time yields another bonefish — a 5-pounder. Stanczyk is happy he’s fishing for fun and not all amped up just chasing trophies.

“I used to take celebrities out, but I’ve turned around,” he says, remembering back when it was all about catching big fish on light tackle. “Now we take families out, introduce them to fishing.” And to Keys sunsets, egrets, herons and ibises, to the blissfully restful backcountry. A lot of serious anglers are purists, he says. They sight-fish for bones, cast flies to permit. “I put the boat in the water. I put the bait out,” he says. “I know where the fish are. I catch them.” When he takes kids out to fish — and that’s one of his passions these days — they don’t care how they catch fish, he says. They just want to catch.

The hard-boiled guide who has been known to hurl expletives when a client loses a fish is starting to enjoy himself, says photographer Ron Modra, who shoots for *Sports Illustrated* and is a longtime friend of Stanczyk’s. “Richard is really into the backcountry now,” Modra says. “He loves to catch snook and redfish, and watch the spoonbills.”

And it truly would have been more satisfying to see a 10-year-old catch that bonnet shark this evening, Stanczyk says, than to hook those two bonefish.

Stanczyk was that youngster once. “My father never fished. He got seasick,” he says. “But he let me chase my own dreams.” His grandfather, a Missouri businessman who owned a chain of 500 lending offices, fished in the lakes and rivers around St. Charles.

“When I was 3 years old my grandfather took me out to a small lake with a dock built around it and gave me a cane pole, a bobber, a hook and a worm,” Stanczyk recalls. “I dropped the bait on the side with lily pads and pulled in a large bass. He paraded me around like I was a hero. It was the first time I got recognition like that. I was hooked.”

Adios Desk Job

Born in St. Louis, Stanczyk and his family moved to Miami in 1949, where his father — a bodybuilder, two-time Olympic weightlift-



Fishing is built into Stanczyk’s psyche, his soul. When he’s not fishing, he’s either talking about it or thinking about it, says a friend.

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ing medalist, holder of six world weightlifting titles and a good friend of 1950s fitness guru Jack LaLanne — opened a gym and later a bowling alley. “My dad was Polish,” Stanczyk explains. “Poles like to bowl. I practically grew up in that bowling alley.”

Stanczyk became a very good bowler, but fishing was his passion. His grandfather, who vacationed in Miami every March and November, fed Stanczyk’s fishing obsession. “Every day after school he’d be waiting there for me so we could go out fishing together,” he says.

When Stanczyk turned 10 his grandfather bought him a 9-foot pram with a 3.5-hp Evinrude, which he kept in a canal behind his home. When he was 15 his fishing buddy gave him a 21-foot Fiber Craft with an 80-hp I/O. “I was not allowed to go into the ocean,” he says. But that didn’t stop Stanczyk. He would motor out the canal and into the bay, then to Haulover Inlet, where the ocean beckoned.

One day he asked a charter captain at Haulover Park Marina how to get to Bimini. “He pointed,” Stanczyk says. “Just go that way for 60 miles and keep your compass on E. My only experience with islands was on Biscayne Bay, and they were uninhabited. I didn’t think Bimini had any people on it, either.” He found Bimini, discovered there indeed were people there and made it home before his parents even knew he was gone.

“Richard was always one or two steps beyond where he was supposed to be,” says Billy Broach, a childhood friend who works at the marina and fished with Stanczyk through their school years. “He always had this drive to fish and explore and try new things.”

Though he fished every chance he got, Stanczyk never intended to become a Keys guide and marina owner. He loved his grandfather and wanted to please him, so at his grandfather’s insistence he went to college, graduated from the University of Miami with a degree in accounting and went to work for a Miami CPA. Surely his grandfather would be proud of him.

Yet shortly after Stanczyk graduated, the old man, lying on his deathbed and using a chalkboard because his throat was filled with tubes after a tracheotomy, asked his grandson about his new job: “Why the hell do you want to do that?”

“I was trying to walk in his footsteps,” Stanczyk says. His grandfather knew him better than he knew himself. “I only stayed with the CPA two years.” One morning as he examined the books of a bank in an office overlooking Pier 5 (now

Bayside Marketplace), he watched the charter boats motor out. “I couldn’t stand it,” he recalls. “I told the bank manager, ‘I can’t do this anymore.’” He called his boss and gave his notice.

Stanczyk bought a rundown bar and restaurant against the advice of his father. “My dad was not a good businessman,” he says. He believes the Olympic weightlifter should have stuck with the gym, rather than opening a bowling alley, which closed after a decent run — 27 years — because his dad couldn’t keep up with the times.

“He asked me, ‘Dickie, why would you buy this restaurant? It’s a complete disaster,’” Stanczyk says. “I brought in female bartenders, country-western music and pool tables.” He hired a female manager and handled the accounting and paperwork himself. It was very successful. “She got the profits from the restaurant,” he remembers. “I took the profits from the bar, and I could do what I wanted to during the day — run a charter boat.”

Major Obsession

Personable and persuasive, Stanczyk has a discerning eye for mutually beneficial relationships. He got his captain’s license with coaching from a Coast Guardsman who “guided” Stanczyk through the test to pay off a bet after challenging the ace bowler to a match. But Stanczyk still had to buy a boat. “I didn’t know a damned thing about that,” he says.

James L. Knight, at the time a co-owner of the *Miami Herald*, was selling his 48-foot sportfisherman, *Rerun*, which he kept at Pier 5. The yacht was far more than Stanczyk could afford, but Bob Lewis, a kite-fishing pioneer and Knight’s private captain, arranged for a meeting between the young entrepreneur and the veteran newspaperman. “It was like going into Yankee Stadium and meeting Babe Ruth,” Stanczyk says.

Knight was dressed in khaki clothing, like a fisherman, and the walls of his office were covered with photographs of fish and island scenes from the Bahamas. *Rerun* had been custom-built for Knight, and he wanted “the right owner” for the boat. “Mr. Knight asked me about my ambitions, and we talked quite awhile,” Stanczyk says. But the boat’s price was double what he could pay. Two days later, Knight’s secretary called Stanczyk and said her boss was impressed with the young man and wanted him to have the boat. “She said, ‘He’ll meet with you out at Tommy’s Boatyard this

afternoon,’” Stanczyk says.

“I bought the boat and worked it for seven years, seven days a week, out of Pier 5,” Stanczyk says. Charter captain Kenny Spaulding became Stanczyk’s mentor in the charter business. The son of a charter captain, Spaulding grew up on Pier 5 and pioneered the use of the electric reel to haul up big grouper and other bottom fish on his boat *Sherri-D*.

Stanczyk took after his grandfather, who was a very good businessman. As a teen, Stanczyk had parked cars at Miami Beach’s Fontainebleau Hotel, where he met high-rollers, walked mobster Meyer Lansky’s dog, ran errands for senators and learned how to send business from the beach hotels to the charter docks. He seldom lacked for clients.

Always hard-driving, Stanczyk worked maniacally, now overseeing the restaurant and bar, building a Miami-based charter business and running daily charters to fish the waters off Florida and in the Bahamas. “I fished every day,” he says. “I was obsessed with fishing. It was ingrained in my life and the only constant thing in my life.”

Stanczyk has wed three times but “didn’t have much luck” with the marriages, he says. Maybe it is prophetic, but in high school he and the childhood sweetheart who would become his first wife were supposed to go to the senior prom together. The morning of the prom, Stanczyk went fishing. He hooked a marlin — a 500-pounder, he says — and a Hemingwayesque battle ensued.

He fought the fish for eight hours. The boat ran out of gas, and between the Gulf Stream current and that marlin, they found themselves 50 miles up the coast from Miami’s Government Cut, in Deerfield Beach. Worse yet, Stanczyk lost the fish. “It was one of the most difficult things in my life,” he says. He and his friends drifted on the tide to a seawall, where they phoned home for a ride. Stanczyk missed the prom but made the after-party.

“He’s obsessed,” says Gaspeny. Any woman in Stanczyk’s life has to know she’s going to “play second fiddle to a slimy critter,” he says. “It wears on them.” Yet Stanczyk has more long-term friendships than just about anyone Gaspeny knows.

“He stays close to people.”

One of those friends is Modra, who lives in Nashville now but fished regularly with Stanczyk when he lived in Florida. “I’ve known Richard for almost 26 years,” Modra says. “He’s

Stanczyk and his son Nick with a nice pair of swords, a fish that the family has pursued with particular vigor.





The iconic Bud N' Mary's is home base for the Stanczyks and a fleet of charter boats.

the real deal when it comes to fishing. It's built into his psyche, his soul. When he's not fishing, he's talking about fishing. When he's not talking about it, he's thinking about it." Stanczyk introduced Modra to bonefish and swordfish, fishing the Bahamas and the Turks & Caicos. He also introduced Modra to Gregorio Fuentes on a trip to Cuba, where he and Stanczyk sipped rum and smoked cigars with the captain of Hemingway's *Pilar*.

Something About Swords

Stanczyk is generous with his time and resources, often taking out novice anglers who otherwise couldn't afford to fish, Modra says. "He loves to pass it on," he says. "His friendship just means more to me than anything. I can't not love him for his enthusiasm for fishing."

That enthusiasm can be nothing short of maniacal at times. When Stanczyk and Gaspeny swordfished together, they "burned out captains," Modra says. "They burned out crews. They burned out friends. It's a long way out [to the grounds] — 50 miles. Richard would leave

home at 5 in the morning and wouldn't start back until right at dark."

Gaspeny says Stanczyk worked on a plan, though never realized, to keep a boat offshore 24/7 and ferry fuel, supplies, charter parties and crewmembers to it to keep swordfishing.

Andy Newman, media relations director for the Florida Keys Tourism Council, has been a friend of Stanczyk's for 28 years. "I've learned more about fishing from him than anyone I've ever fished with," Newman says. Yet fishing with Stanczyk is about more than catching fish, he says.

Hoping to land his first tarpon, Newman went out with Stanczyk near Lignumvitae Key, but it looked as if they might get skunked. Stanczyk, trying to make the best of a slow day, advised Newman to enjoy the experience — renew that child-like awe in looking at the stars, find the elusive peace that a night on glassy water can bring — when Newman got a strike and a big tarpon leaped out of the water. "It's not over until the fat lady sings," Stanczyk told him.

Years later on an offshore trip, Newman lost a swordfish when the line parted after a short fight. "Richard went wild," Newman says. He gets mad when he loses a fish. "I asked him, 'I thought it was about the experience?'" Newman says. "No. You've got to catch swordfish," he answered curtly. As he ages, Stanczyk tries hard to just enjoy the experience but still has an awfully hard time doing that if he isn't catching fish.

As a young man making his mark — and making a lot of money — Stanczyk took another cue from his grandfather: He started drinking, heavily. "Drinking became a real staple in my life," he says. "Ultimately it robbed me of my life. It almost took my life. It was a bad thing."

Yet it was after a night of hard drinking in Bimini that Stanczyk met Harold Adler, whose captain, Jimmie Albright, would introduce him to Keys fishing. "I drank so much that I passed out on the docks," Stanczyk says. Adler, whose boat *Kalex* was at the dock, found Stanczyk and invited him aboard to shake out the cobwebs. They became friends.

In 1970, Albright, one of the Keys' legendary captains, was running *Kalex* for Adler in a Keys sailfish tournament when it blew an engine. Adler asked Stanczyk to bring his boat down from Miami to fill in. "Capt. Albright captained the boat. We caught the winning sailfish, with me helping as mate," Stanczyk says. Through Albright, Stanczyk later met Jack Kertz, owner of Bud N' Mary's, and bought the marina from him in 1978.

Stanczyk jumped aboard the night swordfishing bandwagon in the Keys in the 1970s. Cuban-American fishermen had pioneered the fishery, putting out illuminated glass jars to draw plankton, which attracted squid, which in turn brought broadbill swordfish up from the depths they inhabited during the day to the top 200 to 300 feet of the water column. Night swordfishing tournaments became popular. "In 1976, my last year in the charter business, I entered three swordfish tournaments and caught three swordfish in the first tournament," Stanczyk says.

Night swordfishing thrived briefly, but

"I hit bottom 26 years ago on March 7 at 10 a.m."

Stanczyk says commercial longlining, which eventually was banned, decimated the fishery. "By 1976 I could sense the charter business in Miami was starting to slip, so I sold the boat and went to Alaska," he says, where he bought an interest in a gold mine. (He'd already sold the restaurant.) Stanczyk's gold-mining career lasted just eight months.

"We had a rule: no women, no whiskey. I couldn't comply with it," he says. "I spent too much time in the saloon. I left my wife there. She married an airline pilot from Beirut. I came home."

Though the fisherman lost money in the gold mine, his bank account remained in pretty good shape, even as he drank as feverishly as ever. "I was a lost soul," says Stanczyk, who was now working as a guide. "I was going over to the Bahamas every single weekend on my 23-foot boat." Drinking was a big part of the gig.

In 1978 Stanczyk casually asked Jack Kertz whether he ever thought about selling Bud N' Mary's. Kertz said he'd just sold it and was waiting to close the deal. A month later, Kertz called to say the deal had fallen through and that he'd sell the marina to Stanczyk. The 32-year-old guide became the owner of Bud N' Mary's sportfishing marina.

Paradise with Caveats

Almost 40 years later, Stanczyk has a sense that a hand has guided him through the labyrinth that has been his life, including his delivery from alcoholism. "I hit bottom 26 years ago on March 7 at 10 a.m.," he says. He was engaged in a drunken shouting match with his wife at the time when his son Ricky — then 7 years old — cried, "Daddy stop! Daddy stop! Daddy stop!" Those cries are etched in his memory. It was the last time he took a drink. "My wife left, but I got sober," he says. And that was a blessing, one that he has tried to offer others who are blindsided by alcohol.

The captain of *Miss Islamorada*, Bud N' Mary's party-fishing boat, applied for a job at the marina when he was 17. He was a drinker, says Stanczyk, who has a hard and fast rule: Don't drink at work; don't come to work drunk. He gave the young man a chance, but he messed up, so Stanczyk let him go. He gave him another chance, then another and finally "excommunicated" him. No more chances.

"I was getting ready to go to the Bahamas one

day, and he shows up at the door, eyes red, asking for help," says Stanczyk, who canceled the trip and drove the man to a detox facility. After he dried out, Stanczyk hired him again. "He's married now, just christened his second child," he says. "He's one of my most valued employees. I love him like a son; he loves me like a father."

After Stanczyk sobered up, he watched the company he kept. "I didn't want to be around people who drank," he says. But alcoholism is endemic in the Keys, and many of those suffering from the disease are very talented people. Stanczyk suspended judgment and assembled a group of carpenters, plumbers, electricians and other tradesmen — "the barn dogs" — who work (some even live) around the old dry-stack barn at the marina, which doesn't store boats anymore.

"The rules are, you don't come around me when you're drunk," he says. "You show up every day. You've got to have talent. One of our barn dogs just left after 26 years here. 'I used to judge,' he adds. 'God put these people in my life so I wouldn't judge them. They've built everything around here, and they have a great sense of loyalty.'"

Most who come to know Stanczyk are very loyal to him and Bud N' Mary's. "I've been coming here since 1954. I was 9 years old," says William Levor, 70, a New Yorker who had come to Islamorada to fish with his wife, Elaine. His parents used to vacation at Bud N' Mary's. They came for the fishing.

"It's paradise on Earth down here," Levor says. "We catch sailfish, wahoo, cobia." They were praying for the wind to settle down so they could go out with Rick to fish the backcountry.

Max Gaspeny, Vic's nephew, started coming down with his family to visit his uncle during school vacations when he was 7 or 8 — and fish out of Bud N' Mary's. "It turned into a yearly tradition just before Christmas," he says. After he turned 16 he'd come down by himself, stay longer and fish longer. "I caught my first bonefish here, my first permit," says Max. "I remember the details of just about every fish I caught here."

As a teen, he used to fish with Stanczyk's son Nick. "I was envious of him, living down here and already having his own boat," Max recalls. He has fished the flats and the backcountry with his uncle, and offshore with Nick and Scott Stanczyk.

Now 32, Max worked the last 10 years as edi-

“He’s the free-swinging maniac, but he makes things happen.”

tor of *Fisherman’s Post* in Wilmington, North Carolina. On Jan. 3 he started a new job in the front office of Bud N’ Mary’s and plans to follow in his uncle’s footsteps as a guide. Stanczyk likes the young man, probably because he sounds an awful lot like a young Stanczyk.

“I’ve been obsessed with fishing since a very, very young age,” Max says. “And I’ve been able to fish with the cream of the crop — some of America’s best fishing talent.” He says he’s returning to his first love and plans to carry on his uncle’s legacy.

Out-of-the-Box Thinker

The story of how daytime swordfishing began in the Keys has been told many times. It’s worth revisiting because of what it says about the relationship between Stanczyk and Vic Gaspeny. “We’re the odd couple,” Stanczyk says, a reference to the film starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau as unlikely roommates.

Gaspeny is devoted to fishing, but he is calm, methodical and analytical, keeping detailed records of his catches. “I’m the laid-back scientist type,” he says. “I study the weather, the tides, the dynamics [of fish behavior] in a scientific manner, while Richard shoots from the hip. He’s the free-swinging maniac, but he makes things happen.”

He and Stanczyk sometimes butt heads, in a friendly way, when they fish. Gaspeny’s calculations tell him the fishing should be good in one place. Stanczyk “sticks his finger in the air,” as Gaspeny puts it, and points in another direction. Gaspeny landed his record bonefish at a spot where he didn’t want to go to, but Stanczyk insisted.

Hook a fish, and Stanczyk is likely to needle you, saying, “I’m betting on the fish,” as the fight gets intense, but Gaspeny is used to the banter. He says Stanczyk is the “most fascinating guy” he has ever met, and that keeps the relationship fresh. “I’ve never gotten off a boat with him — no matter how cranky people got, no matter how miserable the conditions were — that I wasn’t glad I went out with him,” Gaspeny says. That says a lot because he says he has fished with Stanczyk no fewer than 700 times, probably closer to 1,000. “It’s an experience.”

By 2001, longlining had been banned, swordfish were rebounding, and anglers were starting to catch them again at night in the Keys, but it was tough duty. “We were staying up all night,” Stanczyk says. “You can’t stay up all night and run a marina.”

Gaspeny, a student of swordfishing, had

been reading articles by Ruben Jaen, the Venezuelan heart surgeon and International Game Fish Association Hall of Fame inductee, about daytime swordfishing, which requires fishing the bottom at 1,000 to 2,000 feet instead of drawing the fish up to 200 or 300 feet with lights at night. Jaen had been day-fishing for swords in Venezuelan waters for almost a decade.

“I stuffed the article in Richard’s hands,” Gaspeny recalls. “He was resistant.” The 4-knot Gulf Stream current and jagged bottom presented huge challenges to dropping bait 1,000 feet or more to reach swordfish during the day.

Coming off the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Keys tourism was slumping, and the charter business needed a shot in the arm. Gaspeny persuaded Stanczyk to undertake a kind of Manhattan Project with him and Stanczyk’s brother Scott, captain of the charter boat *Catch 22*, to devise a rig and technique to day-fish for swords at “the ledge” 23 miles off the Keys.

It cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel, bait and tackle to perfect the rig over several years, Stanczyk told a reporter at the time. The team caught their first daytime broadbill — a 60-pounder — in 2003 using 15 pounds of concrete to take the bait down and hold it in place. Stanczyk says it was the first time in his memory that anyone had been able to photograph a broadbill leaping out of the water.

By 2006 they were using a refined rig with heavy breakaway weights and electric lights to catch swordfish on 53 straight daytime trips over 13 months. “Now everyone around the globe fishes for swordfish, and they use our techniques,” Stanczyk says.

“Richard is an innovator, an outside-the-box thinker,” Gaspeny says.

Boyhood friend Broach agrees. “His wheels are always turning,” he says. “He’s always looking for a new angle, always excited to try something different, something new.”

Stanczyk says that’s what keeps him in the game, as a fisherman and businessman. “I have constantly reinvented myself in the fishing world,” he says. “Sometimes it’s by choice; other times it’s because the fish disappeared.” Or the times have changed.

Family Business

New Englanders Bud and Mary Stapleton opened Bud N’ Mary’s at mile marker 79.8 in Islamorada in 1944 as a hotel and tackle shop. The Stapletons didn’t know a lot about fishing,



Crouched on the platform, Stanczyk guided on the flats for 25 years. Today he’s happy as a clam in the backcountry.

but they had a keen eye for location. “It’s all about geography,” says Stanczyk. Islamorada lies at the convergence of Florida Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and Everglades National Park to the west, and the Atlantic — “the ledge,” the coral reefs, the Gulf Stream, the Bahamas — to the east. “You can do it all from right here,” he says. “Just about any species of fish in this hemisphere can be caught out of this marina.”

That’s what drew Stanczyk to Bud N’ Mary’s — that and its reputation as the epicenter of Keys fishing, where the captains and guides of yore kept their boats and gave Islamorada its cachet as a paradise where world records are set.

Stanczyk has built on that reputation. “[Keys fishing] is not what it used to be, but this is still an outrageous place,” he says. Twenty-four backcountry guides and 15 offshore charter boats fish out of Bud N’ Mary’s alone.

The Stanczyk family operates its own proprietary fleet, as well, which includes *Catch 22*, a 54-foot Blackwell Carolina sportfisherman captained by Scott Stanczyk; *Broad Minded*, a 2016 Freeman 37 captained by Nick Stanczyk; a 22-foot SeaCraft backcountry bay boat cap-

tained by Rick Stanczyk; a 24-foot Pathfinder captained by Sara Stanczyk for lobster charters; 34-foot Crusader *B n’ M*; and the 65-foot party boat *Miss Islamorada*.

“Two hundred people a day fish here,” says Stanczyk. During a 38-year career as a marina owner and a 30-plus-year run as a fishing guide, Richard Stanczyk is responsible for planting the fishing bug in a good many people. “One of the things I do feel good about is that I have introduced more people than you can imagine to sport fishing,” he says. “I love to introduce people to the world of fishing. It’s my passion.”

Bud N’ Mary’s is a big business — one day, as he works on the marina’s financials, he says he’s got \$400,000 in cash receipts to record — yet it also is a tough business.

The marina, its guides and boats, and most Keys businesses have suffered a series of reversals, including the decline of Florida Bay fisheries 15 years ago; the 9/11 attacks in 2001, which undercut tourism; damage from hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma in 2005; the Great Recession; the devastating Cheeca Lodge fire in 2009; sea-level rise; fishing

closures in the marine sanctuary; soaring fuel prices from 1999 to 2008; the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010; and the trend toward bigger boats and engines, which has rendered the marina’s boat barn obsolete. “I had visions of everything I’d built here and spent years of my life on being wiped out,” says Stanczyk.

Six or seven years ago, Bass Pro Shops’ Morris, whom Stanczyk greatly admires, offered him “an astronomical sum” to buy Bud N’ Mary’s. “I was near accepting his offer,” he says. “It was an insane amount of money.”

When Nick, then a student at the University of Miami, got wind of the negotiations, he rushed home to upbraid his father, as his grandfather had decades earlier when Stanczyk traded fishing for a 9-to-5 job. “Nick had tears in his eyes,” Stanczyk says. “He told me, ‘You have 45 boat captains. You have 45 families depending on this property. How could you do this?’”

Instead of selling Bud N’ Mary’s, he decided to refocus it: Keep the Old Florida fish camp feel and market it to a younger generation as a family destination where fishing and boating and the backcountry experience are the draw.

Its Islamorada Hotel is a quaint collection of lodgings: an oceanfront house, a “penthouse suite” overlooking the harbor, four houseboats, efficiencies, hotel rooms, including a tiny houseboat “moored” landside, and a suite over the tackle shop.

He has added a sundries and apparel store to the bait-and-tackle shop, and next to the office added an open-air café/deli. The faded yellow boat barn is being repurposed as a hall for community and marina events. One recent evening it was set up to host a banquet for a group of veterans with disabilities after a day of fishing.

And Stanczyk has a few other tricks up his sleeve. This past February he was in the southern Bahamas, negotiating to buy a waterfront home with a dock. He’s always on the lookout for a business opportunity, and the home could do double duty as a personal getaway and as a remote outpost where he can keep a boat and fly people in and out to fish. Stanczyk is still reinventing himself. “I’ve had an exciting life, a great life, a lucky life,” he says. “If you can do something you really like, you’ve hit a home run. I love to fish.” ←