



NEW PRESIDENT, NEW BOARD

by Steve Davis, BWI President

Each year in February, a group of writers, editors, and boating industry representatives gather at the Miami International Boat Show to celebrate Boating Writers International's annual contest winners and fuel up with a full breakfast buffet before heading to the show floor for opening day. The meeting also brings members together for a "state of the association" update and is a great way to catch up with fellow writers and network with sponsors who generously support the importance of the boating media.

As I step into the role of BWI Board President, my sincerest accolades go to Ben Stein for leading the BWI membership for the past two years. His logic and boating knowledge were, and continue to be, instrumental in keeping conversations focused with the board, its members, and industry stakeholders. Thank you, Ben, you've been a valuable asset, and I'm glad you're staying with us as Past President. I'd also like to welcome Mike Longman of *BoatU.S.* and Arnie Hammerman of *Best4Boats.com* to the board. We have lots of fun ahead of us.

It is fun, and I plan to continue keeping the conversation focused

so all of us can benefit from being a part of the BWI community. As writers, photographers, videographers, editors, and creators, we play a crucial role for manufacturers by boosting a brand's presence in a very competitive market through print, web, and social media platforms. I'm acutely aware of all the shuffling of publication titles and the effect it's had on members. But we are a very creative lot, and I've learned over my eclectic career that things usually work out, no matter which fork in the road I take. The same has happened throughout the industry, but Frank Hugelmeyer, president and CEO of the National Marine Manufacturers Association, in his annual State of the Industry address points out that boating will persevere.

"Boating delivers something Americans value more than ever, meaningful experiences and connection to family and friends and an unrivaled health and wellness lifestyle in nature," he said. "Boating isn't just a purchase, it's transformative, and the demand for time on the water is as powerful now as it has ever been."

Boating is special for so many, and stories are waiting to be told.



BWI will remain a source for members to network and expand opportunities, so don't stop. Tell the story.

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THERE'S NO "I" IN AI

I bristle every time I read another story or hear another podcast about the ways Artificial Intelligence (AI) is expected to replace human creativity. And as someone who makes a living creating copy, photos, and other content about boating and fishing, I take the threat personally. Maybe too personally. This may be a get-it-off-my-chest rant disguised as a BWI craft column but hear me out.



Thanks to ChatGPT and other AI “tools” (I prefer crutches), anybody with a pulse and enough manual dexterity to push a button can “create” decent written copy. Up until recently, this was never the case. Creating smooth-flowing, inspirational copy was an art unto itself, and the difference between true artists and those painting by numbers was obvious.

I’ve never used ChatGPT and I never will. But I’ve become adept at sniffing it out when people send me articles, news releases, or business letters “they’ve” written. I can tell AI-generated copy because while it’s usually decent and factually accurate, it is also often dispassionate, sterile, and uninspiring. And it bugs me how it’s being accepted with a shrug and “what are you gonna do” attitude. Since when did “good enough to get by” become something to shoot for?

I’ve heard that AI is going to keep improving and that the slop being spat out by computer algorithms will, over time, become harder to tell from true human created content. This may be so, but it won’t stop me from mounting the only possible resistance tactic I can muster. As much as possible, I’ve been personalizing my articles with my own experiences on the water, injecting my opinions about a particular boat, feelings about catching a notable fish, or embarrassment about making a stupid mistake. At first it was without intention, but now it’s become more of a mission. When I finish a lead or a key paragraph in an article I’m writing, I pause to ask myself, “Is this something another person could have created using ChatGPT?” If the answer is “no,” I feel pretty good.

Here’s an example: I recently wrote about the speed of a Freeman 42 catamaran by explaining—with only a wee bit of exaggeration—that we made it to the distant offshore fishing grounds before the album version of Iron Butterfly’s *In a Gadda Da Vida* could strike its last power chord. “In your face, AI!” I’m pretty sure I said that out loud as I read the lead back to myself. I doubted that AI would mind any references that ancient—especially for an article about grouper fishing in Florida. And if the Internet somehow actually *knew* this song was blasting through my earbuds during the ride, then there’s truly no hope for humanity. SkyNet has already won.

So, I’m on a one-man crusade to use my own personal Anti-AI Stylebook and convince my PR clients and editors alike that ChatR-O-N will always be better than ChatGPT. And I encourage all of us who write for a living to do the same. We’re in this business because we are passionate about boats. Emphasize passion in your writing as much as facts and data. Use words like I, me, and we as often as possible. Write about how you felt, what you saw, and what it made you think. Share on-the-water experiences that are uniquely yours.

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Over time, I believe the gap between computer generated copy and that created by caring professionals will widen and be easier to see. Not only will you be planting a flag on the AI battlefield, but you'll also be delivering more relatable, engaging, and entertaining copy to your editors and audience.

Ron Ballanti is a BWI Board Member and founder of StrikeZone Communications

GENERAL NEWS

BWI ANNUAL CONTEST 2025 WRAP

The winners of the 2025 BWI Annual Contest were announced at the BWI membership meeting and awards breakfast on February 11 in Miami. Thank you to our new breakfast sponsor, Suzuki Marine USA, who stepped up to support the writers. Also, a great big thanks to all the chairs and judges as well as our 16 contest sponsors (see below) who made it all possible.

We had 315 entries from 82 entrants and we awarded 18 Certificates of Merit. Details are in the [press release](#) which was distributed at MIBS and is up on BWI.org. Congratulations to all.

BWI NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Three open director seats were filled by newcomers Michael Longman and Arnie Hammerman who will serve a three-year term. Alan Jones was re-elected. The slate of officers now includes Ben Stein (immediate past president), Steve Davis (president), Pete McDonald (1st vice president) and Kelsey Bonham Bailey (2nd vice president). Ron Ballanti continues to serve. Congratulations and thanks to all.

A big thank you to all our BWI Annual Contest Category Sponsors. You make all this possible.

Boating Columns – sponsored by KVH Industries, Inc.
Boating Lifestyles – sponsored by Discover Boating
Boating Profiles – sponsored by Nautical Ventures
Boating Travel or Destination – sponsored by Dometic
Boating Adventures – sponsored by Yamaha Marine Group
Boating Photography – sponsored by Raymarine-FLIR
Environmental Awareness & Education – sponsored by Propspeed
Fishing – sponsored by Suzuki Marine USA
Boating Issues, News and Analysis – sponsored by Mercury Marine
The Business of Boating – sponsored by BRP Marine
Seamanship, Rescue & Safety – sponsored by Sea Tow Services International
Boat Tests & Reviews – sponsored by Volvo Penta
Gear, Electronics & Product Tests – sponsored by Furuno Marine Electronics
Boat Projects, Renovations & Retrofits – sponsored by Boats Group
Boating Videos – sponsored by Boat Owners Association of the U.S.
Women in Boating – sponsored by Marine Business Unit/Yamaha Watercraft

BWI IS SOCIAL!

BWI has an expanded presence on social media. Be sure to give us a follow on Instagram @boating_writers_international, on Facebook at Boating Writers International and on LinkedIn @boating-writers-international.

Don't forget to tag us in your posts too, so we can share and repost your stuff. The more we're connected, the more we can keep the world informed about what's happening on the water. For questions, contact Pete McDonald at pete.mcdonald@firebrand.com.



WELCOME

New Members

ACTIVE

Henry Gannon

Carson City, NV

Mario Vittone

Lithia, FL

John Lack

Elk Grove, CA

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The BWI Journal is produced by and for members of Boating Writers International and can be found at www.bwi.org. Send items to be considered for publication to newbwiinfo@gmail.com. All information contained herein is meant for the use of members, is in their best interest, and appears in as true and accurate a form as possible. Membership in BWI is open to anyone involved in the recreational boating industry. Active members are generally writers, editors, photographers, videographers and broadcasters. Supporting members are usually manufacturers or marine organizations.