

Recently I received yet another e-mail message from one of our chapter presidents asking how he should answer a question from one of his members: Why should we be members of the national TSCA; what do our members get from their association with TSCA? It's a good question, and I'll try to answer it here.

First, TSCA is and has always been a TOTALLY volunteer-staffed and member-driven organization. We have NO paid staff. Even the officers and Council who do all the grunt work in membership fulfillment, magazine publishing, and Gardner Grant reviews are unpaid (and still pay their regular dues to boot!). Since it is a volunteer-staffed organization, we are limited by the willingness of our members to do all the required work and any other perceived desired or "needed" work.

Second, as long as I have been in TSCA (since 1997), the national organization has left local governance to the individual chapters, and has not tried to direct them in how to develop or administer their programs. As a result, the chapters are very diversified, ranging from informal, messabout-only chapters like Puget Sound and Oregon Coots, to those with significant local youth-development and community-boatbuilding projects like John Gardner and Crystal River, to those closely associated with larger organizations like Buffalo Maritime Center and Michigan Maritime Museum.

So, what DOES the national TSCA do?

Primarily, we provide a center point for organizing local small-craft clubs & organizations and providing them with a national identity. The community we represent is small by any measure, and without a national identity the various local groups would likely drift into isolation rather than provide mutual support. I believe our relative influence in the small-boat community will become increasingly important as large museums like Mystic Seaport and other commercial organizations are less willing and able to provide financial support to small-craft programs.

We offer organized, INSURED on-the-water boating activities for members and their guests. We have contracted with The Gowrie Group for event liability insurance for all TSCA chapter activities. As part of that effort, we have become organizational members of US Sailing, through which the Gowrie Group offers this exclusive, affordable insurance. While the cost is a significant part of our dues – approximately \$5 per member per year, it has not caused any dues increase to date.

As a recognized non-profit educational organization, TSCA provides local chapters with the IRS 501(c)(3) "umbrella" to keep the tax man at bay when it comes to donations & dues. Because of the diversity of chapters noted above, that may not be important to the BMC or MMM chapters (who have their own non-profit umbrellas), but has been VERY important in supporting the community-focused efforts at JG and Lost Coast (where prospective donors want the tax deduction for their donations), and at least incidental in other chapters.

Visibility of the national organization is provided to our members via our quarterly journal, The Ash Breeze. It is published by volunteers from material sent in by our membership and friends. We don't pay professional writers, so the "quality" of writing simply reflects the varying abilities of our boating members to translate their experiences into words and pictures. Our editors have ALWAYS done minimal editing of submitted articles, keeping with the "member driven" philosophy. An informal editorial board selected by the editors helps with coarse proofreading, but a few misspellings are bound to escape their notice, and they will NOT rewrite a member's submission to attain some arbitrary "quality" standard.

Because of the editorial delay inherent in a quarterly publication, we have moved a lot of the administrative writing to our web site. Again, since it is maintained by volunteers with limited time and experience, you may not find a weekly rotation of new and exciting pictures, but important events and announcements are posted usually within a day (and often within a few minutes or hours) of receipt. Chapter sites are, again, maintained by chapter webmasters without interference from the national organization.

One of the most underused but potentially most useful services we provide is via our support forums on our relatively new Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/TSCA.group/>) and our older – but still well-populated – Yahoo Groups forums. A wide range of knowledge and experience is available via the various national and chapter forums. While you may have to sort through more messabout announcements than you might like, answers to most members' questions are usually answered within a few days, at most.

Our web site, along with link exchanges with other similar organizations, brings in MANY questions from people outside TSCA, who are potential TSCA members. I field phone calls from around the country and e-mail inquiries from around the world on a weekly basis. A significant number of them come from our link on the ACBS (Antique & Classic Boat Society, the powerboaters' analog to TSCA) web site. Apparently it is easier to get good and timely information from TSCA members than from the MUCH larger ACBS membership! Most of those inquiries I redirect to other TSCA members via the forums and/or e-mail. I cannot remember a single inquiry in 15+ years about some little-known boat (including some classic powerboats) that has not brought at least one valuable piece of information to the requester via TSCA.

Among our relationships with other organizations is a Cooperative Agreement with Boat/US, the national boating lobby. That agreement brings our members a 50% reduction in Boat/US dues (simply cite Cooperating Group #GA84393B in your application/renewal) and access to several services such as their speakers' bureau, which can be useful for chapter meetings.

TSCA was born in response to concerns over adverse legislative proposals in the 1970s that would have effectively legislated homebuilt boats out of existence. Our IRS 501(c)(3) status makes it more difficult to do any overt lobbying, but our members have been able to respond to several local legislative challenges on the chapter level. Chapter organization is much quicker and effective in these cases, but spreading the word through the national organization is essential to keep boaters in other areas forewarned. While we are relatively small and insignificant in national boating politics, we now have at least a couple personal relationships at Boat/US that let our voice be heard on national issues.

Last, but certainly not least, we administer the John Gardner Fund which grants money to [usually] smaller organizations and individuals for small-boat projects, who might not otherwise be able to get funding for projects of historical significance and/or community value. Our grant money is only limited by the willingness and ability of our members and friends to donate to the Gardner Grant Fund (professionally, independently, and efficiently administered by the Maine Community Foundation); and the ability of grant requesters to present a reasonable case for their projects.

I hope this answers the question for you and for people you know. If not, just ask us, and we can provide more detail.