

SUPER MARINE SURVEYOR

Lower Mat resident one of two females to be accredited

If Diane Douglass comes to survey your boat, there's no need to help her onto the deck. Since following her husband, Keith, onto boats 25 years ago, Diane has conducted hundreds of surveys over the years, and she's now one of only two females in all of Florida to be an accredited marine surveyor.

"It's a man's world," Diane said as she described her job. "I've been asked to leave the boat and not to come on the deck. I tell them 'OK, check with your insurance company.'"

A resident of Lower Matecumbe near MM 74, Diane and Keith came down to the Keys 29 years ago, journeying 52 days via sailboat from their Central New York home with their two children, who were 4 and 8 at the time. With Keith securing a job at the Florida Sea Base, where he still works, Diane was offered a nursing job at Mariners before she even made land in the Keys.

"The head of the Sea Base, Sam Wampler, was friends with the head of Mariners Hospital," she said. "They knew I was a nurse, so I was offered a job before I got here."

During their fourth year in the Keys, Keith decided to run for county commission. He won in 1984, but the family needed some income as their pay went down coming to the Keys — and even more so during Keith's county commission days.

"He started to look into surveying — that's what he was doing at the Sea Base, as he'd get boats into the program and inspected to make sure they were safe," she said. "Somebody said to him, 'Become a surveyor.'"

Diane, who worked in the nursing and health care industry for many years, would follow her husband whenever possible onto boats as he conducted surveys. The experience she gained allowed her to obtain three years of credit toward her accreditation as a marine surveyor. But she was given just a short period of time to take a test for full accreditation — something that many usually have five years to take.

"I only had a year and a half to take the test," she said. "They called me last June and said, 'You have until October to take the test.' I had to learn everything from electrical and wooden boats and fiberglass repair to all the Coast Guard stuff and industry standards. I had a stack of books several feet tall."

Sure enough, Diane passed the test within the timeframe, and she's now part of the Society of Accredited Marine Surveyors, or SAMS. Diane says she enjoys the work that involves all sorts of scenarios.

"Say you want to buy a boat; we check all the systems to make sure it's all working, what it's being advertised as and things that are wrong with the boat," she said. "For insurance purposes, companies want to know where their risk is."

Diane said they survey many charter fishing boats. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, she said, they've conducted 80 damage claims in the Keys.

"She can hold her own," Keith said. "When I first met her, she never had been on anything bigger than a rowboat."

Full name? Diane Douglass.

Where were you originally from? Upstate Pennsylvania in the Poconos.

What are your hobbies? Fishing and sewing. I used to be a seamstress. I was also a sail maker.

What's the nicest boat you've surveyed? A 63-foot Merritt. Used to be at the end of the canal where we live. I spent two-and-a-half days on that boat.

Ever have a rough encounter on the job? Oh yes. I had a guy who had an engine all apart, and he knew we were coming. There was grease all over. We showed up and he said 'She's not coming on my boat.' He said 'I'm going to lunch' and walked away.

What do you like to do on your down time? Go out on the boat. It's called Reel Lady. Keith and I also like to go to Dog Beach, which is a little island. We have a little yacht club, and the dogs can run there. Our cat used to go with us. She used to swim, but she doesn't go any more.

Where's your favorite spot to go in the Keys? Dog Beach.

What's something people don't know about you? I'm a convert to Catholicism.

Who's been most influential in your life? Probably my husband.

Who listens to you better, your dog or your husband? My dog.

Do you have a dream boat or dream car? My dream car is covered in the driveway, a 1978 MGB.

What's your go-to drink after a long day? Scotch.

Your favorite place to eat? Lazy Days.

Finish these sentences

My friends would describe me as ... private.

My husband would say I am ... an accredited marine surveyor.

If I had a superpower, it would be ... super house cleaner.

If I could go anywhere in the world, I would go to ... Scotland.

The last thing I do before I go to bed is ... let the dog out.

Surveying boats is ... a lot of fun.

W JIM MCCARTHY
jim@keysweekly.com

