



Excel Boat Club fills a niche on Lake Minnetonka.

by David Hawley

BILL HEIAM CALLS HIMSELF A "HARDCORE WATER KINDI
guy." And he has the background to prove it — includi
summers spent sailing, skiing and fishing on La
Minnetonka, where his parents owned their home duri
his childhood.

Four years ago, about the time the eldest of his thr
sons was entering kindergarten, Heiam started thinki



That's when he heard about the Excel Boat Club, where no members own a boat.

"I am surrounded by neighbors who have boats in their garages," says Heiam, who now lives in Chanhassen and owns a telecommunications sales agency. "I got sticker shock when I learned what it costs to rent a slip, and I heard horror stories about waiting two hours to launch at a landing."

These days, when Heiam and his family arrive at his club's pier in Excelsior, they are met by a valet who loads their gear into a cart and escorts them to one of the 18 boats they have selected for their day on the lake. Depending on their activities, the boat might be a 25-foot Glastron speedboat, a 24-foot Azure deck boat or a 26-foot Glastron with a cuddy cabin for naptime.

The valet backs the boat into the channel, then hops off at the main

pier — and away they go. At the end of the day, the valet hops back on, parks the boat in its slip and carries all the gear back to their car. Heiam has never cleaned a boat, gassed it, waxed it or even tied it up at the pier.

Susan Roberts, wife of Medtronic executive Dave Roberts, says they often use one of the club's big Bennington luxury pontoons for wine-tasting parties or cookouts (each pontoon has a large gas grill). Want it stocked with food and snacks? No problem. Need a driver to handle navigation? Just ask.

One nice thing about pontoon parties, Susan says, is playing host at the club and avoiding the bother of getting the house ready for guests. "It's one of the best things about summer," she says of her days on the lake.

"You won't find a higher-end service that's done in shorts and t-shirts," boasts Excel Boat Club owner Tom





"Our members tell us all the time about what a hit Lake Minnetonka makes with their out-of-town clients."
Tom Jacob

Jacob, who is launching his seventh season this summer on Lake Minnetonka. His website (www.excelboatclub.com) makes the economic argument that owning and maintaining a boat is a lot more expensive than paying the club's annual membership fees, which range from \$3,195 to \$6,195.

"But for most of our members, it's not about the money," Jacob says. "They just don't want to deal with everything involved with owning a boat."

Excel members agree. "The average person who owns a boat uses it maybe 10 times a year," says Tim Fieldhouse, a Fortune 500 company executive from Shorewood. "For every hour spent boating, they probably spend three or four hours doing drudgery. I can't say that waxing a boat is my idea of a good time."

Fieldhouse, who joined the club two years ago after moving to the Twin Cities from Atlanta, says the club's booking requirement

me," Fieldhouse says, then reconsiders and laughs. "Come to think of it, it may be a member after they stop to say, 'I'm cool!'"

Convenience aside, Jacob says one of his members use the club for 100 hours of entertaining — and, in fact, the club has a corporate membership category.

"Our members tell us all the time about what a hit Lake Minnetonka makes with their out-of-town clients," Jacob says. "Every town in the country has a golf course and some nice restaurants. But we've got a 14,500-acre lake just minutes from downtown, with beautiful bays and miles of shoreline. It makes an impression they don't forget."

The club limits its size to 150 members and by early summer there's a long waiting list to join. It isn't hard to join the club, says Jacob, who also has pontoon boats that he rents in the tra-

Jacob says that when Berman's pontoon returned after only a short time on the lake he anticipated hearing a complaint about something that had gone wrong. Instead, Berman walked in and joined the club on the spot.

"It didn't take me long to realize what a wonderful opportunity it was," Berman recalls. "You can't beat it." ♦

BOAT CLUBS AND ALTERNATIVES

Members of the Excel Boat Club have the option of choosing between a variety of power boats and luxury pontoons. But Excel's club isn't the only way to drive your own boat on Lake Minnetonka without owning one. Here are options:

EXCEL BOAT CLUB – Excelsior
Excel also has a standard day-use rental program for small fishing boats and pontoons. 952.401.3880. www.excelboatclub.com

SAILOR'S WORLD – Wayzata
In addition to its sailing club, Sailor's World also has a small powerboat club that features use of a 23-foot Chaparral deck boat or 21- and 23-foot Chaparral open bow runabouts. 866.405.3787. www.sailorsworldinc.com

HOWARD'S POINT MARINA – Shorewood
Small fishing boats and 25-foot or 30-foot pontoons are available for daily rent. 952.474.4464. www.howardspoint.com

BAY RENTALS INC. – Excelsior
Jet skis are available for daily rent. 952.474.0366.

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