

# Friends Await: Seven Seas Cruising Stations Growing

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Seven Seas Cruising Stations Growing – Watch where you step in Oriental. Dragon eggs lurk in many places around town. Photo by Terry Boram

Since the first boat sailed over the horizon, sailors have shared experiences, knowledge (and a drink or two) with other sailors. That sharing of information and camaraderie was how the [Seven Seas Cruising Association](#) began more than 60 years ago and prompted the formation of its Cruising Stations program in the '70s.

The program has more than 150 volunteer hosts worldwide welcoming cruisers to their ports, providing vital local knowledge and often hosting socials at the local marina or even at their own homes. But with hosts along the ICW just waiting to greet you with a smile, you need not cross oceans to experience this hospitality.

SSCA Rear Commodore Joan Conover revived the Cruising Stations program in 2007 after it had sat idle for several years. While Joan works hard recruiting hosts in critical areas such as Panama and Haiti, she's just as excited about new hosts at mile marker zero on the ICW in Portsmouth, Va., and in New Bern, N.C., off the Neuse River. "We have seen a tremendous surge in cruisers visiting the upper ICW," Joan shares.

While driving to our new home in Florida, we made a side trip to Oriental, N.C., to speak with hosts Ashley and Carol Erwin, two of Joan's recruits. Having first contacted them via the e-mail address on the SSCA website, we met at The Bean. Sitting in rockers on the coffee shop's porch, I asked what led the couple to settle in Oriental after cruising.

"You need a tour to understand," Ashley said. As we drove slowly around town we talked history, local culture, restaurants and which marinas were best for certain services. We learned about the "dragon eggs" around town, and Ashley gave us the grand tour of Whittaker Pointe Marina, one of the two marinas he manages in his "retirement."

"We hope you let others know how great our area is and that we are here to help," Carol said. In just an hour, we'd made friends for life.

The desire to befriend cruisers is the number one trait Joan looks for in a new host.

"They need to be outgoing and have a willingness to help, whatever the need," she says.

While recent cruising patterns, along with increased social media and smart phone use, have slowed traffic to U.S. cruising stations, Joan maintains that nothing can replace human contact. "When you come into a harbor it's good to know you have a friend," she says.

Ann and Jim Catchick of Vero Beach became Cruising Station hosts in 1999 while they were still cruising their 42-foot Ted Brewer designed sailboat in the Bahamas. Although they stopped cruising in 2003, the Catchicks remain active in the cruising community by driving visitors to get parts or fill propane tanks, recommending doctors, and extending other hospitality. Ann recalls lending their car to a cruiser who needed to take his boat engine to a mechanic. "We didn't even think twice about doing handing over our keys. It just made sense," she says.

Each Wednesday the couple hosts the CLOD (Cruisers Living on Dirt) breakfast at a local restaurant. It's open to any cruiser past, present and future. For the past 14 years, they've also opened their home to a few dozen cruisers each Thanksgiving. "We have friends who travel from the Gulf Coast, local cruising friends, and cruisers who are headed south to the Bahamas for the winter for this potluck dinner," Ann says. "It is great to see old friends as they pass through, but we love to make new friends."

Joan rattles off other contacts like Bob McBride in Portsmouth, Michael and Normandie Fisher in New Bern, Rick and Carol Butler in Beaufort, S.C., and Karen Thurman in Key West, Fla. "The Cruising Station program is alive and well in the United States," Joan says.

To find a warm smile in ports near and far, visit the SSCA online at [www.ssca.org](http://www.ssca.org).

