Nomination of Rives Potts:

Rives Potts, born in 1949, in Richmond, VA, is a leader in the sailing world whose career spans several decades, from hands-on keel and boat building to executive leadership in the marina industry during times of growth and change.  His integrity, work ethic, determination and the high standards he sets for himself and his teams contributed to business growth and racing victories.  An approachable, congenial leader, he considers no task too menial and can often be spotted driving a travel lift, picking up trash, or cleaning the marina heads on Sunday mornings.  As a coach and mentor in business and in the sport of sailing, Potts has helped people develop their full potential by taking time to analyze results, give instruction and provide encouragement.

Over the past 60 years, Potts has been an avid sailor.  He started sailing with his father on their home-built Sailfish, and with his uncle in Hampton Roads, Virginia on a 22-foot Roger Morton designed center boarder, as well as Penguins, Jet 14’s, 505’s and Flying Dutchmen.  As an all-state football and baseball player in high school in Richmond, VA, Potts’ athletic ability and strength helped him be a sought-after crew on one of the early modern maxis, Southern Star, for the 1970 Bermuda Race.  The all-star crew on the Southern Star were some of the biggest names in big boat sailing at the time, from the east and west coasts….25 in all.  The experience with that talented group was a game changer for him.

After graduating from Virginia Military Institute in 1971 with a joint degree in civil & mechanical engineering, Potts worked in the construction engineering field before entering the University of  Virginia’s Darden School of Business, and continued his passion for racing in more Bermuda Races, Chesapeake Bay races, SORC’s and in many New England races such as Block Island Races, Block Island Race Weeks, Vineyard Races, NYYC Annual Regattas and Annual Cruises, Marblehead-Halifax Races, and many other local races.  Upon graduating with his MBA degree, he forewent the corporate life to go to work for Bob Derecktor and Jim Mattingly, building boats, in Mamaroneck, NY.  He was involved with building such notable racing sailboats as Boomerang, Flying Goose, and Volcano, and sailed on all three, amongst other well-known boats like Tatoosh, Recluta, Tenacious (including crewing on the 1979 Fastnet Race with Ted Turner).  He was also part of the building teams for Bill Ruger’s 90’ power yacht Titania, several patrol gun boats for the US Navy, many modifications to CCA designed racing sailboats to the new IOR design configuration… Carina, Pleione (now Hound), Congere, to name a few, and also built masts and booms, and keels for a number of boats.

Having gained the reputation as a hardworking, do-everything crew with credible boat building skills, in 1979 Potts accepted the offer to join Dennis Connor’s crew as a member of the America’s Cup Freedom campaign where he served both as project manager and crewman.  For eighteen months, trucking the boats back and forth between Newport and San Diego, the team trained with intensity and fervor without a day off, setting a new precedent for future competitors and winning the America’s Cup in 1980. Potts sailed in four other America’s Cup campaigns, three with DC and one with John Kolius (NYYC) in Freemantle, doing double duty as in-house boat and keel builder/repairer and crew.  In the eighties, he sailed with Dennis in many races around the world, including Ensenada Races, Cal Cups, Maxi Worlds, Big Boat Series, SORC’s, Sardinia Cup, and many local races in CA and in NE.

During this time period Potts also became partner, and managed, Pilots Point Marina, in Westbrook, CT which became the go-to yard for many of the high-profile racing and cruising yachts from around the world.   He built the yard up from 8 people to over 100 and built the twelve meter Magic, the Frers designed 50’ Retaliation, in conjunction with Custom Marine,  poured and installed over 60 keels for the boats converting to the IOR rule, and then later to the IMS rule.  Major refits and modifications were done to many of the great racing & cruising yachts of the time at PPM under Potts’ direction… Congere, Running Tide, Saga, Tempest, Kialoa, Nirvana, Williwaw,  Ticonderoga, Isabelle, Flyaway, Enterprise, Freedom, Blackwatch, Bolero, several yachts for the Herreshoff Marine Museum, and dozens more over three decades with Potts at the helm.

Potts was renowned for fixing things and making things happen, for the good.   When Bevin Koeppel, the owner of the Congere, broke his boom on a blustery first day of an AYC Spring Series weekend, he sadly told his crew (which included Potts), that Congere would not be able to race on Sunday.  Potts took it on himself to take the boom to the yard shop and stayed up all night repairing the boom (aluminum) and gave Bevin a call at 5am to tell him he could go racing…which they did, and won the race.  Bevin became a customer for life.

Another Potts/boom story:  Potts was sailing on Kialoa in the Kenwood Cup in Hawaii.  They were racing neck & neck with Windward Passage, downwind reaching in 30 knots, not more than a 100 yds apart down the east side of Molakai, when Kialoa’s boom dragged in the water at 23kts, snapping in two pieces.  Jim Kilroy and his captain, Bruce Kendall, assessed the situation, and told the crew that they would not be able to sail the 800 mile Around the State Race, which was to start the next day.  Potts grabbed two other crewmen and hunted down a welding machine and an electrical pole junkyard, and pieced the boom back together, good enough to do the race the next day. Kialoa won the race around the islands of Hawaii and broke the course record.  The fix was not pretty, but it got the job done. The crew and the owner were happy.

The Rives Potts’ stories of this nature are endless, where extra effort and determination, and the ability to pull a team together, somehow changed the day, whether on the racecourse, or in the shop, time and time again.  Needless to say, Potts was a highly sought-after crew and friend by many.

He also started and hosted the early summer regatta at PPM known as the Black Seal Rum Cup, which attracted many of the hottest IOR and IMS boats of the day as an early season warm up regatta for the upcoming NYYC Annual Regatta, Block Island Race Week, Bermuda Race and the other summer races.  Novel ideas, such as Thursday & Friday practice days and starts that were videoed for review and critique in the evenings by such luminaries as Dennis Conner, Tom Whidden, Paul Cayard, Steve Benjamin, Andreas Josenhans and others. Races were always run, even if it meant waiting for the late afternoon sea breeze to kick in…where several races were still held…often with several short legs.  Everyone appreciated the effort to make the races happen. No lack of racing at this regatta. And the results were posted before the boats hit the dock, and each boat was greeted with PPM volunteers offering trays of Mai Tais for the thirsty racers. All followed by great parties in the evenings, where the owners and their wives were treated like royalty…as the ones who really made our racing possible.  The now-famous, Peter Reggio, was Potts’ first PRO for this regatta.

He also created the Fun ‘n Sun Regatta, which was for many of the local sailors who had little or no experience in sailboat racing.  Each boat (50-60 boat fleets) would bring their own crew, and Potts organized a cocktail party on the Friday night of the weekend regatta at which he raffled off celebrity guests (many of the same who were at the Black Seal Rum Cups), to brief the novice skippers and crews on the plan for the racing over the next two days, and to go along as advisors on the races.  Huge success, and all the entry fees and raffle $ went to local charities. Prizes, just like the Black Seal Cup, were all practical gifts donated by local marine businesses. Good fun was had by all, and perhaps mostly by the guest celebrities, who enjoyed helping the novice sailors learn a little about racing and having fun with their boats.

Potts also started the PPM Sailing School for 8yr olds, up through adults, and classes especially for women.  The 6-week sessions for the young ones was taught in Sabots, JY15s, and Colgate 26’s, and marina customers would take the kids out on their cruising-class sailboats once they had learned the basics.  Everyone benefited from the experience, and many of the kids went on to race in prep school and college, and on the bigger boats in the marina on the Wednesday night racing. The adult and women’s programs were very successful, in that seamanship and boat handling were the main focus and having a good time on the water.

Potts also started the Connecticut Sail Access organization in Westbrook, which offered opportunities for people with disabilities to go sailing.  He donated several dock slips, a Hoyer lift, an 85’ ADA ramp for access and built a large platform for social activities and cookouts for the sailors and their families.  He encouraged other marina patrons to get involved. Now, some 30+ years later, the program is going strong and is run solely by marina customer volunteers.

In addition to growing and operating Pilots Point, and his involvement with the America’s Cups into the mid-nineties, Potts continued to keep up his sailing, in boats large and small, locally, and in events all over the world.  In his own words, Potts said that he was fortunate to be invited to sail on some great boats with some very great people, who have become friends for life. A fairly short summary of events he has sailed in, that he can remember, are most of the world’s major ocean races, 3 Transatlantics, 3 Sydney-Hobarts, over 20 Newport- Bermuda Races, approx. 18 SORC’s, 4 Miami-Montego Bays, Several Clipper/Kenwood Cups, three California Cups, 1 Congressional Cup, 1 Swiftsure Race, two Ensenada Races, countless day /overnight races in San Diego, the Chesapeake Bay, New England, 4 Maxi Worlds series,  3 Fastnets, 3 Cowes Weeks, 4 Marblehead-Halifax Races, dozens of deliveries back from Bermuda and to/from the Caribbean, and about 20 NYYC Annual Cruises. Notable boats on which he has sailed/raced on are Carina (48’ McCurdy & Rhodes), Country Woman (36’ Bob Barton), Rappahanock (37’ Dick Carter), Albemarle Pippin (40’ NY40-Peterson), White Cap (42’ Hinckley), Etoile (46’ S&S), Recluta (German Frers’ first successful racing yacht), Tatoosh (49’ Frers), Williwaw (46’ Peterson), Morning Star (46’ and 50’Frers), Abracadabra(50’ Reichel/Pugh), Retaliation (50’ Frers), Stars & Stripes 60’ Frers sled),  Kialoa III, IV & V,  Congere (82’ Pedrick), Boomerang (64’ Derecktor/Frers) & (80’ Frers), Southern Star (75’ Tripp), Xargo (80’ Frers), Condor (80’ K. Bushe), Emerude (80’ Frers), Nirvana (80’ Pedrick), Windward Passage (73’ Alan Gurney), Tenacious (61’ S&S), Running Tide (61’ S&S), Ticonderoga (73’ Herreshoff),  Sumarun (90’ Herreshoff), Sojana (115’ Farr), and the AC boats…Enterprise, Freedom, Liberty, America II (all 12 meters), and Stars & Stripes (80’ AC boats)

In his spare time, Potts was raising a family of a daughter and two sons, with his wife, Nancy, whom he met when they were 11 years old, and whose father was a Hampton One Design national champion.  As Potts was eager to teach his children to sail, and to perhaps follow him into his career on the water, he realized that he would be unable to commit the time to do this if he were sailing on other people’s boats.  He decided it was time for him to have his own boat, so that he could take his family sailing with him. He had taken care of Richard Nye’s Carina for almost 18 years and she had always been his favorite boat…..pretty, strong, seaworthy and under the Nye’s command, seemed to get around the race course pretty well.  In the early nineties, Mr. Nye told Potts that because of health reasons, he would be selling Carina.  Knowing Potts’ love for the boat, he offered to sell it to Potts.  Since then, under Potts’ command, and largely sailing with 4-5 other fathers and their sons, and a few other good friends, Carina has been a happy boat.  Potts’ two sons sailed their first Bermuda Race when they were 12 & 13, and have done every one since, except when they were in the Marine Corps and otherwise pre-occupied in the Middle East.  They and their friends, and their dads, have been great crew for Potts and Carina, bringing home 6 class wins and 2 St David’s Lighthouse Trophies, a couple of Corinthian Trophies and three team trophies.  Carina has won the Block Island Race, the Vineyard Race, the Round the Island Race in Newport, and the Signet Trophy for the top boat on the NYYC Annual Cruise.  On the other side of the Atlantic, Potts has won his class in the Fastnet Race on Carina, 2nd in Class twice in the Transatlantic Race, and was overall winner in the Royal Yacht Squadron’s 200th Anniversary Regatta in 2015.  After the 2011 Fastnet Race, Potts’ sons, and their cousin, and a couple of friends, sailed Carina across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific and to Sydney in time for the Hobart Race.  After the Hobart Race, they sailed her back to Newport, via Capetown, Charleston, SC., to complete their circumnavigation, and just in time for Carina to win 1st overall in the Bermuda Race for the 2nd time, back to back.

Carina had her 50th birthday this past year.

Personal recognition for his sailing successes has come by his receiving the Mosbacher Trophy in 2010 as the New York Yachtsman of the Year, runner up for the Rolex Yachtsman of the Year in 2012 (to Stan Honey), winner of the Northern Ocean Racing Trophy in 2012.

After the 1980 America’s Cup victory, Potts joined Brewer Yacht Yards as the General Manager of Pilots Point Marina.  Over a 30+ year time period, Potts progressed to roles of increasing responsibility and ownership, in 2012 he was appointed President and Operations Chief overseeing 26 boat yards from Maine to Maryland.  In 2017, Brewer Yacht Yards merged with Safe Harbor Marinas and Potts was appointed Chief Operating Officer of the newly formed company.  Potts currently serves as President of Safe Harbor Marinas, the world’s largest owner and operator of marinas.  Under his leadership, Safe Harbor has grown from 63 properties to 97 properties with team members dedicated to providing exceptional experiences to over 40,000 nationwide boaters.

Throughout his professional career, Potts continued his deep involvement in sailing as Commodore of the New York Yacht Club, its Sailing Committee Chair for six years, Rear Commodore of the Cruising Club of America, a member of the Board of Trustees of The Landing School for twenty years, a volunteer at Safety at Sea and an Inspector for the Newport Bermuda race.   He served several terms as the CT governor’s representative to the Long Island Sound Commission, formed to create guidelines and to monitor the LIS’s eco system. Additionally, he is an active member of the Fishing Bay Yacht Club, the Royal Ocean Racing Club, the Storm Trysail Club, the Off Soundings Club, and the Royal Yacht Squadron. Potts continues to be active in numerous sailing related organizations and he is currently a board member of Oliver Hazard Perry Rhode Island and the College Offshore Sailing Circuit.  Experience and dedication in every facet of sailing….VMI engineer, businessman, philanthropist, boat builder, volunteer, sailor and dad.