

# Con Trios Yacht Club Blessing Of The Fleet Event Is Big Success Again

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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PORTAGE DES SIOUX - The Con Trios Yacht Club event, the Blessing of the Fleet, took place in Portage Des Sioux on Saturday, August 21, 2021, and was once again a big success.

Blessing of Fleet spokesperson Jeff Easley said: "This is an annual event that consists of much planning, a fundraising party at a local marina (Alton or Grafton) and a large boat parade that actually begins in two places, Alton Marina and the Yacht Club of St Louis

in St Charles MO. The two boat parades leave their respective areas and converge at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rivers. This year's boat parade consisted of at least 100 boats.

"There is a theme every year for people who want to decorate their boats accordingly, and judges will determine the winners as they pass by the shrine. This year's theme was "board games" to which a cruiser decorated as the game 'Candyland' won."

Easley said the event is sponsored every year by RiverBills.com, which is actually Bill Kelley, a man who has had a deep and lifelong appreciation for the Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri rivers.

"The Treehouse Wildlife Center of Dow, IL., partners with RiverBills on many events in the Metro area dealing with trying to preserve the health of the Mississippi River and much of the wildlife that depends on it," Easley said.

Sherri Easley, the newly appointed director of the Treehouse Wildlife Center is very supportive of the Blessing of the Fleet cause, which is a fundraiser for the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rivers, to help maintain it.

Jeff Easley is a volunteer transporter for the Treehouse. When injured wildlife are found, he is dispatched to go get it, whether it is a full-grown Bald Eagle or a baby bunny.

Sherri Easley, Jeff Easley, and Damon Sage, a long-time member of Con Trios Yacht Club and a sponsor of the event, were Blessing of the Fleet judges. They are shown in the photo above.

### **Leaders of the Blessing of the Fleet event:**

**Con Trios President:** Rick Flier

**Con Trios Vice Pres:** Aimee Davison

**RiverBill:** Bill Kelley

### **Judges:**

**Sherri Easley:** Director of Treehouse Wildlife Center

**Jeff Easley:** Injured Wildlife rescue and transporter

**Damon Sage:** representative and member of Con Trios yacht club

## **HISTORY OF THE BLESSING OF THE FLEET, INC., AT PORTAGE DES SIOUX**

The Blessing of the Fleet, Inc. is responsible for organizing The Blessing of the Fleet and Parade of Boats, an annual event on a river rich in tradition. This event is held on a mid-summer afternoon on the Mississippi River between Mel Price Lock and Dam in Alton, Illinois and the Winfield Lock and Dam, Missouri.

The Shrine of Our Lady of the Rivers in Portage des Sioux is the actual site of the ceremony and gets her name from the fact that three major rivers - the Illinois, the Missouri, and the Mississippi - all meet within a few miles of the statue. The first pleasure Boat Blessing materialized as a result of a flood that threatened Portage des Sioux in the early 1950s. The towns' parish, headed by Rev. Edward Schlattmann, prayed together to the Virgin Mary for the town of Portage des Sioux to be spared from the perils of the rising waters. Together, they coined a name for the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Rivers. As history records, the flooding waters parted and traveled just above and below the river town without entering it. To pay tribute to their Lady, the town people and parishioners, Schlattmann and local businessmen, and local boatmen formulated plans for the first religious fiberglass statue.

Eventually, the 25' Statue of Our Lady of the Rivers and a 25' Base were erected at the site of Portage des Sioux. It remains today the fourth tallest statue of Mary in the world. Over the years it has served as a navigation aid for the area and the podium from which the annual Blessing of the Fleet takes place. As each vessel approaches the base of the Shrine, and slows to idle speed, a blessing is bestowed as they pass imploring heaven to protect and bless them in these waters. This tradition has proven to be the highlight of the area's boating season. Each year attracts hundreds of participating decorated pleasure crafts, as well as spectators to the area. Together, they display an exquisitely executed celebration of the season, exhibiting a long-inspired passion for boating and relating knowledge of history.

Participants compete for awards in specific categories by decorating to a designated theme for each year and are invited to gather following the parade and blessing for a fun and festive awards ceremony held at a local area marina.

The Blessing of the Fleet works in conjunction with area marinas, harbors, various related area businesses, as well as civic and local organizations and has the cooperation of the Orchard Farm Fire Protection District, Rivers Point Fire Protection District, U.S. Coast Guard, and U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadron, Missouri Water Patrol, and Our Lady of the Rivers Shrine Committee of Portage des Sioux, Mo.

To all past and present officers and committee members of the Blessing of the Fleet, Inc. who have dedicated their time and talents over the past sixty-plus years to preserve and maintain this tradition, we are honored to congratulate you. To generations yet unborn, The Shrine and this Annual Tradition will together serve as a symbol of our generation's appreciation of the nautical sensibility and natural beauty of this area where three rivers meet near the site of the Statue of Our Lady of the Rivers, Portage des Sioux.

Congratulations Blessing of the Fleet, Inc. on these accomplishments.