

Marina life

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lives, when Dennis was a lumber sales manager and Dick ran the Bean Pot restaurant.)

Some marinas are easier to live in than others. The newly renovated Clinch Park Marina in Traverse City, for instance, now has extensive onshore facilities for the use of transient and long-term slip users alike. And the Duncan Bay Boat Club just east of Cheboygan is positively luxurious — more than half of the people who own slips there either live on their boats all or most of the time, said dockhandler Natassia McKillip.

“We have a clubhouse with shower and a pool, and we provide them with most of the extras they might need,” she said. “I know most of the people here, and they’re really a lot like neighbors with each other.”

Derek Rothgarber and his two neighbors at the Suttons Bay Marina are exactly like neighbors; at the end of almost every workday, you can find them chatting to each other from the transoms of their respective boats as they grill up the evening meal and enjoy a little relaxation.

Rothgarber, 30, lives aboard his powerboat, Gin & Sin, and works just up the beach at Skrocki’s Marine Supply — often helping other marina occupants solve problems with their own boats. During the winter he rents a house on nearby Stony Point. He bought his first boat when he was 21 and has never owned a house.

“What I love about this life is having the freedom to go someplace different every weekend and still enjoy this lifestyle,” he

says. “What I don’t like is having to figure out what to do with all the stuff I can’t fit on the boat. I used to keep my stuff at a friend’s house, but he’s moving out now and I just had to go get six boxes of winter clothes. I don’t know where I’m going to put it.”

Dick and Jill Hartley don’t even have a permanent winter home. During the summer, they live on their 36-foot sailboat “La Vida” in the Elk Rapids Village Marina, and in the winter they go traveling from one warm destination to another in their fifth-wheel RV.

“We’re homeless,” said Jill, a retired middle school teacher. “We keep trying to get the government to give us money, but so far they haven’t.”

The Hartleys have berthed “La Vida” in Elk Rapids for the past 15 years. When Dick retired from his teaching job at Central Michigan University in 2001, they decided to sell their home and move onto the boat full-time. They don’t miss many of the comforts of home, since the marina has almost everything they need — from outdoor eating and party rooms to an indoor lounge for foul weather — and downtown Elk Rapids with shopping and dining is just a few blocks away.

“We love it,” said Jill. “Mainly it’s the people; we’ve made some wonderful friends here, and you’re constantly meeting people from Michigan and nearby states.”

Since sailboats are a good deal less expensive to operate than power boats (the fuel is, for the most part, absolutely free) “La Vida” spends quite a bit of the season on the lake and not in the slip. Those



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Dennis and Maureen Mitchell in front of their boat, “G’Day,” at the Elmwood Township marina.



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