

## **Member Spotlight**

### **By Candace Perry Hall**

**Jim Hunt** – Elected member of NBYC in 1961 (later serving as a Board Director, Racing Chairman and Rear Commodore), currently an honorary member  
Nominee for the National Sailing Hall of Fame

When Jim “Sham” Hunt first settled in Padanaram, at the age of 24, he had already experienced more offshore sailing and participated in more major races than most sailors accrue in a lifetime.

The son of the legendary boat designer and yachtsman C. Raymond (Ray) Hunt, Jim grew up sailing with his family, and he shared the same passion for sailing as his father. At 14, he crewed in the Bermuda Race aboard the family’s 52-foot ketch, Zara, and would ultimately crew in about 80 percent of his father’s races.

They won the New London to Marblehead race three times in Zara, and sailed that same boat from Massachusetts to the Bahamas and back when Jim was just a teenager, with the entire family.

At 19, Jim crewed for his father, along with his three siblings and mother, in Cowes Week, the United Kingdom’s longest running sailboat race. Racing against the best sailors in the world, they competed in a 41-foot Concordia, Harrier, designed by Ray Hunt. They won the first six races, but lost the last race, Fastnet, in a painful turn-of-events that led to them dropping out of the race. When they were six hours ahead, two turnbuckles failed, so they had to retire, sailing instead to Ireland.

That, however, was just the beginning of Hunt’s boating legacy. Living just down the street from the Yacht Club, he came to the area to launch his career at the O’Day Company, starting as a salesman. Throughout the next decades, he balanced a life between yachting entrepreneur, international racing competitor, and offshore cruising sailor to accomplish a list of goals he set as a young man.

“When I think of all the sailing feats we accomplished in 20 years, it is a story and a half,” he said.

Just shortly after settling in Padanaram, Hunt won a gold medal in the 1960 Olympics (Naples, Italy), crewing on a boat designed by his father – a 5.5 Meter named Minotaur. He and Dave Smith crewed for George O’Day (founder of the O’Day Company).

In the following years, he sailed as both skipper and crew in national and international competitions. He crewed for his father in two major events, sailing in the America’s Cup Trials (a second time) and the World Championships in 5.5 Meters, in which they won a gold medal (1963).

He then established himself as one of the country's top skippers, sailing a Tempest, a 22-foot racing keel boat built by O'Day. In 1967, he placed second in the International Tempest Championships, held at NBYC. To have a hometown skipper be so successful was a boon for the club, but the next year was even more thrilling, when Hunt won the Mallory Cup (the North American Men's Championship).

Hunt, together with his brother Josh and long-time friend and NBYC member Bourne Knowles, won the cup in San Francisco. While recounting that time, Jim said there was a lot of hype during the event, and he concentrated on keeping himself and his crew focused. They ended up winning the first two races of the finals and finished first overall.

NBYC member Peter Kavanaugh (Commodore 2001-02) said he remembers the excitement around the club at the time, which included hanging a huge banner at the clubhouse.

"No one from New Bedford had ever won that medal (the Mallory Cup). He was an inspiration to us all – it gave us something to strive for," he said.

Hunt continued to compete successfully in major sailing events, including the Tempest Nationals in Marion (first) in 1971 and the Tempest World Championships in Sweden (4th out of 63 boats, only American to win a race). He also competed locally, as one of the top skippers in the Rhodes 19 fleet (an O'Day boat).

At the same time, he rose up the ranks at O'Day, first becoming the president of O'Day, then expanding his role to become the top executive of Bangor Punta and then Lear Siegler Marine (both companies bought O'Day along with several other boat companies). His company produced a long list of O'Day boats as well as Cal Yachts, Ranger Boats and Prindle Catamarans.

He retired as CEO/President of the conglomerate, which had 600 employees and three operating plants, in California, Florida and Massachusetts. At the end of his tenure, O'Day alone built just under 50,000 sailboats.

Peter Kavanaugh nominated both Jim and Ray Hunt for the National Sailing Hall of Fame more than a decade ago, and Jim Hunt's nomination has been renewed twice since that time. There are now more than 100 candidates, and each year the Hall of Fame's board chooses approximately 10 inductees.

Ray Hunt (designer of the Boston Whaler, Concordia yachts and V hull powerboats and considered to be one the top yacht designers in the 20th century), was inducted in 2014.

Don Macauley, former publisher of SAIL magazine, renominated Jim Hunt in 2016 in two categories: sailing and technical. In a nomination letter, he detailed Hunt's extraordinary background in both sailboat racing and cruising. He stressed that Hunt's greatest contribution, however, was his pioneering work as a boating manufacturer.

Macaulay attributed sailing's rising popularity to more affordable yachts, with O'Day leading the yachting world in producing high-quality boats that ordinary families could afford.

"Until the 1960s, sailing had been the exclusive sport for America's elite, then the O'Day corporation changed everything. Sham Hunt's vision was to bring sailing to America's middle class, and his manufacturing skills produced good sailing boats at prices ordinary families could afford," he said.

Hunt retired from that role after 27 years, and then embarked on a three-year sail to Turkey and back with his wife Nina and other crew at times. They sailed on a modified O'Day 40, Whale & The Bird, covering 30,000 miles and 23 countries.

In the following decade, he served as vice president and later CEO of another boating company, Corsair Marine (which built trimarans), worked as a ski instructor for three years in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and built two boats – a 45-foot catamaran and a 27-foot power cat.

The catamaran was designed by NBYC member Chris White, and Hunt said it was his all-time favorite boat. Not only was it comfortable, but it went extremely fast ("a little scary at times, but you could always slow it down," he said).

The boat, also named Whale and The Bird, was launched in 1996 in Washington state, and then Jim, Nina, and various friends went full-speed ahead on a series of cruises. He and Nina cruised the Pacific Northwest, and then sailed with friends to the Panama Canal before returning to Massachusetts. They covered 13,000 miles visiting 10 countries.

He sailed subsequent voyages around the world to exotic locations including Tunisia, the Bahamas, the Caribbean, and Cuba, and completed three Atlantic crossings as owner and second in command.

In 2016, he completed the "Great American Loop" with his brother and other family members on a Black Watch 26. They started in Westport and progressed to the Hudson River; Erie Canal; Lake Ontario-Trent Severn Canal; Chicago; Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee Rivers; Mobile; and finally Port Charlotte, Florida.

All in all, Hunt accrued 145,000 miles at sea without any injuries or incidents. He and Nina now live in Westport, and they have two boats – a Black Watch 26 and a Boston Whaler (both Ray Hunt designs).

Hunt's accomplishments are highlighted in the [National Sailing Hall of Fame](#). He is also credited with being a role model for NBYC sailors, inspiring some of its top racers to win national and world championships, whether it be through the boats he built or the races he won.