

# There's a New Marina in Town

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Two River Times



Trip Brooks, left and Mario Criscione, Asbury Park real estate developers, with their latest project, renovating and operating the Marina at Oceanport, which was part of the former Fort Monmouth U.S. Army installation.

OCEANPORT – There is a second lease on life for the former Fort Monmouth marina.

The 10 Riverside Ave. property, now renamed Marina at Oceanport, as of July 4 is up and running again. It is available to boat owners and will shortly be home to a full service restaurant and bar.

“We’re marrying the love of the water and the love of the real estate market in one project,” said Trip Brooks, one of the two partners in the Marina at Oceanport.

Brooks and his business partner, Mario Criscione, both of Asbury Park, are also partners in a 116-unit residential development project slated for Asbury Park.

The men had been looking at prospects at the former Fort Monmouth site where the Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority (FMERA) continues to seek tenants and purchasers for the former U.S. Army installation. When they found out that a long-dormant liquor license in Oceanport might be available, the developers gave serious thought to the marina and its accompanying building.

The U.S. Department of the Army leases the marina to FMERA. Criscione and Brooks bid to operate it and were awarded a year-to-year lease, Brooks said.

Since finalizing the details on the liquor license and lease agreement less than a month ago, the two have been in overdrive to get the location prepared for summer activity, they said.

“The docks were in fairly decent condition” when they took over, Criscione said. They needed to be cleaned up from years of disuse, except by some of the area’s wildlife.

The docks have 71 slips and a boat-launch ramp on the Oceanport Creek, which feeds into the Shrewsbury and Navesink rivers.

With the opening of the marina, “we’re getting a lot of interest now in the slips,” and have already leased some spots, Criscione said.

The site’s building, however, “was heavily damaged by Sandy,” when 4 or 5 feet of water flooded it as the result of the October 2012 storm, Brooks said.

The existing building, located on the marina’s 3.9 acres, is about 2,600 square feet and was constructed in 1986. It was previously available to military personal and fort civilian employees, according to information provided by FMERA.

The structure needs to be completely redone, especially its electrical system, to accommodate their future plans, Brooks said.

The building will be used for a full service restaurant and bar. It will have a fireplace, an outdoor dining deck and a bar that opens up over the water in the warm weather and a large window area off-season. Brooks and Criscione hope to have it open by early fall and will operate the facility all year.

In the meantime, they’ve put up a large tent to cover numerous new picnic tables and benches and will be serving drinks and snacks on weekends during the summer to accommodate the public and boaters, while work continues on the restaurant.

“It’s going to enliven this area,” Brooks said, noting the steady flow of traffic at the Oceanport Avenue intersection in the area of Old Wharf Park. The establishment will offer visitors to neighboring Monmouth Park racetrack and other sites another option. “It does seem like it’s an ideal spot.”

Brooks has been working in real estate development for the last 30 years, including on projects in New York City, Hudson County and most recently Asbury Park, where he has lived for 14 years, he said.

Criscione, who attended Maritime College, in New York, is a partner in a company operating in New York Harbor, transporting bulk petroleum products by barge. Like Brooks, he too, is now living in Asbury Park.

“So, we’re local guys who wanted to stay local,” Brooks said.

FMERA has been working with the former fort’s three host communities, Oceanport, Eatontown and Tinton Falls, plus federal, state and county representatives to redevelop the facilities and

1,126 acres at the former installation. It is looking to boost the area's and state's economies since the fort's closing in 2011 meant the loss of government operations and jobs.

Among the fort's other recreational facilities is the golf course and former officer's club on Tinton Avenue in Tinton Falls. The U.S. Army deeded that property to FMERA in June with the authority awarding the golf course's operation contract to Atlantic Golf Management. Under the terms of that contract, the firm will oversee operations for 12 months and may be extended on a month-to-month basis, according to Erin Gold, a spokesperson for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

This summer FMERA is expected to issue a request for offers to purchase the site to continue as a golf course and hotel/conference center, according to Gold.