



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Marine Industry Veterans Larry Russo and Steve Tilders Join 2026 EPIC Awards Judging Panel

Chattanooga, TN – August 5, 2026 — The Soundings Trade Only Group is pleased to announce the addition of two highly respected marine industry veterans, Larry Russo and Steve Tilders, to the judging panel for the 2026 EPIC Awards. Formerly known as the Most Innovative Marine Company Awards, the EPIC Awards recognize companies that are moving the recreational marine industry forward through Exceptional, Purposeful, Innovative and Compassionate leadership and action.

With decades of industry experience and distinguished records of leadership and service, Russo and Tilders bring valuable perspectives to a judging process designed to identify companies making a meaningful impact across the marine industry.

Larry Russo is a third-generation marine industry leader who spent more than four decades with Russo Marine, the family-owned dealership founded in 1940 in Medford, Massachusetts. He served as president and CEO before the company was acquired by MarineMax in 2016, after which he became senior vice president of MarineMax Northeast. He retired in 2025.

Russo has held numerous leadership positions within the industry, including chairman of the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas (MRAA) and the Massachusetts Marine Trades Association (MMTA), as well as board positions with the MMTA, Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF), Sea Tow Safety and Education Foundation, Grow Boating and NMMA Boat PAC. His industry honors include the Irv Rosenthal Award, NMMA Hammond Leadership Award and MMTA Lifetime Distinguished Service Award.

Steve Tilders brings more than five decades of marine industry experience to the EPIC Awards judging panel, including 17 years with BoatLIFE and 34 years with the company whose marine brands evolved from Rule, ITT, and Jabsco to Xylem. Throughout his career, Tilders held a variety of senior leadership positions, including director of sales and Global Marine Champion.

Tilders also dedicated 17 years to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) Board of Directors and its Marine Accessories and Components Division (MACD) Board, where he served as chairman. Beyond the marine industry, he has led numerous humanitarian initiatives, making more than 35 trips over two decades to aid in underserved communities around the world. He received ITT's highest honor, the Harold Geneen Award, for his community service in Haiti and, in 2025, was honored with the prestigious Alan J. Freedman Marine Industry Leadership Award. Tilders retired in the summer of 2026.

The EPIC Awards recognize organizations demonstrating excellence and meaningful impact across a range of areas, including:

- Altruism/Social Awareness
- Development & Technology
- Work Culture
- Manufacturing Processes/Supply Chains
- Start-ups
- Sustainability
- Training
- Other
- Mix of Categories

"Each year, the EPIC Awards shine a light on the transformative work being done across our industry," said Michele Goldsmith, vice president and general manager of the Soundings Trade Only Group. "We're thrilled to welcome Larry Russo and Steve Tilders to this year's judging panel. Their depth of experience, industry leadership and commitment to the marine community will bring valuable insight to the 2026 awards."

In addition to invited guest judges, the judging panel will include senior editorial and publishing leaders from the Soundings Trade Only Group and its parent company, Firecrown Media.

The 2026 EPIC Award winners will be announced October 7, 2026, at the conclusion of the MIX event during the IBEX Show. Recognition will include one overall winner, a Top 10 list and category-specific award recipients. Winning companies will be profiled in the November issue of *Soundings Trade Only* and featured online at TradeOnlyToday.com, along with additional recognition and promotional opportunities.

The awards will consider company achievements and initiatives taking place between August 16, 2025, and August 21, 2026. Entries are open through August 21, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET.

To learn more about the 2026 EPIC Awards, preview the entry form or submit an application, visit www.tradeonlytoday.com/epic-awards. The flexible online entry platform allows applicants to update their submissions through the deadline.

About the Soundings Trade Only Group:

The Soundings Trade Only Group is a marine business-to-business multi-media brand, with a mission to provide information to grow your business. It includes a monthly print publication, digital entities including a daily e-newsletter, web, and social media sites, and marine industry events. *Soundings Trade Only* offers the latest business news, and information about products, trends, statistics, management, and marketing insights, designed to reflect, inform, and inspire the marine industry. It is part of Firecrown Media, a global media platform for affluent enthusiasts and includes both consumer and trade marine titles. For more information, about the Soundings Trade Only Group, please visit www.tradeonlytoday.com, for your free subscription please visit www.tradeonlytoday.com/subscribe.

About Firecrown:

Firecrown isn't just the leading media platform for affluent enthusiasts; it's pioneering the fusion of content and commerce. With more than fifty prestigious publications in the marine, aviation, and hobby markets, Firecrown goes beyond traditional media. Its business encompasses e-commerce, finance, and real estate, all tailored to the communities engaged by its media outlets. Serving more than 24 million U.S. households classified as affluent enthusiasts, these consumers have considerable disposable income and are keen to invest in their passions and adventures. Firecrown is headquartered in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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