



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Soundings Trade Only Group Announces Winners of the 2026 EPIC Awards

Recognizing Exceptional, Purposeful, Innovative, and Compassionate Companies

October 7, 2026 | Tampa, Fla. — Soundings Trade Only Group today announced the winners of its 2026 **EPIC Awards** during a special ceremony at IBEX in Tampa, Fla.

Formerly known as the Most Innovative Marine Company Awards, the EPIC Awards recognize organizations shaping the future of the recreational marine industry through bold leadership, purposeful innovation, and commitment to positive impact.

EPIC — an acronym for *Exceptional, Purposeful, Innovative and Compassionate* — honors companies driving meaningful change within their businesses, across the marine industry landscape, and in the communities they serve. Each year, the program recognizes a **Top Award** honoree, a ranked **Top 10** and **individual category** winners.

Grady-White Boats Receives 2026 Top Award

This year's Top Award was presented to **Grady-White Boats**. In September, Eddie Smith, who has owned the boatbuilder for 58 years, announced plans to secure the company's future through the creation of a purpose trust. The move is a first for the recreational boating industry and creates what is expected to be the second-largest purpose trust of its kind in the United States, following the model established by outdoor retailer Patagonia in 2022.

"I think what Eddie Smith did for Grady-White was truly EPIC," said judge Steve Tilders. "Not selling the company and taking care of employees, while benefiting others, ensures that Grady-White's 'secret sauce' stays intact for the future."

Soundings Trade Only will profile the honorees and reveal the ranked Top 10 in the upcoming November issue.

2026 EPIC Award Category Winners

The EPIC Awards also recognized companies demonstrating excellence in individual categories:

- **Altruism / Social Awareness:** Grady-White Boats
- **Development & Technology:** Garmin and Brunswick Corporation — Tie
- **Work Culture:** Correct Craft
- **Manufacturing Process / Supply Chain:** Smoker Craft Inc.
- **Sustainability:** Volvo Penta
- **Training:** National Marine Electronics Association (NMEA)
- **Special Award — Partnerships:** Sharrow Marine

Open to all companies serving the recreational marine industry, the EPIC Awards recognize innovation and impact across the industry, within local communities and throughout the broader global marketplace.

"The 2026 judging process was challenging and inspiring. The submissions were extraordinary, highly creative, thoughtful, and informative," said Michele Goldsmith, vice president and general manager of Soundings Trade Only Group. "This year's honorees are transforming the marketplace through bold initiatives and strategic vision that are reshaping their businesses and elevating the entire marine industry."

Goldsmith also thanked the 2026 judging panel: **Chris Dixon**, senior editor, *Power & Motoryacht*; **Mark MacKenzie**, COO, Firecrown Media Marine Group; **Steve Tilders**, a 50-year marine industry veteran whose executive leadership experience includes Boat Life, Jabsco, Rule and Xylem, and a former chairman of NMMA's MACD board of directors; and **Larry Russo**, former president and CEO of Russo Marine and senior vice president of MarineMax Northeast. Russo, who retired in 2025, has served on the boards of numerous marine organizations and received multiple industry honors.

For more information about the EPIC Awards, visit tradeonlytoday.com/epic-awards. Submissions for the **2027 EPIC Awards** will open in June 2027.

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

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About Firecrown:

Firecrown is not just the leading media platform for affluent enthusiasts; it is 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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