

Merle Parke – an inspiration to California Yacht Brokers

The Merle Parke award is presented annually at the CYBA January dinner to an individual who has contributed unselfishly to the boating industry in California. The “Merle Parke” has been presented since 1985 to a who’s who of the marine industry.

Merle Beam Parke was born in Long Beach CA on November 9th, 1919. His parents were born in New York and move to California after Merle’s sister, Sydney was born.

Merle served in the U.S. Navy during WWII and he met his future wife, Eleanor Fabri, while on duty near Yerington, Nevada. Merle and Eleanor were married in 1946 and settled in Long Beach, Ca. Merle worked for Jerry’s Boat Sales and after a few years joined a partnership with Eleanor’s brothers and purchased Sun Harbor Boat Marina in San Diego. The Parkes lived in San Diego for many years and formed Merle B. Parke Yacht and Ship Brokers after selling the marina which they ran until retirement. They retired in Yerington, Nevada and Merle passed away on December 2, 2001 at age 82.

Merle was instrumental in the early formation of the California Yacht Brokers Association. In 1985 the CYBA Board of Directors dedicated an award to be presented annually to the person in the California marine industry who best embodied the volunteer spirit and dedication to support the yacht brokerage business. The first winner, naturally enough, was Merle Parke.

Since then the Merle Parke award has become one of the most prestigious honors that the CYBA can bestow upon an individual and the list of previous winners is a who’s who of the California marine industry.

Each year a committee consisting of the previous year’s winner, the CYBA president and the CYBA executive director select the most deserving honoree. An engraved plaque is presented to the winner at the CYBA annual dinner held in January of each year.

Former CYBA president and 2004 Merle Parke award winner, Jeff Long, provided a historical perspective about Merle Parke which is quoted here.

“Merle was a founding Member of the CYBA back in the mid-1970s. He and a few fellow brokers felt that if they were going to be in this business, they were going to bring professionalism, integrity and ethics to the industry, as there were very few rules and regulations back then. These men laid the ground work for what we have today.

As the years progressed, Merle...just the name “Merle” came to exemplify everything good about a person...all the things he represented...all the things he stood for.

People who knew Merle, remember his never ending love of the industry, always making time for those who had questions, and conducting himself in a most professional manner. Being from a military background, he sometimes had the perception of being a little gruff...but if you needed help, he was there; if you had a question, he would take time to answer it. All he expected of you was to do what you were doing in a professional manner and do it right.

As he approached retirement, his peers thought enough of the man, and what he stood for, to honor him and his name with an annual award given to an individual in the industry who has exemplified or exemplifies the things Merle would have admired.

The Merle B. Parke Award is one of the highest awards in the industry, and it is an honor to be a recipient.” Jeff Long

If you have a Merle Parke story you would like to share please get in touch with the CYBA. We would also love to receive any photos of Merle to supplement this article, thanks!