

IAMI Investigators of the Year for 2008

Two years ago this month, a Sr. Agent for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries learned that someone had obtained a boat by "questionable means." An investigation was launched that would eventually involve five law enforcement officers and four insurance company employees. They would spend hundreds of man-hours on the case, which would result in 14 charges, including felony theft, being filed against five suspects.

It seems the man who had obtained his boat by questionable means had "stolen" his own boat. He reported the "theft" to his insurance company and then set to work, with the help of some accomplices, to remake the boat and register it with a new owner as a completely different make and model. He had inside help that *would* make it easy to circumvent the titling system and he also had professional help that would make it easy to physically change the boat itself. The suspect went to a lot of effort to cover his tracks, he must have thought his plan was foolproof. What the suspect didn't anticipate, was the amount of work that would go into investigating his theft.

There were four important elements in this investigation that made it work. First, it took commitment. The boat in question was small - a 19' center console - and not especially expensive when compared to some of the high-speed performance boats that turn up missing. But theft is theft. And the people who worked on the investigation were all committed to doing something about the problem of theft. The investigation also took patience, patience to wait for fake paperwork to be filed with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; patience to put the boat under surveillance while new numbers and decals were affixed; and patience to obtain the boat's true HIN when the old one was removed and a new one added. And the investigation also took persistence, to identify and then investigate each of the original suspect's accomplices. Some were relatives. Another owned a marine repair shop. Eventually, thanks to the investigators' persistence, everyone who was involved would be charged.

Aside from commitment, patience and persistence, the fourth element that led to the successful outcome of this investigation was cooperation. This case would not have been solved had it not been for the cooperation of the people who work in Law Enforcement and the people who work for the insurance company. Each supplied information that kept the investigation moving forward. Only a few years ago, this sort of cooperation was the exception. Now, thanks to TAMI, cooperation between law enforcement and non-law enforcement has become the rule.

This year's Investigator of the Year for Law Enforcement are: Captain Ronald Morris, Lt. Bill Tyree, Sgt. David McAlpin, Agent Carla Rachal, and Agent Billy Shoemaker, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Enforcement Division.

And for Non-Law Enforcement are: Scott McClary, Sally Mistretta, Chad Thibodeaux, and Chris Canaski, Progressive Insurance Company, Louisiana.