

Priority Response, Commitment and Next-Gen Education



Thirty years ago, when Captain Tom Kehlenbach, owner of [Sea Tow Central Connecticut](#), began patrolling the waters of the Long Island Sound, cell phones didn't exist. Now Capt. Tom, a Master Salvor, uses drones to find scattered wreckage, and has the honor of being Sea Tow's second-longest serving captain.

Though technology has dramatically changed over three decades, two things haven't: Capt. Tom's ironclad commitment to priority service and his unwavering leadership in mentoring the next generation of boaters.

"This is an impressive milestone for Capt. Tom and one we're proud to celebrate with him," said Sea Tow CEO Capt. Joseph Frohnhoefer III. "His focus and dedication to helping individuals and families enjoy boating is why he has been successful over the last 30 years. The programs and relationships he has developed locally are a testament to his commitment to the community he serves."

Capt. Kehlenbach's team, comprised of active-duty and retired first responders, patrols 75 miles of coastline with a fleet of custom-rigged Boston Whalers strategically located throughout the area. Sea Tow Central Connecticut's response time averages 30 minutes or less, a metric that reflects Tom's own expectation for service.

"Families, especially those with small children, need to know we'll be there in a timely manner no matter what," he said. "It's our goal to always respond within an hour of receiving a call."

Capt. Tom's team has responded to more than 15,000 boaters over three decades of being on the water and helped countless more over the VHF radio, phone or at the dock.

Equally important to Kehlenbach is promoting boating safety and education. Sea Tow Central Connecticut maintains 14 [Life Jacket Loaner Stations](#), a program created by the Sea Tow Foundation, that cover Branford, Westbrook and Old Saybrook areas.

Capt. Tom also advocates that individuals and families should start boating education early. Sea Tow Central Connecticut offers a popular three-day course, dubbed "Hands on the Helm Boating University," giving teens 20 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction every summer. Born from his own daughter's desire to know more about her dad's passion, the course covers such topics as knot tying, flare and fire extinguisher use, VHF radio use, docking procedures, boating etiquette and map and chart reading.

"These kids are the future of boating," Capt. Tom said. "They will be able to use what they learn here for the rest of their lives."

For Capt. Tom, who got his introduction to Sea Tow at the Norwalk Boat Show, business is a family affair. His wife, an accountant, handles the books, and his (now) college-age daughter has been cleaning boats since she was 15. He counts his captains as extended family.

"After 30 years of serving boaters in the area, much has changed – but Capt. Tom's commitment to helping the community has stayed the same," Frohnhoefer added. "We're proud to have Tom and his team wear Sea Tow yellow."