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Boat-Building Icon Leon Slikkers Retires from Tiara Yachts, Capping Legendary 75-Year Career in the Marine Industry

- *In a career that began with building wooden runabouts, Slikkers pioneered sport, sail and pleasure boats with a focus on innovation, engineering excellence and unparalleled commitment to quality.*
- *With second-generation CEO Tom Slikkers at the helm, a third generation is now leading key functions to propel the company forward.*
- *Extraordinary growth – a near doubling of revenue from 2017 to 2021 – is fueling strategic investment in the company’s future.*
- *Following remarkable success of the luxury outboard segment, Tiara Yachts’ soon-to-be-released 55-foot yacht signals the company’s commitment to innovation, building in America, and inboard heritage.*
- *An early adopter of closed-molded processes – common in the defense and aerospace industries, Tiara Yachts continues its dedication to precision, quality, utility and performance.*
- *With a history rooted in Western Michigan craftsmanship, Tiara Yachts remains committed to being a destination for talent.*

HOLLAND, Mich. – September 8, 2021 – Leon Slikkers, a marine industry pioneer, whose career building boats dates back to the 1940s, is retiring from Tiara Yachts, the company announced today.

An industry trendsetter who bucked conventional wisdom when it came to building boats out of fiberglass instead of wood, Slikkers, now 93, founded S2 Yachts in 1974. The company initially focused on trailerable sailboats, but as it grew – armed with greater access to capital and Slikkers’ unrelenting drive to innovate in a highly competitive industry, S2 began building power boats shortly thereafter.

That eventually led to the creation of Tiara Yachts, an industry leader in mid-sized luxury yachts that currently employs over 600 people at its state-of-the-art 800,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Holland.

“This company, its rich history and all that it has accomplished wouldn’t have been possible if not for the vision, passion and unyielding entrepreneurial drive that our father has demonstrated for a lot of decades,” said Tom Slikkers, CEO and President of Tiara Yachts, a position he’s held since 2012. “His dedication to excellence and the translation of his passion for boat building across three generations will be a lasting legacy as we continue to provide exceptional customer service and highly specialized products.”

Leon Slikkers’ career began as a carpenter for Chris-Craft in 1946. In the mid-1950s, he took a risk, selling his home to raise capital to start building mahogany runabouts under the name of Slickcraft Boat Company. Shortly after starting Slickcraft, he began experimenting with fiberglass and composites. He sold Slickcraft to AMF (American Machine and Foundry) in 1969 and remained as its president for four years, before founding S2 Yachts with a sole focus on sailboats.

In 1976, S2 began manufacturing sport boats under the Tiara brand and, in 1978, Pursuit sport fishing models. Customers quickly embraced the products, and a variety of improvements and new models have been added over subsequent decades to solidify the company’s market-leading position. S2 Yachts later sold the Pursuit Boats brand to Malibu Boats Inc. in 2018. Given the impressive length of Leon Slikkers’ career, it’s been said that he has built more quality boats than anyone in the history of the industry.

Expansion of Luxury Outboard Portfolio, Celebration of Inboard Heritage

From the company's earliest days, Leon's drive to address customers' wants and needs through cutting-edge design and engineering processes shaped Tiara's culture of innovation and quality. In recent years, he saw increasing demand for larger, outboard-powered products with more luxurious appointments. That led to the company's move in 2017 to develop a suite of outboard-powered boats that meshed the luxury, quality, utility and performance of the company's inboard series. Since then, its luxury outboard portfolio has skyrocketed in popularity, leading to the launch of the 48 LS, the flagship of the LS Series, in February 2021, making it the largest outboard-powered model offered to date.

"It was with our father's foresight and vision that we made the critical decision to pursue a Tiara-inspired outboard luxury brand," said Bob Slikkers, Senior Vice President of Operations. "That we've been able to embrace and so quickly adapt to those changes is a credit to our father's original vision combined with the skill and dedication of our design, engineering, manufacturing and sales teams. We set out to do something bold for our company and our brand, and we successfully pulled it off, a true testimony of our leadership team and their ability to achieve greater success in the future."

The latest and perhaps boldest example yet of the company's efforts to design and innovate around customer needs will occur in 2022, when Tiara Yachts launches a state-of-the-art 55-foot inboard yacht, a thoughtfully engineered combination of its LS and Coupe series that represent Tiara's most personalized and technically advanced product. The long-range luxury vessel will feature multiple modules to customize the cockpit arrangement to suit each customer's personal boating lifestyle, whether it be entertaining or fishing, with several seating configurations and luxury features such as a summer kitchen and al fresco dining.

"Being a part of a three-generation family business is an exciting experience. I have heard stories from my father and grandfather about the family's success, and now I am participating in developing and shaping our future products," said Alex Slikkers, Sales and Marketing Specialist. "We have so many new ideas and products on the horizon that I know our customers will truly enjoy."

"The new 55 in many ways is the culmination of everything we've learned as a company and a manifestation of what is most important to our customers who desire incredible boating experiences," said Tim Slikkers, Director of Engineering. "Each chapter of our journey has illuminated successful features that inspired the 55, which is an artful blend of the best features of our dayboat and cruising models, and an exceptionally innovative, luxurious and high-performing yacht that will be unlike anything in the market today. It's also a statement that Tiara Yachts remains a major player in the domestic and global inboard markets."

Growth Fuels Next-Level Investment

Tiara Yachts has experienced impressive growth in recent years. The company's revenues are on pace to more than double during the 2017 to 2022 timeframe. With zero debt, the family will continue to make more smart investments to leverage its success for future market share growth.

"The company was founded on the idea of creating a delightful boating experience for its customers. Everything we do is driven to support that mission, so that doesn't leave any room for complacency," said David Slikkers, the company's director of government relations. "We are continuously innovating and reimagining every part of our business, from design to engineering to manufacturing to sales and customer service. Every day we come to work looking for new ways to delight our customers."

Manufacturing in the 21st century brings many opportunities to make continuous improvements in processes, from use of robotics and ultraviolet curing to deploying 3D printing. The company's close molded process journey, started twenty years ago, is accelerating as more benefits are realized, including utilization of advanced woven fibers and carbon composite materials which reduces weight and improves performance, while creating a safer and cleaner working environment for the employees, potentially reducing VOC emissions by 70 percent.

"Our sophisticated manufacturing methods are parallel to those used in the aerospace and defense industries, where precision is critical – giving us a competitive edge when it comes to recruiting new employees who want to be a part of a technology team," said Kelly Slikkers, Director of Manufacturing and Quality. "Our grandfather founded this company in part on the historic craftsmanship of Western Michigan combined with our commitment to providing rewarding career paths. Our strategic investments in people, process and products in recent years will help us attract the best and brightest minds, while positioning our company and brand for an exciting next chapter."

About Tiara Yachts

Tiara Yachts, headquartered in Holland, Mich., is one of the oldest privately held boat manufacturers in the United States. The Tiara Yachts model line includes inboard vessels from 39 to 53 feet, in the Open and Coupe Series lines. Outboard powered Tiara Yachts models range from 34 to 48 feet in three distinct Series: Luxury Sport (LS), Luxury Crossover (LX) and Luxury Express (LE). For more information, please visit tiarayachts.com and [Our Commitment](#).

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