

BOAT PARADING ON THE BLACKWATER

The Blackwater River is known for smooth flowing water, beautiful moonlit nights quiet cruises and year round boat parades. During the warm months a civic group known as the Blackwater Pyrates conducts informal lighted boat parades once a month on full moon Saturday nights. These parades are performed in either the river or one of the bayous. In December of each year the Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce officiates the Christmas Lighted Boat Parade which takes place at Milton's Riverwalk. All of these parades are open to the general boating public and the summer Pyrate parades are free to join, just bring food and drink for the rafting that takes place after the parade.

Sound like fun? Here is some answers to frequently asked questions to help you get started:

BOAT PARADE CHECKLIST

1. All state and federal Boat regulations will be complied with. Your boat is subject to inspection by the Safety Officer before, during or after an event.

Basic items are:

- A current registration with boat numbers posted correctly (with spaces).
- A life vest for each passenger
- Visual distress signal (Note that flares are not required in river areas)
- Operational navigation lights
- Serviceable Fire Extinguisher.
- Emergency Sound producing device.
- Working Navigation Lights.

(This list is only a sampling of required gear for a small boat operating in river basins. Research your specific State and Federal boat requirements).

2. Only plan to put as many people on your boat that the placard allows.
3. Parents are responsible for minor children.
4. Recommended) All children under the age of 13 will wear a life jacket at all times during the event.
5. A BUI is the same as a DUI and it will really mess up your Lighted Boat Parade.
6. Jumping from a boat while in procession is not allowed.
7. Jumping from a running boat is not permitted.
8. Before starting a boat or moving in an out of a rafting group of boats it will first be ascertained that no one is in the water.
9. No boat can exceed 4 MPH during a parade procession.
10. (Recommended) All boats should have a communications device – share cell numbers with other boats.

11. Have adequate gas to finish the event.
12. Check oil levels on boats that apply.
13. Carry spares.
14. If your boat fails, signal to be towed (have an available towrope).
15. Protect others boats, make sure you have adequate boat bumpers. DO NOT PULL UP TO ANOTHER BOAT WITHOUT BOAT BUMPERS adjusted to the correct height.
16. Bug spray?
17. DO NOT throw any items from a boat such as beads, candy etc.
18. Towing people on a tube or skis under a bridge or structure is not permitted. (Towing disabled boats do not apply).
19. By law you are responsible for you own wake.

HOW TO LIGHT YOUR BOAT

Generator vs. Battery Power

1. Most boats run their lights from a deep cell marine battery
2. It is important that the battery you use does not also start your boat.
3. You can use a *quiet* generator (Honda \$2500.00) or an inverter (\$80.00) Any store with an automotive department has inverters. The inverter should be a minimum of 750 watts. It converts the 12-volt battery power to the 110-volt household current that your lights require. Twelve-volt lights are expensive and come in short strands while 110-volt lights come in plentiful color selections and are affordable.

Connecting your Lights

1. You hook the inverter to your spare battery and then plug your lights into the inverter.

IMPORTANT NOTE

INCANDESCENT: Only run a maximum of 3 incandescent (old type) light strings in succession unless the box tells you different. If you run more than that they will blow the tiny fuses in the plugs and your day will be come tedious and unrewarding. Overcome multiple light string groups with extension cords.

LED: If you run LED lights you can hook up over 20 continuous strings but to be safe, read the box.

NOTE

When placing your lights consider how you will attach your boat bumpers, your mooring lines and the proximity of the lights to the waterline.

Light Types

Your lights are the essence of a fun parade. A poorly lit boat will not make up for enthusiasm. However, the reality is you need to start small and learn each year as you add to and adjust your theme.

1. **LED lights** are recommended because they use little electricity, have a brilliant glow and will burn all night on one battery.
2. **Incandescent lights** (older type Christmas lights) will use much more electricity and should only be used during the actual parade to make sure they last when it counts. **A mixture of incandescent and LED will work well as long as most are LED.**

What Wins?

1. To win parades use your imagination. Experiment before the parade. Boats that experience light failure during the parade seldom win. Boat parades are judged on **Creativity** (how unique your design is), **Enthusiasm** (your crews interaction with the spectators), and **Theme** (Christmas, Tropical, etc).

NOTE

Take time to complete your setup and run it on the intended power for one hour. If it fails you have time to readjust how it is connected.

THE ACTUAL PARADE

1. Arrive at the lineup point 30 minutes early – if you are late, you're last in line, just fall into place.
2. The **Parade Marshall** will ride amongst you and tell you where to line up as he assembles the parades. He will check your **displayed number** that you got when you signed up or he will take your money **and sign you up on the spot.** Failing to register is no big deal but you can't win unless you are registered.
3. **Don't worry if you don't know the route.** Simply follow the boat in front of you. The first boat is the leader – do not try to change your position once the boats are moving. This all works better if you stay in a line. If you wander you will block the view of the spectators who are all around you.
4. Maintain the parade speed, do not crowd the boat in front of you nor create a boring distance between you and the boat in front of you. Judge enough distance to make an emergency stop if you have to. In other words, be able to stop within half the distance to the boat in front of you at the prevailing speed of the parade.
5. This is not a land parade and the fish will eat anything so **DO NOT THROW ANYTHING FROM YOUR BOAT.** To do so is to disqualify your boat and your crew. In addition there is a stiff fine that will accompany this action.

AFTER THE PARADE

After the Christmas Parade the Chamber of Commerce conducts the “**Blessing of the Fleet**” which is a short ceremony. You can either dock for this or simply stand in place (motor off) in front of the area on the dock where it takes place. At this time you will be in the proximity of other boats and boat bumpers are highly recommended. After Pyrate Boat Parades the crews usually raft all of their boats together to share food and refreshments. Once again, it is only proper boat etiquette to approach another boat with your “adjustable” boat bumpers ready and consider your light placement when doing so..

YOUR CREW

If it's your boat, you are the captain. That's the way it works. Don't yell at your crew as you start a maneuver. You should have explained all of this to them before you left the dock. If some of them are “only along for the ride” place them in a quiet part of the boat and don't expect them to be able to react on a moments notice. You will quickly find out that your panic has nothing to do with their ignorance about marine matters. **Assign specific duties** to those on board that will help launch, navigate, entertain and recover your boat. Give your crew advance warning of impending maneuvers so they can mentally prepare themselves. Do not try to do it all yourself, get your crew involved so they will enjoy boating as much as you do. It will make your trip much more enjoyable.

***FOR EVERYONE'S SAFETY ALL VESSELS MUST CONFORM TO
COAST GUARD MINIMUM EQUIPMENT SAFETY REQUIREMENTS.
ANY VESSEL FOUND NOT TO CONFORM WILL BE DISQUALIFIED.***