



EVENTS

Florida marine manufacturers look to expand markets at Cancun

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Less than 3,000 miles across the Gulf of Mexico separate the state of Florida from the Caribbean's 'mini-Dubai', the resort destination of Cancun, Mexico, so it should be no surprise that Florida's formidable marine industry will be well represented at the Cancun International Boat Show & Marine Expo (CIBSME).

Fully half of the US exhibitors in attendance at the show are from the 'sunshine state' and are participating through the auspices of Enterprise Florida (EFI), the state's commerce department that became a public/private partnership more than two decades ago.

"We are legislatively mandated to support the export sales and growth of small to medium size manufacturers in the state of Florida," explained TJ Villamil, Sr VP International Trade Development. "It is [also] about attracting businesses to Florida that pay higher than average wages and diversify the state's economy."

While EFI supports all Florida manufacturing, the focus is on companies under 500 employees and marine, by virtue of its economic impact, gets a lot of attention and a dedicated team. The group has participated in the Sydney and Dubai boat shows, as well as METSTRADE.

"We set up a big Florida pavilion, and these companies go and they wave the Florida banner alongside our team members that are there supporting the growth of the

industry. And all those exports are good for Florida,” Villamil told *IBI* in a recent interview.

Mexico is an important market for the state, with an EFI office in Mexico City for over 20 years. It is a market known well by Jose Chao, director of operations for E&P Marine, a Miami-based manufacturers’ representative which has been exporting US-made marine accessories to over 60 countries for more than 35 years.

“We have seven companies that we represent that are in the state of Florida,” Chao told *IBI*, citing VersaChock, a small manufacturer of chocks, tiedowns and on-deck mounting systems. “They’re a very small company. And by us being able to participate in a show like and be associated with Enterprise Florida, in a show like Cancun, we’re able to give a small company tremendous exposure.”

Onan Technologies CEO Paul Westrope, makers of Glidecoat ceramic marine coatings, said EFI offers much more than just financial assistance as the company looking to expand into Central and South America.

“Leveraging the EFI contact in Mexico to make introductions to potential distribution partners that hopefully we can meet with through the course of the show, the translation services. There is a lot of benefit that they bring to the table and it’s those things that ultimately made the decision, that we do want to break into the Spanish-speaking markets,” he said. “Having people on the ground, having someone that we can turn to, to help us identify partner companies that can help us grow in that market, that’s a significant asset.”

The Cancun International Boat Show & Marine Expo will be held at Marina Puerto Cancun and GOS Marina from 9-11 December.