

Production begins at Contender Boats St. Lucie plant



Contender staff with the company's first boat manufactured in St. Lucie County.

Fort Pierce, FL/August 18 – The iconic Packers of Indian River facility off Midway Road in Fort Pierce is now home to Contender Boats, an equally iconic Florida boat manufacturer.

Production of Contender's premium semi-custom boats began in August at the 100,000-square-foot facility that was formerly a hub for area citrus fruit packing. At full operation, approximately 200 employees will be crafting all Contender's 32-foot and smaller boats in St. Lucie County while larger boats will continue to be built at the company's headquarters in Homestead, Florida.

Founded in 1984, Contender builds a full line of sportfishing boat models from 24 to 44 feet, with many customizations available – from engine power to upholstery. The Fort Pierce facility is the company's sole expansion outside of Homestead.

“We are thrilled to be expanding our operations here in Florida,” said Joe Neber, Contender’s founder, owner and president. “Fort Pierce has a longstanding reputation in the boatbuilding industry, and we are looking forward to leveraging local talent as we grow our team.”

“We are proud to have Contender join St. Lucie County’s thriving marine community,” said St. Lucie County Commission Chairman Sean Mitchell. “With the Fort Pierce inlet offering safe and speedy ocean access, multiple high-quality boatbuilders, the largest mobile boat hoist in the U.S. and an experienced workforce, our county’s blue economy is flourishing.”

“The announcement of the sale of the citrus packing facility to Contender last year was met with a great deal of enthusiasm,” said Pete Tesch, president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County (EDC). “Not only were we excited to have a company with Contender’s great reputation join our prestigious community of boatbuilders, the renovation of the packing house for the manufacture of sportfishing boats is symbolic of the remarkable resiliency we’ve seen as our local economy has evolved over the past few years.”

Amanda Sabin, Contender’s director of marketing, noted that the rooms where oranges used to be sprayed down are now being used as spray bays for boats. “This facility is allowing us to expand our operation while strengthening our commitment to building our boats here in Florida,” she said. “It’s an added bonus to be playing a historical role in St. Lucie County’s economy as well.”

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About Contender Boats

Founded in 1984 and based in Homestead, Florida, Contender Boats is a recognized leader in building semi-custom sportfishing boats – carefully engineered and meticulously handcrafted. Today, Contender offers various models from 24 to 44 feet. Customizations are available for every model – from engine power to upholstery – delivering the performance, convenience and comfort anglers expect. To learn more about Contender Boats or to find a dealer, visit www.contenderboats.com, Facebook @contenderboats inc. and Instagram @contenderboatsofficial.

About the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County

The EDC is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic vitality in St. Lucie County through the attraction, retention and expansion of businesses in the community. The EDC works in partnership with local governments and the private sector to advance its goals of creating more and

better-paying jobs for residents, broadening the tax base and improving St. Lucie County's economic quality of life. Contact the EDC at 772.336.6250 or www.youredc.com.