



# The Story of East River Shipyard

## A Shipyard Rebuilt Through Vision, Grit, and Leadership

---



### Introduction

East River Shipyard has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past two decades, from an ambitious marine development with undiscovered potential to one of Atlantic Canada's most comprehensive full-service marine facilities. This story is best told through two perspectives: Brad Boutilier, who purchased the shipyard in 2020 and led its revival, and Mike Wilson, who has managed day-to-day operations over the past three years and helped turn vision into execution.

---

---

Together, their leadership reflects the balance between long-term strategy and operational excellence that defines East River Shipyard today.

## **The Foundations of East River Shipyard – A Vision Ahead of Its Time**

In the early 2000s, East River Shipyard began as East River Marine, a project that encompassed the entire East River Point. The original vision was ambitious: to create a high-end marine centre catering to classic wooden yachts and larger luxury vessels, while attracting American yacht owners to Nova Scotia.

Initial infrastructure including docks and buildings was developed, but the market did not mature as anticipated. Slower development in East River, combined with financial pressures, ultimately led the operation into difficulty.

The property was later acquired by Halifax businessman Alan Silverman, who stabilized the facility and began searching for a buyer who could bring new life to the yard.

## **A Turning Point**

By 2020, Brad Boutilier was searching for an opportunity closer to home, one that would allow him to remain rooted in Nova Scotia while building something meaningful. East River Marine stood out, despite its challenges.

At the time, the facility was rundown and unprofitable, with aging infrastructure but strong underlying potential. After extensive discussions, Brad and Alan Silverman finalized the purchase in January 2020, with the deal signed at the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron.



## **Building Through Uncertainty**

Brad's first year of ownership coincided with the onset of COVID-19. With limited staffing and widespread shutdowns, survival was the immediate priority.

---

Because East River Shipyard serviced the commercial fishing fleet, the yard was classified as an essential service, allowing operations to continue. This was critical, enabling the business to support commercial vessels while maintaining momentum during an otherwise uncertain period.

Rather than retreat, Brad focused on strengthening the foundation of the business, servicing both yachts and commercial fishing vessels while steadily rebuilding the yard's capabilities.

### **Investing in Infrastructure and People**

Between 2020 and 2023, East River Shipyard underwent significant transformation. Major investments were made in infrastructure, including:

- A new 150t travel lift and dock to accommodate it. Now one of the largest on the East Coast of Canada
- Expanded heated storage and service facilities
- New buildings designed to support year-round operations
- A rapidly growing workforce

When Brad took over the yard, he employed just two or three part-time workers. Today, East River Shipyard supports a skilled, multidisciplinary team capable of handling complex, full-service marine projects, something that did not previously exist at scale in Atlantic Canada.



### **Operational Excellence at East River Shipyard**

As East River grew, Brad recognized the need for strong operational leadership. Mike Wilson joined the company in March 2022.

---

Mike's background was deeply rooted in the marine world. He grew up around boats, with a grandfather who owned a wooden boatbuilding company. After moving to Nova Scotia for university in 2009, he fell in love with sailing and the local marine community, spending summers in Chester and competing in Chester Race Week.

Following university, Mike worked in entrepreneurial roles before spending six years as a marine-focused insurance broker, where Brad became one of his early clients. As Mike watched East River grow, he saw both opportunity and momentum.

When he approached Brad about potential marine business opportunities, Brad instead offered him a leadership role that would prove pivotal to East River's expansion.

With immediate administrative gaps to fill, Mike stepped in wherever needed, initially supporting the business in a more foundational role before moving fully into operations. This approach became part of East River Shipyard's culture: team members start where they are needed most and grow alongside the business.

Today, Mike oversees the day-to-day operations of East River Shipyard, ensuring that systems, people, and projects operate efficiently and at a consistently high standard.



## Looking Ahead

Over the next 5–10 years, East River's growth will focus on refinement, expansion, and innovation.

---

Through the partnership between East Coast Boats and East River Shipyard, the yard is expanding sales, service, and warranty support for major engine and propulsion brands, including Mercury, Yamaha, Volvo, and diesel lines, allowing East River to better serve its existing clients while capturing a larger market share.

On the commercial side, the **150-ton travel lift** allows East River Shipyard to support fishing vessels from Cape Breton to southwest Nova Scotia. It provides faster, more economical alternatives to marine railways, enabling rapid response and reducing downtime for working boats.



East River Shipyard is also filling a long-standing gap in the pleasure boat market. Larger vessels like catamarans and wide-beam powerboats can now be hauled, stored, and serviced locally, eliminating the need for owners to travel to the northeastern United States for service.

As sustainability becomes increasingly important, East River is actively investing in greener operations. Planned and ongoing initiatives include:

- Electrification of equipment
- Advanced environmental containment and dust collection
- Improved air filtration in paint and fibreglass shops
- Exploration of robotics for blasting, paint removal, and application

East River aims to be at the forefront of green shipyard innovation in Atlantic Canada.

---

## How the East River Property Continues to Evolve



As the property continued to develop, the vision for East River expanded beyond marine services alone. The growth of the yard and surrounding land created an opportunity to better serve the local community in another practical way.

This led to the development of **East River Self Storage**, a secure, purpose-built storage facility located

on the same property. What began as reinvestment into infrastructure and land has evolved into additional services that benefit both boat owners and the wider community.

Today, East River Shipyard is not only a full-service shipyard, but also home to a growing self-storage facility designed to provide convenient, secure storage solutions year-round.

## What East River Shipyard Stands For

At its core, East River Shipyard aims to be known for:

- Quality
- Fair value
- Full service and support

Unlike traditional “backyard boatyards,” East River Shipyard offers flexibility, owners can complete their own work or rely on a full team of skilled trades under one roof. The goal is to remove friction for customers while delivering exceptional results.

---

Mike sums it up simply: a quality facility with the best haul-out, storage, and repair capacity in Atlantic Canada.

## **Acknowledging the Community and Supporters**

Both Brad and Mike emphasize that East River's success would not have been possible without the patience and trust of its early customers.

During years of construction, expansion, and growing pains, customers supported the yard through muddy seasons, heavy equipment, and constant change. Their loyalty made it possible to reinvest, grow, and ultimately build the facility East River is today.

We would also be remiss if we were not to acknowledge our key supports. From Jerry Nowee who was and still is a key mentor to Brad and the team to the many local companies that helped the shipyard become what it is today

## **Conclusion**

East River Shipyard's story is one of resilience, investment, and leadership, guided by Brad Boutilier's long-term vision and executed through Mike Wilson's operational expertise. Together, they have rebuilt not just a shipyard, but a marine facility designed to serve Atlantic Canada for decades to come.

