

# Local knowledge of the New River

By Capt. Michael Knecht

Navigating Ft. Lauderdale's New River can be a challenge for even the most experienced captain. The New River is filled with confusing markers, twists and turns, currents and very tight quarters.

Join me as I travel up the New River. I will point out a few interesting spots along the way. (By the way, as we head up the New River, we will be monitoring VHF Channel 16 and VHF Channel 9. Most of the river traffic and all of the bridges monitor Channel 9.)

As we start up the river from the south, take note of the markers. There are two sets of markers in this area: the New River markers and the ICW markers. If someone gets them confused, their yacht can wind up aground on the Triangle.

This is the first of many *securité* calls we will make during our journey. We will make all *securité* calls (pronounced si-kyoor-i-TAY) on channels 9 and 16. The passage between markers 5 and 6 at the mouth of the river can be tight for large yachts and is not a good place to meet another vessel.

Here's what I say when I'm approaching that area (adapt it to meet your situation):

"*Securité*, *securité*, *securité*. TowboatU.S. New River inbound the mouth of the New River at markers 5 and 6 with a motor yacht in tow. Any concerned traffic please contact TowboatU.S. New River on VHF Channel 9."

As we continue along the river, one of the first good waiting areas approaches between markers 7 and 8. (No. 1 on the map) We can comfortably wait here to pass a vessel coming out of Tarpon Bend. This is also one of the locations I like to use when meeting a yacht to tow up the river.

Our next *securité* call is as we approach markers 9 and 10. Here we will announce our approach to Tarpon Bend. This is the first tricky spot. It is a blind S-turn and we cannot see oncoming traffic. There are a number of shallow spots approaching the bend and on the inside of the bend that concern me as well.

At this point it is important that we not get out of shape as we navigate Tarpon Bend. Don't be surprised to come around the turn and meet another yacht at the most difficult part. It has happened many times. I find that

signaling with a horn is a good practice as I negotiate the many blind turns on the river to let oncoming traffic know I'm coming. Remember, not everyone listens to their VHF radio.

Now that we are through Tarpon Bend, there is about a quarter mile of mostly straight navigation. If someone had responded to our *securité* call, I would have suggested that this is a good area for down-bound traffic to wait as we negotiated Tarpon Bend. (No. 2 on the map.)

At the end of this quarter mile, we see that the river has a short bend. At this bend sits the building called the Girl's School. This five-story, dormitory-style building sits on the north side of the river. I like to make a *securité* call in the straightaway so I can wait on my side of the Girl's School should I need to pass something large.

Now we are on our way to the tunnel where U.S. 1 passes under the New River. Here the river takes a bend to the southwest. We will make a *securité* call as we approach.

While it is a wide spot and passable, we need to make sure that if the current is running we allow room for the yacht with the current on its stern to swing as it comes around the turn.

Now the river takes a turn back to the west as we approach downtown Ft. Lauderdale. We move with care as

we come around this corner just before the Third Avenue bridge. It can be tight when you have boats docked on both sides of the river. If I need to pass someone at Third Avenue, I choose to do it on the upriver side.

The next bridge is Andrews Avenue. The area between Third Avenue and Andrews Avenue can be a good place to pass. (No. 3 on the map.)

The next bridge we see is the FEC Railroad bridge. This is the only bridge on the river that does not have a bridge tender. It is computer controlled and goes down automatically when a train is coming. If it goes down, all we can do is station keep and wait.

Once we are through the FEC Railroad bridge, the river makes a sharp turn to the south at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. As we approach this bend, we will make a *securité* call. The area between the performing arts center and the FEC Railroad bridge can be tight and is usually not a good place to pass. The short straightaway on the south side of the bend can be a good place to



Knecht has been a captain since 1990 and has been running the New River with TowBoatUS for eight years. He was recently named the company's river supervisor in charge of yachts. He monitors two VHF channels and two cell phones to talk to bridge tenders, boating traffic and his colleague, Christian "Skinny" Denhard, on his own tug behind.

PHOTOS/LUCY REED

meet another large vessel. (No. 4 on the map.)

Now we are at the Seventh Avenue bridge, the last of the downtown bridges.

Let's pause here for a note about working with the bridge tenders. The tenders monitor Channel 9. I listen for other traffic calling the bridges as I approach. Sometimes it is possible to coordinate a shared opening with the other vessel. This saves the bridge an opening and has saved me from waiting because I got there just after the bridge closed.

Remember, too, that the New River bridges have two lockdown periods: 0730-0830 and 1630-1730. Commercial vessels have one advantage in this situation: The bridges will open for towboats on demand, even during lockdown, so there is no waiting if you are under tow.

About a quarter of a mile past the Seventh Avenue bridge is the fork in the river. The south fork leads to Little Florida and the bulk of the cities marinas and boat yards. The stretch between Seventh Avenue and the fork is a good place for us to wait for any traffic coming out of Little Florida. (No. 5 on the map.)

We will make a *securité* call before we commit to Little Florida, a sharp S-turn that can be difficult, especially when there is a strong current. There is a short straightaway just upriver from the turn. If anyone responds to our *securité* call, they will probably wait there for us to pass. (No. 6 on the map.)

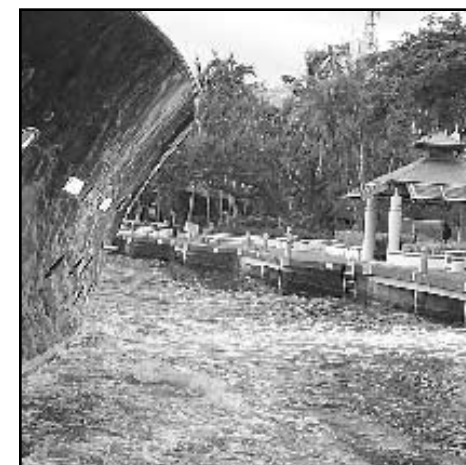
The next areas we will approach are Ducksville and the Wiggles or Narrows. We will make a *securité* call at Ducksville and be prepared to wait there for any down-bound traffic coming through the Wiggles. The Wiggles is a quarter-mile stretch that can be tight for a large vessel and leaves

little room for maneuvering, let alone passing. And it is very unforgiving if a boat has a mechanical problem. We will listen as we approach the area for any down-bound vessels that may call the Davie Boulevard bridge, but not answer our *securité* call.

Safely coming out of the Wiggles, we are in a wide area before we reach Davie Boulevard. We can stay here to pass a down-bound yacht waiting to enter the Wiggles or if we meet a down-bound yacht coming through the Davie Boulevard bridge. (No. 7 on the map.) It may be wide, but we need to stay alert in this area. When the current is strong and the wind is blowing it is easy to get shoved around a bit.

We are past Davie Boulevard and in the long straightaway (about a third of a mile) that ends with a 90-degree turn.

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The New River is a tricky place. High rises on both banks have created a windy canyon-like effect, small canals spilling into the river cause boats to slide, and the pump-out station south of the Andrews Bridge (above) dumps enough to push even the heaviest Feadships aside.



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# Blind corners require planning

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This is another place where we will make a *securité* call before we commit to the turn. There is plenty of room on both sides of the turn for vessels to pass (No. 8 on the map) but no room in the turn for two vessels of any size to pass.

After the turn we are back in a stretch of the river that is filled with yards and marinas.

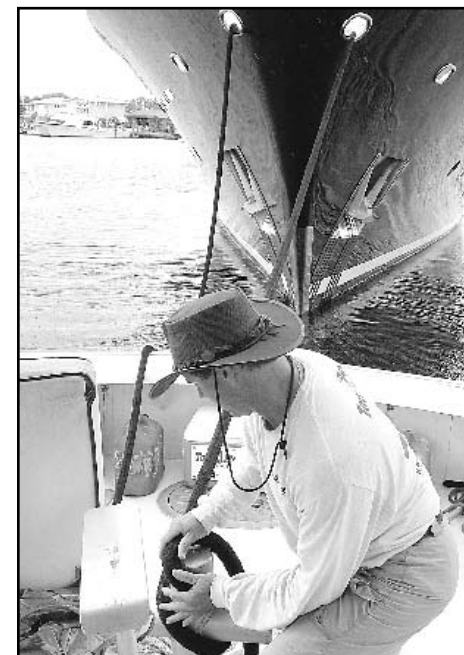
Farther along, we find ourselves in a quarter-mile straightaway that leads into a long curve that passes under the I-95 overpass. (No. 9 on the map.) We will make a *securité* call in this straightaway before committing to the curve. We can wait here for any yachts that are already committed to the CSX Railway bridge or coming out from under I-95.

Now we are approaching one of the toughest spots on the river, the CSX Railway bridge. This is a problematic spot in perfect conditions. When the current is running and/or the wind is strong, it can be particularly dangerous.

The CSX Railway bridge has a bridge tender. I like to call them while still in a comfortable place to find out if I am going to have to wait for a train. We will make a *securité* call and keep our eyes open for traffic that is not monitoring the VHF. It will be a difficult situation if we meet another vessel, even a small one, after we have committed to passing through the railway bridge. There is plenty of room on the upriver side of the bridge to have out-bound traffic wait. (No. 10 on the map.)

We successfully maneuvered the most difficult parts of the river. For the next half mile the river takes relatively gentle turns until it comes to a 90-degree turn to the west, just before the Secret Woods Nature Center. We will make a *securité* call in the straightaway before we commit to this turn.

As we pass Secret Woods on the south side we approach more marinas and boatyards. Here, coming off



Knecht pauses in a good holding spot to adjust the lines. He pulls the 127-foot Feadship *Golden Rule* while his teammate pushes the stern to maneuver tight and tricky turns.

PHOTOS/LUCY REED

the river to the south and heading under State Road 84, is a waterway to the Dania Cut-off Canal. The river continues west, past more boatyards on the south side and homes on the north.

The New River continues west for miles, but this is as far as we will go on this journey. It's a beautiful, scenic waterway but can be quite adventuresome for those who are unfamiliar with it. Along with the challenges of nature is the constant concern of other boaters. Without proper planning, forethought and the ability to react quickly to a chance meeting in a blind corner, a scratch or worse is possible.

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Constant monitoring of channels 9 and 16 is a must to traverse bridges in a timely and safe way. In the half-mile of wide, calm river west of the Davie Boulevard bridge, two inbound boats passed, one outbound boat passed and the *Jungle Queen* brought up the rear. Bridges open for commercial boats on demand, so it helps to coordinate shared openings. PHOTO/LUCY REED