



Turning up the volume

Phin Foster talks to International Cruise Victim Association founding president **Kendall Carver** who has been campaigning for industry accountability ever since his daughter disappeared from a Celebrity ship in 2004.

In June of this year, a CLIA memo outlining a 'reputation management and outreach plan' was accidentally sent to the *Greenwich Post* newspaper. While the leak certainly caused a degree of embarrassment in Fort Lauderdale, CLIA communications director Lanie Fagan, the email's author, has since characterised the strategy as nothing new; simply part of an ongoing effort to publically convey the low levels of onboard crime. 'The industry has a good story to tell, and we are looking at ways of telling it,' she says.

That CLIA wanted to launch a charm offensive portraying its members as leaders in 'environmental conservation, safety and security, health and sanitation, economic impact, and innovation within the maritime industry as a whole', can be interpreted in two ways. Either the association is trying to drive the news cycle in a proactive, positive manner, or events within US Government and the efforts of grass roots action groups have put it on the back foot.

Kendall Carver would certainly side with the latter interpretation. The former Washington National Life Insurance Company CEO and founding president of the International Cruise Victim Association (ICV) has been tireless in his endeavours to hold the cruise industry to account for onboard criminal activity ever since his 40-year-old daughter disappeared from a Celebrity ship in 2004. Despite the considerable amounts of time, effort and money invested over the past four years, Carver's message to his adversaries is resolute: 'It's nothing personal.'

'We're not here to put these companies out of business,' he explains. 'We just want to see that, if a crime takes place, appropriate action is taken and people are prosecuted. Whether this can ever be achieved voluntarily, however, is a different question entirely.'

It has been said that the first step towards recovery is admitting you have a problem. In 1999, in the wake of a series of damaging *New York Times* articles, cruise lines announced a zero-tolerance policy to crime. In Carver's eyes, activities of the companies since then have exposed this undertaking

as an empty promise. 'If that's your stated objective,' Carver opines, 'there should be nothing you wouldn't do to combat it. But when we have sat down with CLIA and gone through our proposals, the response is the same: "They sound like good ideas but we have another way of going about it." The problem is that we never hear what this alternative is. When they resist, the whole undertaking is nothing but a PR stunt.' In a recent communication, CLIA was unable to commit cruise lines to any changes.

However, CLIA executive vice-president, public policy and communications Eric Ruff says that senior management has in fact been very cooperative with Carver. 'CLIA CEO Terry Dale and other senior industry officials have met repeatedly with Ken

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Carver and others, and we have had very positive ideas and recommendations come from those discussions. With all due respect, Mr Carver's repeated claims that cruising is unsafe simply do not pass muster.'

The alternatives being offered by the ICV are summarised in a ten-point plan. Proposals such as independent onboard marshals, if not the formation of an international cruise police force, are already been addressed in Alaska and are the subject of a bill introduced to the Californian state senate. Carver views such developments as positive – even if they appear to be more motivated by environmental concerns – but believes that only Washington can drive wholesale change.

To this end, the ICV has forged some impressive connections. On 25 June,

Senators John Kerry and Doris Matsui unveiled the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2008. If passed, it will mandate improved safety features on ships, require better reporting of crimes, permit rape victims instant access to the FBI and a National Sexual Assault Hotline, improve training for ship crew members, and allow the US Coast Guard access to ships in order to monitor wastewater disposal and to act as peace officers.

This follows a series of congressional hearings over recent years involving victims of cruise ship crime and their families and meetings between ICV representatives and the FBI and CLIA at Congress' behest. Throughout this process, Carver has become increasingly convinced of the need for systematic change. 'The cruise lines tell us they're not equipped to investigate crimes and that they report everything to the FBI,' he begins. 'Meanwhile, the FBI top brass claim they lack the resources to follow up such reports. Nobody is assuming responsibility, so nothing is getting done. In 2005, ten million passengers embarked upon cruises, 50 criminal cases were opened and only four convictions were made. That is scary.'

Carver might interpret it as such, but the cruise industry can just as easily point to the fact that such low figures go some way in explaining why crime at sea makes the headlines when it comes to light. What divides the two camps is the issue of transparent reporting. A culture of out of court settlements is endemic within the industry, with only limited figures available for those cases that do not go to trial. Another outspoken industry critic, Professor Ross Klein, believes that the rate for sexual assault aboard cruise ships is 57 per

Kendall Carver

Beginning his career in the insurance business, Kendall L Carver has acted as CEO and chairman for several organisations and consultancies including Kendall L Carver and Associates. In December 2005, he co-founded the International Cruise Victims Association.



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100,000, 80 to 90% higher than the overall figures for forcible rape in the US.

'In his congressional testimony in September of last year,' Carver notes, 'the FBI chief claimed that criminal reports made by cruise lines were confidential. However, he also said figures were available through the Freedom of Information Act. Major news agencies have been trying to get their hands on that information, without success. Apparently it's "a question of national security". Come on! I can get the crime rate in Disneyland; what's the difference here?'

Carver sees this lack of transparency and dialogue as making little business sense. In the case of his daughter Merrian's disappearance, it took four months, two subpoenas, a private investigator and \$75,000 just to get access to the ship steward. 'It should be so much easier,' he tells me. 'We waited 14 months before going public. I wrote to [Royal Caribbean CEO]

Richard Fain and a certified copy was sent to every board member. All the response I got was a call from a lower-level employee and that upset me. Stakeholders need to step up and demonstrate that corporate culture needs to change. They are the people who could transform things overnight, but the more I read, see and hear, the more I realise how deep-set this attitude is.'

Michael Sheehan, associate vice-president, corporate communications for Royal Caribbean Cruises is, however, keen to stress his company's financial generosity with the Carver family. 'Despite several court rulings dismissing the Carvers' claims against the company, Celebrity Cruises has provided significant compensation to the family, beyond the costs they incurred in attempting to locate Ms Carver following her cruise. Celebrity Cruises continues to extend its heartfelt sympathies to family and friends of Merrian Carver, regarding their tragic loss.'

Carver may feel that a shift will only arrive with the industry 'kicking and screaming', but he is surprised that decision makers are not seeing the opportunities that a renewed focus might offer. "'Security" is the current buzzword,' he explains. 'If I'm flying, it's good to know there's a sky marshal onboard to protect me. Having independent security officers should be a tremendous selling point; at the moment, security measures are there to protect the cruise line, not the passengers.'

The ICV now counts members in 16 different countries and is beginning to make waves that belie its status as a small, voluntary organisation. 'There's not a hope in Hell I'm walking away from this,' Carver proclaims. 'But if I did disappear tomorrow, we'd still be here and just as strong. Our members have undergone experiences you would not wish on your worst enemy; that tends to engender a quite a degree of passion and commitment.'

Just remember, it's nothing personal. 'There have to be people within CLIA who want to see changes made,' Carver believes. 'Once these guys start dealing with me directly, they'll see I'm actually a pretty reasonable guy.' [wc](#)



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