

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

New life at Bridgeport shipyard

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A bird's eye view of the Bridgeport shipyard

A new chapter is underway at the Bridgeport shipyard, where operator J. Goodison Company Inc. is seeking to resurrect the site after its previous operator was evicted earlier in 2012.

Selected by the Bridgeport Port Authority to operate the regional maritime center, J. Goodison secured two competitive contracts this month with the U.S. Coast Guard, worth more than \$3 million over 5 years.

“The future is very promising for us,” said CEO Jack Goodison, who predicted that the shipyard could ultimately be one of the busiest in the Northeast. Three additional Coast Guard contracts are still pending and Goodison anticipates even more after that.

“We’re being flooded with phone calls from fisherman, ferry boat companies in Connecticut and New York, hub and barge operators,” Goodison said. “You put it all together – the deepwater access, proximity to New York, size of the property – it’s a recipe for success.”

Based out of Rhode Island, the marine maintenance and repair service company began leasing the shipyard in August, which has been vacant for months since Derecktor Shipyards, the previous tenant, declared bankruptcy and was evicted for failing to pay rent.

While Derecktor was heavily invested in yacht and other large boat construction, J. Goodison primarily serves the commercial marine service market with a number of government and military contracts.

Currently the company has about 25 employees in Bridgeport and plans to hire 12 additional employees within the next couple weeks. As they grow, Goodison said he anticipates a workforce of 75 people by the end of two years. J. Goodison is a certified HUBZone employer with the U.S. Small Business Administration and has agreed to hire staff living in the historically underutilized business zone.

“There’s a lot of interest in putting housing on the waterfront,” said Donald C. Eversley, director of the Bridgeport Economic Development Corporation. “But I’ve always been bullish on having a ship maintenance location.”

Eversley spent about four years recruiting J. Goodison down from Rhode Island and said he was pleased to see a repositioning of the shipyard, which has been impeded by Derecktor’s bankruptcy.

“In a time where Massachusetts and Rhode Island harbors are closing, we still have a site that is valuable,” Eversley said. “This is validation that we can play a significant role in the maritime business.”

Yet while J. Goodison and the city of Bridgeport are anxious to get the shipyard up and running again, much of the lot remains nonoperational, Eversley said. Derecktor still has a large amount of equipment and materials on the site that can’t be moved until the U.S. Federal Bankruptcy Court settles the case.

Because the court has been “so slow,” Eversley said the port authority is not only missing out on owed rent but also future rent from new tenants.

“It’s a double-edged sword against Bridgeport’s neck,” Eversley said. “All we can do is wait. And complain.”

Yet the new contracts are a start for the company to build up its workforce and start creating its footprint in Bridgeport.

“There are less and less places to go because a number of yards have gone out of business,” Eversley said. “We think (the shipyard) could be one of the most successful in the whole Northeast.”

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