

## Bay Ship & Yacht a pillar of Alameda's maritime industry

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Chris Johnson was in a tugboat late one night when his vessel started taking on water.

Johnson, then a port engineer for Foss Maritime, called Alameda's Bay Ship & Yacht. The shipyard rustled some workers out of bed to hoist Johnson's vessel out of the water and begin emergency repairs.

"There have been many situations like that, and I've never had anything they couldn't handle," said Johnson, now the marine superintendent for the San Francisco Bar Pilots.

Most activity at the facility isn't that dramatic, but it's no less important for keeping an engine of the Bay Area economy shipshape.

Up to 300 vessels berth annually at Bay Ship & Yacht, where 250 employees repair, rebuild and maintain everything from workhorse tugboats to commuter ferries and floating pleasure palaces.

"They're a bit like God. If Bay Ship disappeared tomorrow, it would be nothing less than a crisis," said Bobby Winston, the proprietor of Bay Crossings, a monthly maritime newspaper. "You'd have to invent them."

Bill Elliott founded the company in 1977 as a mobile construction-and-repair outfit specializing in wooden ships. It settled in its current home next to Rosenblum Cellars Winery on Main Street in 1994 and has been growing steadily ever since.

"Over the last few years, we've incorporated a lot of new facilities, moving forward to become a 21st-century shipyard," said Ira Maybaum, Bay Ship's director of business development.

Its sweet spot is midsize working boats -- ferries, fishing boats, military vessels, tugboats and barges -- that experts say are integral to the area's economy.

The company itself is now one of Alameda's largest private employers, said Lori Taylor, Alameda's community development director. She estimates the island's maritime industry currently employs about 1,000 people, with Bay Ship & Yacht the largest contributor.

James Dalske, assistant dean of students at the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, said the area's maritime industry took a big hit during the recession but is bouncing back. Bay Ship & Yacht, he said, helps boat-based businesses thrive and stay local by providing the critical support they need.

That support was on full display one recent afternoon, as crews overhauled the 31-guest room National Geographic Sea Lion cruise ship, painted the WETA ferry Pisces and refueled the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Pike. In nearby warehouses, tradesmen fabricated the complex machinery that keeps boats afloat as workers toiled around the sprawling shipyard on bicycles.

One repeat customer is the National Park Service. It's hired Bay Ship & Yacht for several projects, including the \$10 million-plus refurbishment of the 1895 schooner C.A. Thayer, which is docked at San Francisco's Hyde Street Pier.

The wooden-ship reconstruction required craftsmen to specially bend pieces of lumber, said Lynn Cullivan, a park ranger there.

"That's pretty specialized. It was a hard, intricate and delicate job to do," he said.

Today Bay Ship is increasingly targeting the mogul market. Super yachts, or yachts longer than 100 feet, often bypass San Francisco Bay for warmer climates. Maybaum hopes the upcoming America's Cup in 2013, with races beginning next year, can put the area -- and its ship facilities -- on the map of their well-heeled owners.

But it's already making a name for itself in the rarefied super-yacht world. Workers will soon begin lengthening a 170-foot super yacht by some 36 feet.

"We'll literally cut it in half, then insert the midbody, which we're getting ready to build right now," Maybaum said.

Maybaum said it's that kind of diverse service offering that will keep business sailing along Alameda's waterfront.

Added Winston of Bay Crossings, "The ferries and barges and tugboats are here, and they always are going to be here. The everyday work of commerce, all of that would stop if you didn't have a shipyard to keep these things going."

#### Bay Ship & Yacht

- Founded: 1977
- Services: Full-service shipyard repairing and maintaining yachts, commercial and military vessels and historic ships; custom boatbuilding; industrial fabrication; wood joinery.
- Employees: 250 at Main Street facility; also operates Treasure Island dock; Richmond boatyard; mobile ship repair unit
- Dry dock capable of lifting a 390-foot boat up to 3,000 tons; elevator-like "Syncrolift" can haul vessels up to 200 feet and 1,200 tons. Capacity for 10 ships on land at once.
- Where: 2900 Main St., No. 2100, Alameda
- Info: [www.bay-ship.com](http://www.bay-ship.com)