

Shipbuilding trades centre ready by July

BY CARLA WILSON, TIMESCOLONIST.COM FEBRUARY 6, 2012



Canada's new multi-purpose polar icebreaker, the John G. Diefenbaker, is expected to be ready in 2017.

Photograph by: Fisheries and Oceans Canada, .

A new marine trades training centre is expected to be announced in Victoria next week to support B.C.'s shipbuilding sector now that Seaspan Marine is working on an \$8-billion construction package for federal non-combat vessels.

Non-combat ships will be mainly built in Vancouver at Seaspan facilities and brought to its Victoria Shipyards in Esquimalt for finishing and trials.

Federal officials, including a government minister, are expected Monday at the future site of the trades training centre, near the Esquimalt Graving Dock, according to George MacPherson, president of the B.C. Shipyard Workers Federation.

The centre is expected to be complete by July.

The industrial marine training centre was in the works before October when Seaspan Marine won the right to negotiate the non-combat construction work. About 4,000 direct and indirect jobs are anticipated to be created in British Columbia by the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy.

Seaspan, B.C. Ferries and provincial and federal governments are supporters in the \$1.8-million facility. Industry, unions, educational institutions and governments are working together to determine what training will be required. Some shipbuilding and repair trades are already underway at colleges and other educational facilities. New courses will be offered through institutions and at the centre.

"What it is going to do is provide that educational base so that we have a stable workforce," said Esquimalt Mayor Barbara Desjardins.

Public Works and Government Services Canada was in talks in September with the Songhees First Nation to lease land for the modular training centre.

The marine training centre will be built on land below the construction site for the Songhees Wellness Centre, now going up on at the corner of Admirals and Maplebank roads, said Doug MacLaren, CEO of the Resource Training Organization of B.C. The graving dock is located nearby, to the south.

Stantec consulting is completing the centre's design. The job will be tendered in the coming weeks, with construction starting in six to eight weeks, MacLaren said. Courses should start this fall.

A job will be posted within a week for a manager of training and applied research for the centre. Another administration position will also be posted, MacLaren said.

There is strong interest for the shipbuilding jobs with about 2,000 unsolicited resumés arriving so far, MacLaren said.

Philip Venoit, president of the Island's Building Trades Council, said new training will allow apprentices to study locally, rather than travelling out of town, which has been the case for several trades. It will also create new jobs for instructors.

Scientific vessels will be the first built under the federal program. The first steel will be cut in 2013.

As trades training gears up, STX Canada Marine Inc. has won a \$9.5-million contract to design Canada's new multi-purpose polar icebreaker, the John G. Diefenbaker, which will represent this country's sovereignty in the Arctic, a federal statement said. The design work, part of the non-combat program, will be carried out at the company's Vancouver office.

STX is expected to take 18 to 24 months to complete the design, the statement said. Sea trials and delivery of the icebreaker are anticipated for late 2017.

Total investment in the icebreaker will be \$720 million, Fisheries and Oceans Canada said. It will be between 120 metres and 140 metres long, able to break ice up to 2.5 metres thick, have the ability to carry two helicopters and will be able to operate in more difficult conditions than Canada's existing icebreakers. It will have room for 100 personnel.

STX is designing other vessels for the federal program, including the offshore oceanographic science vessel.

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