

LABOR PAINS

LABOR IS STILL THE ISSUE FOR U.S. SHIPYARDS

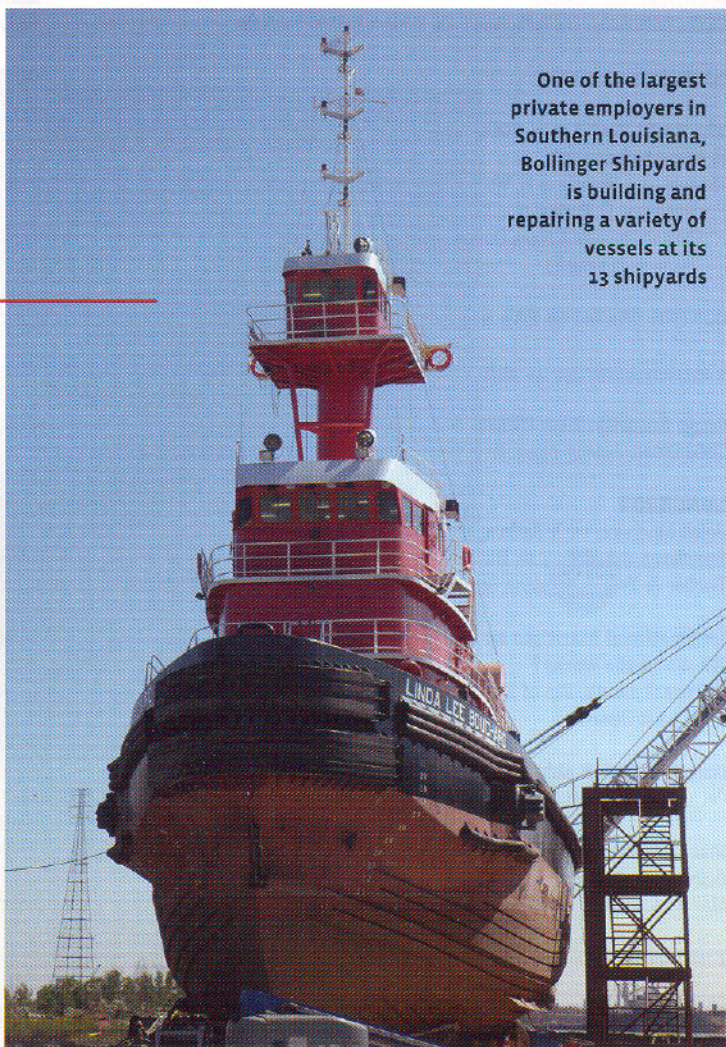
Despite some very healthy orderbooks, attracting and retaining enough skilled labor is still an issue for many shipyards in the U.S. "One of the biggest challenges going forward is securing a stable, skilled workforce and improving efficiency," said Scott B. Clapham, vice president of business development for Aker Philadelphia Shipyard, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa. Aker Philadelphia Shipyard currently has a workforce of 1,300, with subcontractors, according to Clapham. There are four Veteran Class MT-46 46,000 dwt product tankers under construction with another six on order.

"Our biggest hurdle moving forward," said Austal USA's Michelle Bowden, "is staffing our facility with experienced aluminum shipbuilders. We are currently one of the largest of our kind in the U.S. and we are working with a relatively small local pool of potential employees. It has become a challenge to attract staff from outside the immediate Gulf Coast, but we have risen to this challenge and have almost doubled our staff in less than a year."

Now wholly owned by Australia's Austal Ltd., Austal USA, Mobile, Ala., currently has a full time staff of 755. It is currently constructing two 107m high-speed catamaran passenger/vehicle ferries for Hawaii Superferry and a 127m high-speed trimaran Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) for the U.S. Navy.

"We consider all three of the vessels to be notable," said Bowden. "The two Hawaii Superferry vessels will be the first of their kind to travel throughout the Hawaiian Islands transporting both passengers and cargo, including trucks and cars from island to island. The LCS, meanwhile, is a landmark contract for Austal and gives us the opportunity to prove the value of this hullform in a military application."

Labor is very much an issue for Bollinger Shipyards, Inc., one of Southern Louisiana's largest private employers. Headquartered in Lockport, La., Bollinger Shipyards, Inc. (BSI) currently operates 13 shipyards with 40 drydocks in Louisiana and Texas with a total of 3,000 employees. Bollinger Marine Fabricators, Amelia, La., and Bollinger Gretna, Harvey, La., are



One of the largest private employers in Southern Louisiana, Bollinger Shipyards is building and repairing a variety of vessels at its 13 shipyards

building or converting 20 tank barges; Bollinger Calcasieu, a bow stern module; while Bollinger Shipyards, Lockport, La., has orders for two liftboats for Edison Chouest, 10 Platform Supply Vessels for Rigdon Marine, a tug for Bouchard Transportation and the third LCS for the U.S. Navy.

"BSI is so diversified that we have many notable projects," said Bollinger executive vice president Robert Socha, "ranging from new construction to conversions of vessels that will go out of service unless they receive the major upgrades, to our daily service of repairs and regulatory dockings. Our double hulling of tank barges is unique, as is our range of newbuilds: 28,000 bbl to 110,000 bbl tank barges, DP2 diesel-electric PSVs for Rigdon and standard Bollinger 145-, 163- and 191-foot Offshore Supply Vessels, as well as our LCS program for the U.S. Navy."

One of the Gulf Coast's many smaller yards, with 60 employees, Rodriguez Boat Builders, Inc., Bayou LaBatre, Ala., currently has two 104 ft x 34 ft x 14 ft ABS-classed oceangoing tugs under construction for Dann Marine Towing of Maryland that will be delivered in January and May 2007, respectively. According to Joseph Rodriguez, the shipyard is also building a 176 ft Lloyd's Register-classed cargo vessel for Inter-Island Shipping Ltd., Nassau, Bahamas, and a 75 ft x 28 ft triple-screw tug for Garber Bros. Towing of Louisiana. Rodriguez Boat Builders also has a contract to build a 66 ft x 25 ft x 7 ft Lugger-style tug for B&B Marine Towing of Louisiana.