

Another successful year for **Victoria Shipyards**

Canada's Victoria Shipyards [VS] near Vancouver, a major player in cruise ship refitting, have again enjoyed a highly successful year thanks in part to several refits for major cruise ships. Cruise & Ferry talked exclusively to Malcolm Barker the yard's Vice President and GM.



2006 was a good year for us. It was dominated by the dry-dock and refit of HMCS Protecteur a Canadian Navy Support vessel, which underwent a major 10 month face lift. We also dry-docked and refitted Celebrity Cruise Lines ships Infinity and Summit where pod work was carried out. Pods were also repaired on HAL's Oosterdam. With the

booming BC and Alberta economy we employed an average of 500+ trades people in the yard and 50 apprentices on 5 year apprenticeship programs"

Barker stresses the yard's greatest strengths are the quality of the work force, attention to detail and guarantees on delivery. "We are competitive with the West Coast Shipyards and believe that our "best value approach" and customer satisfaction is of paramount importance. There is an old saying "you can always find something cheaper and worse"

Cruise Ships play an important role in VS's overall business plan. The vessels usually operate on the Pacific Northwest Alaska run from April to mid October. Consequently, it's normal for these ships to dry-dock during their repositioning from the Mexican Riviera or the Caribbean. VS's large Esquimalt Graving Dock [1,186ft x 126ft x 30ft draft over the sill] is ideally suited to take these mega vessels and the company has acquired a world class reputation for cruise ship repairs.

Barker also stresses the importance of their strategic partnership with the Canadian Navy. "This work requires an in depth knowledge of the specific requirements of naval vessels and a sophisticated management team who understand the paper process that is of paramount importance when carrying out naval refits"

For three years VS has been the lead yard with Holland America on their Signature of Excellence Program. "We don't class this as jumboisation"

Barker tells us, " but we certainly added additional structure and capability to the vessel. Following our success with Holland America, we worked with Crystal Cruise lines on the Crystal Harmony carrying out major accommodation and upgrades to meet the growing demands of the new Japanese market"

"We traditionally dry-dock and refit approximately four cruise ships a year. This is due to the cruise lines operational plans, i.e. they normally schedule dry dockings in April and May, or September and October during their repositioning periods. This is when vessels can be removed from service at the least cost to the owner. We also carry out voyage repairs during the Alaska cruise summer season for vessels operating from Vancouver and Victoria" Barker tells us that they intend to make significant investments over the next two years in both buildings and equipment"

"We are well placed geographically to handle the large cruise ships for scheduled refits, but we also carry out emergency dry dockings. The largest vessels that can be docked in our facility are the Grand Class from Princess Cruise Lines, but Celebrity Cruise Lines, Millenium Class are the largest docked to date"

Cruise ships are an integral part of our overall business plan. I believe we have created good partnerships with cruise lines and they have a ship repair company that meets their high-end requirements. I like to refer to the Honda advertisement which says "would you let anyone look under your hood". These are quality ships that require a quality facility to carry out the work"

Barker believes 2007 will be another year of growth and the start of an exciting period in the BC shipbuilding and repair industry. "The Canadian Government has announced some major shipbuilding and repair programs, in which our companies have a tremendous opportunity to participate. The cruise lines are talking to us about scheduled dry dockings through until 2010 and have shown tremendous confidence in our ability to service their vessels. Our traditional ship repair client base also continues to grow." ■