



### Port of Nanaimo

# Broadening the base — from heavy ocean history to light industrial success

By Laurie Jones

Since the first shovel hit the ground in 2010 for the new Passenger Terminal at the Port of Nanaimo's (PON) downtown facilities, there has been a steady growth that is changing the dynamics of the organization's focus. From helicopters to passenger ferries to disaster relief, the PON is pursuing several light industrial partners/tenants for its 37-acre assembly wharf property that will create an exciting future for the city's waterfront business.

"With a number of new companies partnering with the Port of Nanaimo, the key for us is being able to diversify with multifaceted products," says Ian Marr, President & CEO. "We're not just a one-dimensional operation."

Marr says in addition to the BC Vehicle Processing Centre (BCVPC) that is going into full swing in the early spring for distributing thousands of imported automobiles, docking space has been allocated for the proposed passenger ferry to Vancouver with Island Ferries Services. "We have an agreement in principle and are ready to formalize a lease agreement as soon as funding and approvals are confirmed by the proponent. We hope to have the service in place starting this summer."

He adds the Port also has the Duke Point facility which provides container and breakbulk handling that can handle ships with a larger draft given the available 13.5 metre depth at the berth. "We are looking to expand and increase both business and facilities at Duke Point in partnership with our operator DP World, in conjunction with our short sea shipping initiative," Marr explains. "We have also handled project cargo at Duke Point and our downtown location which both have excellent access for receiving, storing and distributing goods."

Mike Davidson, PON Chief Operating Officer says in 2015, Western Forest Products began the decommissioning of their downtown mill operation, but has maintained their other location in the

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community, specifically the mill at Duke Point. "At that time we looked at our downtown site to consider opportunities for repurposing it with light industrial companies," he says. "In addition to the BCVPC and the proposed passenger ferry, we are in the process of confirming new development with the Western Canada Marine Response Corporation (WCMRC). They are proposing to build a 15,000-square-foot warehouse that includes office space and a storage yard on a two-acre site. This will be their home-base facility servicing six satellite stations throughout B.C."

Davidson says that WCMRC is a Transport Canada certified Response Organization whose mandate is to ensure there is a state of preparedness in place and to minimize the impact when an oil spill occurs.

"For us, it's a great opportunity to have them based here in Nanaimo to provide the emergency response services to our community and surrounding areas when needed," says Davidson. "In addition to the land base component, WCMRC will also have a small water area to accommodate mooring docks for nine response vessels to support efficient marine response and environmental protection."

### All aboard!

While the Port of Nanaimo has been receiving cruise vessels since 2002, the development of the new terminal building and floating dock was a game changer. Designed by PND Engineering, a company from Seattle who had previous experience with building cruise ship docks in Alaska, the main component of the floating dock is a pontoon that is 350 feet long, 50 feet wide and 20 feet deep. The structure took

33,000 man-hours to build — a small portion of the estimated 170,000 man-hours in the construction and fabrication of the project, including the marine and land-side activities. The dock consists of 320 metric tonnes of rebar and has the equivalent of 130 large truckloads of cement.

A state-of-the-art building was designed to accommodate the Port's offices and Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA) which includes a small function space on the ground floor.

"When the dock was built in 2010, it was primarily designed for cruise ships and passenger vessels in mind," says Davidson. "However, with the addition of Helijet operations and other uses, the facility has evolved. The dock has accommodated other vessels such as BC Ferries and barge tie up for short-term usage. Smaller, pocket-size cruise ships are able to tie up as well. For example, the *World* cruise ship has been to Nanaimo on a number of occasions."

Davidson adds that historically, cruise ships visiting Nanaimo in the 1980s would tender passengers to shore but the downtown core was not set up for a short-term influx of thousands of people. "The cruise ship companies were interested in returning to Nanaimo but they advised that the city had to make changes to the local facilities to accommodate them," he says. The design process began in the early 2000s, with the culmination of the work creating the grand opening of the facility in the summer of 2011 with the arrival of the 2,400-passenger *Norwegian Pearl* ship.

"While there are a number of bus tours that go out of Nanaimo during cruise port-of-call days, these typically accommodate

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400 to 600 passengers, so there are potentially thousands of people who get to visit our downtown and city areas to walk, shop and explore,” says Davidson. “It’s a real boost to the downtown economy that the community welcomes with open arms. We would like to see the cruise ship business continue to grow as this has a substantial impact for the community. We’re heading in that direction, and of course with the possibility of the passenger ferry start up, we will be busier than ever.” He adds while Nanaimo is not a designated embark or disembark location for cruise ships, there have been a few passengers who missed their originating departure and were able to rejoin their cruise from Nanaimo.

### Soft landing for Helijet

When Helijet was considering expanding their operations to Nanaimo over five years ago, they looked all along the shoreline — from the Departure Bay ferries locale to NPA property at the south end of the city. “We identified a couple of locations, including where the Seair terminal is but we didn’t go forward for a number of reasons,” says



Photo courtesy Nanaimo Port Authority

Nanaimo's terminal has provided numerous opportunities for additional businesses.

Danny Sitnam, President and CEO. “When we started looking again, we had heard there were other business opportunities that may be established at the Port Authority, specifically a staging site for the new passenger ferries to Vancouver. We wondered if a helicopter operation could run out of there.

Sitnam says as they started a dialogue with the city and the Port of Nanaimo, they realized it would be a good fit for Helijet. “The location was a short drive time from the core of the city and with a possible walkway being developed along the waterfront in

the future, we thought it was an all-around good spot for consideration and had room for growing the company.

“It’s been a very positive move to work with the Port of Nanaimo. They have been good landlords to us and are supportive of the program. At the end of the day, it’s all about transportation, whether it’s marine, air or ground.”

With the morphing from heavy industrial work on Nanaimo’s waterfront to a bustling, vibrant location for people in a variety of successful businesses, it’s clearly full steam ahead for the Port of Nanaimo.



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