

Gulf Copper Expands Offering to Workboat Market

Last year when Gulf Copper Fabrication was profiled in the November 2008 Workboat edition of *Maritime Reporter*, the opening sentence said “a 60 year old company with a knack for reinvention.” Fast forward one year, and the company has again made a significant move, acquiring R&R Fabrication’s two marine construction and repair facilities, including its drydocks, in Port Arthur, Texas. This move is significant as it greatly expands Gulf Copper’s capability to serve the workboat and offshore service vessel market, effectively allowing it to serve all sectors of the Gulf of Mexico market, said Steve Hale, President, Gulf Copper.

While the destination was ultimately reached, the road was anything but straight, as Hurricane Ike threw a wrench into the negotiations to purchase the R&R facilities, making the deal a nearly year-long process that closed in early October 2009. “We have two outstanding facilities in Corpus Christi and Galveston, but in addition, we wanted to expand our capability to include brown water vessel support, and the R&R facilities (each of which is about 25 acres) were really geared up for that,” said Hale. While Gulf Copper solidifies its base and capabilities in the GOM region, the company is not resting on its laurels, rather pushing to expand its presence, with both new facilities and services offered globally.

Gulf Copper recently opened a new facility in San Diego, where it is currently renting shop space near the water to service navy and commercial business.

The company has operated its drydock in Corpus



Gulf Copper added two facilities to better service the GOM workboat market, with industry veteran Dennis Buffo (inset above) tapped to run the yards. Pictured above is the Central Yard in Port Arthur.

Christi since 1991 to service the U.S. Navy, but with the Navy pulling its minehunter fleet out of Corpus Christi, Gulf Copper can now offer the facility for commercial services. Corpus Christi was in fact a key player in the expansion of Gulf Copper, as it provided a stepping stone to opening its facility in Guam, which in turn was key to developing Gulf Copper’s global services unit.

Gulf Copper Global Services deploys Gulf Copper employees globally, mostly for rig repair and specialty jobs. This includes about 40 employees currently deployed in West Africa for work on a Transocean rig; in total, the company has about 100 people currently deployed working on four or five drilling rig projects. The expansion of facilities and services is part of Gulf Cop-

per’s larger plan to always offer its customers the services they need, where they need them.

“Right now it is a very challenging market. The competition for work is fierce, and the larger capital projects today are fewer and further between,” said Hale. “We’re not seeing the jobs with the big scope, but there are still opportunities, mostly with smaller jobs.”

Gulf Copper’s ongoing success for the long haul is attributed to a handful of core factors.

- **Fabrication:** “We have always had a good core of people that can build anything,” Hale said. Also, the addition of computer-driven fabrication has made these good craftsmen even that much more efficient. In addition, the fabrication shop in Galveston received more than \$2.2m in stimulus funding for fabrication shop upgrades. “It’s about giving our guys better tools to be more efficient.”

- **Global Services:** Years ago the business model (in this sector) was “build it and they will come. Well what happens when they stop coming?,” Hale asked. “We have the rig repair and maintenance capabilities that allows us ... if the work is not here ... to go to where the work is.”

- **Communication:** Gulf Copper is an employee-owned company operating in many locales. “When you are spread out, communications is a big challenge,” said Hale. “In today’s world with all of the communication tools available, you would think that it would be easier, but it is not. You really have to work at it.”