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World-class ship-repair yard to settle in Gibson **NAOMI KING**

Staff writer

HOUMA -- One of the world's largest ship-lifting cranes will be operating in a Gibson shipyard in about two years, a company official announced Tuesday.

Local government officials say the new yard will help boost other businesses in the northern Terrebonne community.

Diamond Services Corp., an Amelia-based oilfield-support company, has ordered two massive boat-lift cranes from Italy, each costing about \$3 million. The company plans to build a repair and inspection yard on 250 acres of waterfront property along Bayou Black, just a few miles southeast of the La 662 exit off U.S. 90.

By August next year, the cranes should be in Gibson and ready for work by the following November, said Tim Tregle, controller with Diamond Services.

Each crane is about 65 feet wide inside each lift and about 70 feet long. The two cranes are each 640 tons and can work in tandem to lift 1,280 metric tons.

Working together, the cranes can hold a barge up to 200 feet in length, or about two-thirds the length of a football field.

The new shipyard will be near a four-lane highway and is hurricane resilient, but one of the most over-looked features is that the 20-foot-deep channel alongside the yard is filled with freshwater, which is less likely to corrode ships and equipment, Tregle said.

Years ago, the Gibson area used to house similar shipyards owned by Avondale, said Terrebonne Parish Councilwoman Arlanda Williams, whose district includes Gibson.

The restaurants and local businesses benefited from the steady traffic in and out of the community, she said.

"For so long, we've forgotten that area," Williams said. "This will be the start of other eyes on that area."

Williams asked about the shipyard's impact on the community, which Tregle said would not infringe on any neighborhoods.

The shipyard will initially create 50 to 75 permanent jobs with a long-term goal of having more than 200 workers. Local economic officials said the nearby technical schools will likely provide the workforce for the jobs, including welders, fitters, painters, mechanics, warehousemen,

longshoremen and roustabouts.

Diamond Services began eyeing Terrebonne in March, but its plans were up the air for a while, partly because company officials were concerned about pending expiration of business incentives, called Gulf Opportunity Zone and Enterprise Zone, established after the 2005 hurricanes. An income-tax incentive for equipment, such as the crane, is set to expire at the end of this year. The tax incentive says that the equipment must be in service by the end of this year. Diamond Services said the cranes won't be ready until the end of next year.

At the end of last year, Congress agreed to extend parts of the business-incentive program for counties in Mississippi and several parishes in Louisiana. Terrebonne did not qualify because it only applied to counties and parishes that sustained 60 percent or more damage to homes.

Mike Ferdinand, CEO of the Terrebonne Economic Development Authority, said he talked to federal lawmakers to see if the extension could also apply to Terrebonne. He said they're also looking into Internal Revenue Service policies about delivering equipment in a normal environment. The goal is to prove that equipment delivery has been disrupted because of post-hurricane activity.

"We still don't know if that's going to qualify, but we decided to move forward regardless of the GO Zone (incentives)," Tregle said. "We have confidence in the project."

The combined \$6 million price tag for the cranes is still eligible for a 4 percent state sales-tax rebate, Tregle added, which would add up to about \$240,000 in savings. Terrebonne Parish would still get about \$270,000 from local sales taxes, Tregle said.

Though Tregle initially estimated in May the new shipyard to be a roughly \$30 million investment, he said Tuesday that the project will be less, but declined to give an exact amount.

The maintenance and inspection yard is a new venture for the company and its first facility in Terrebonne Parish, Tregle said.

The 250-acre site, which used to house the old McDermott pipe yard, sits on 1,900 acres owned by Diamond Services. Although an estimate hasn't been determined for the number of boats the yard will be able to hold, Tregle said "we hope to load it up."

One of the project's biggest investments are the two mobile, boat-lifting cranes. Painted "Diamond Services red," Tregle said, the 640-ton cranes will be built and shipped from ASCOM, a manufacturing company in northern Italy.

The cranes will lift boats from a 200-foot-wide slip boats will pull into with the help of tugboats.

Standing 54 feet tall, or about six stories, each crane is a large square machine with movable straps attached to two beams. The straps are made of a polyfiber that's stronger than nylon, Tregle said. A small box worn by a controller controls everything.

All the crane's weight is displaced on four legs, sitting on a total of 16 tires. Each tire alone weighs 3,200 pounds and stands more than 8 feet high. Oddly enough, getting these special tires is one of the hardest parts to building these lifts, Tregle said.

Though it will be geared toward commercial vessels and barges, Tregle said the company has thrown around the idea of setting aside an area for people to work on their boats themselves; the company would only lift it out of the water. A landing strip for planes is still a possibility, Tregle said.

Already, companies interested in using the shipyard have called, he said.

As for companies interested in the waterfront land owned by Diamond Services, Tregle told economic-development officials to let him know, and he'll pass the word to his boss and the company's founder, Wallace Carline.
