

# Colville to service the Slope by sea

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The fact that the Beaufort Sea has less ice year to year is not lost on a Colville Delta businessman who recently purchased and outfitted an all-aluminum boat for North Slope service.

“I don't think we will have any problems running supplies and support equipment out to offshore locations,” said Mark Helmericks, president and chief executive officer of Colville Inc. “If it weighs 4,000 pounds, bring it on; the White Night will deliver.”

Helmericks explained that the name of the boat will also have its roots in the Arctic, just as he does. Helmericks grew up on the Colville Delta west of Prudhoe Bay on his family's homestead.

“White Night is the Russian popular term for the midnight sun, so I adopted it for the boat since it will spend most of its working life under 24-hour daylight,” he said.

Helmericks bought the 32-foot boat from Alaska Mining and Diving in Anchorage for \$180,000 and had the nimble craft outfitted for use in the Arctic.

Powered with two twin Evinrude outboard engines, the craft is capable of 47 knots (53 mph) at full speed, and has extended tanks for enough fuel for eight hours of use.

The White Night is a Boulton welded-aluminum, cuddy-cabin boat. It was originally designed as an offshore sport-fishing boat for Pacific Northwest waters.

Modifications for Arctic conditions include a hull stretched two feet longer, long-range fuel tanks, a side cargo door capable of taking 55-gallon drums as deck cargo, an insulated hull, enlarged cabin heater, oversized inverter electrical system for 12v/110v onboard electrical power, and two-stroke Evinrude E-Tec 250 hp engines for better performance in freezing weather.

“We sell lots of the Boulton boats, but not this size and (not) with a door to roll a 55-gallon drum,” said Dan Martin, sales manager for Alaska Mining and Diving. “This will do well in the Arctic, it's made to take punishment.”

But before the boat goes north, it will first get used in Southcentral Alaska waters.

“We need to become familiar with the boat,” Helmericks said. “We are just going to have to go down into the Kenai and over to Prince William Sound to do some shakedown cruises.”

The ship was christened by Helmericks and Jennie Thompson Gay, the 84

year-old mother of Becky Gay. Becky Gay recently returned to Colville Inc. to work for Helmericks.

“This is so cool,” Becky Gay said. “Now I want to get my six-pack (commercial boat) license.”

Helmericks' plan is to keep the boat — complete with heater, a global positioning system, radar and a head — at East Dock in Prudhoe Bay for use along the vast North Slope. It will go into service this month, after a truck trip up the Dalton Highway.

“We think that we can run parts or supplies out to exploration areas in the Beaufort (Sea) for less money than a helicopter charter,” Helmericks said.

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