

Rebirth for Historic Sparrows Point

New Era

In its heyday during World War II, the Sparrows Point Shipyard was a powerhouse, employing 20,000 workers who built ships to serve the war effort. Founded in 1889, the yard was purchased in 1917 by Bethlehem Steel and constructed hundreds of ships. Today, the fab shop, the headhouses, the machine shops are all quiet, stilled by the failed attempts to keep the yard going in the face of economic impossibilities.

Yet, this is no waterfront museum to the industrial age, with monstrous excavators, fitted with menacing shears and magnets browsing like dinosaurs through piles of shredded steel. The 1,200-foot graving dock is once again in operation, the first murmur of a renaissance just beyond the Key Bridge.

"Activity begets activity," pronounces Vincent Barletta, the energetic landlord of the Sparrows Point Shipyard, outlining his plan for an industrial park in the truest sense of the word.

With residential development putting the squeeze on the Baltimore Harbor from Key Highway to Canton, many maritime businesses are looking for new homes. Barletta hopes to put out the welcome mat to both port and non-port related companies at the 250-acre facility.

"We are talking to steel fabricators, ship repairers, terminal operators. We have an industrial coating company here already and we plan on consuming this property to its fullest potential, 110 percent," says Barletta.

When Baltimore Marine Industries, the last owner of the yard, went bankrupt, the facility was sold by court order. On November 5, 2003, the Boston-based Barletta Willis Investments, LLC was high bidder on the entire facility at an unusual live auction on the site.

The newly formed Sparrows Point Shipyard closed on the

Yard Under Way

New Uses



site in March 2004, with plans to invest "north of \$20 million" to prepare the property for new use. In September 2004, the first signs of revitalization appeared.

With Maryland's first lady, Kendel Ehrlich, at his side, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta announced a federal contract worth \$2.3 million to North American Ship Recycling, Inc., which would become the first tenant.

"These contracts could be just the beginning," Mineta said. "If they go well, and if the company is competitive in future bids, more ships could follow next year."

Indeed, retired U.S. Navy cargo ships *Mormacmoon* and *Lauderdale* made their last voyages from the so-called "ghost fleet" in Virginia's James River to the Sparrows Point yard and are being scrapped. An old tugboat rests in one of the slipways awaiting recycling.

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North Atlantic Metal Recovery separates the steel for recycling, markets it and then sizes it for the customer. Much of the steel from the ships is made into plate. Ed Poturalski runs the operation for North Atlantic Metal Recovery on five acres at the yard. His 30 years of experience on the piers in the Port of Baltimore have given him a thick Rolodex of potential clients for scrapping some of the aging barges and tugs around the harbor.

"In the old days, people used to run junk equipment aground and take the numbers off it and disappear. We make it easier to get rid of an old barge than getting a car towed," says Poturalski. "They can bring their junk equipment to the slipway and we can cut it up and sell the steel for reuse."

Barletta says that ship scrapping is only the beginning.

"We will go where the market takes us," he says.

Right now, the yard is still in the "mobilization" phase. A parcel near the gate is being cleared of thousands of tons of wood left by a failed wood recycling project facility from years ago. There are bulkheading and paving plans to provide infrastructure improvements for the site. Barletta says that the current market is pulling the yard toward terminal operations.

Barletta has installed Heather Sites as Project Engineer for the shipyard project, sending a strong signal about the company's proactive stance on environmental compliance. Sites, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate and environmental engineer, is integrally involved in both the day-to-day operations and the planning for future uses of the yard.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate Heather Sites makes sure that environmental standards at the shipyard are maintained.



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Sites says, "Barletta is committed to maintaining a high environmental standard at the shipyard. We want to make this a successful endeavor from every angle, and part of that is maintaining an environmentally sound workplace and facility."

North Atlantic Metal Recovery's Poturalski can see the yard being a success as a multiuser facility.

"I don't think we will ever see shipbuilding going on here as it did years ago," he says, "but I can see five or eight years down the line this being a very busy facility." 🌐



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