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NEWS FROM THE PORT OF PORT TOWNSEND

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Suggested headline:
Shipwright Holly takes helm of Haven Boatworks

Blaise Holly, for 16 years a shipwright at Haven Boatworks of Port Townsend, has now acquired the company from Stephen Gale, who retired.

Haven is one of the leading vessel repair and retrofit businesses based at the Port of Port Townsend and, with a staff of 37, one of its largest employers. Among the many legacy boats on which Haven has worked is the "Adventuress," one of Puget Sound's most famous sailboats. Haven also recently completed rebuilding the motor vessel "Comrade," which went on to win the award for best restoration at the 2022 Victoria Classic Boat Show.

The ownership transition has been in the works for months but was finalized recently and announced to the staff in late September.

"Standing with Stephen, there was a palpable sense of excitement among the crew," said Holly. "They know that they now have a clear path going forward well into the next decade." The transition also ensures that Haven's coastwide reputation for quality work on all kinds of boats – but especially wooden ones – will be sustained.

Eron Berg, executive director of the Port of Port Townsend, was happy with the longevity for Haven that the ownership transition represents.

"Haven is a keystone here, with the number of boats they work on and the number of good people they employ," he said. "Haven is vital to our boat yard. They have successfully navigated the passing of the baton. This is as good as it gets."

Gale and a handful of others who had worked for Ernie Baird's boat shop launched Haven in 2004 when Baird closed his shop. The company grew from five to 37 over the years and steadily expanded its expertise from wood to all boat materials, systems, electronics and mechanics.

After leaving Freyja Boats, Holly came aboard in 2006 and rose through the ranks to become the lead shipwright. In that capacity, he was often in the center of organizing and managing complex repairs and retrofits that involved all of Haven's skill sets. He also worked directly with the customers, whom today he estimates are about half commercial boats and half pleasure boats.

Among the Haven specialties known to customers, he said, is "combining skilled labor, seasoned management and increasingly hard-to-find materials" such as specialty woods. "You don't often find that in the same business," he said.

Haven also has a good reputation among the trades, he said. "At Haven everyone is given a fair shake and we judge people by the work they do," he said.

Although Holly is skilled with his hands and takes pride in executing crisp work, he said he finds just as much satisfaction running a crew.

"It's indicative of the culture we have," he said. "Customers have gotten to know the craftspeople here through the years as they have become department leads. And now they get to see a craftsman become the new owner."

As for the transition, Holly said he and Gale started "nibbling around the edges" of a transition plan for awhile, and entered serious discussions this year. Though Gale is retired, the crew "looks forward to him poking his head around the shop whenever he wants," said Holly.

Haven is also moving to a nearby property at the Port. Holly said it is assuming control of the former Integrated Marine Systems facility in the near future.

"The additional space will allow Haven to continue on the path of steady growth it has enjoyed for the past decade," he said.