

Northwest Maritime Center Opens Sept. 10

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When the Northwest Maritime Center opens its doors on Sept. 10, it's bound to result in more interest and activity for the Port of Port Townsend's adjacent marina and marine-related tenants. "The center of gravity of our town is going to shift toward Point Hudson," says Port Director Larry Crockett.

"And the common goal is that to the visitor, it should be one wonderful maritime experience," he continues. "They don't really need to know that one maritime organization is a nonprofit and the other a government entity."



PHOTO TAKEN AUGUST 18, 2009.

The Northwest Maritime Center, viewed from Point Hudson Marina, is about to open its doors to the public. When it does, "the center of gravity of our town is going to shift toward Point Hudson," says Port Director Larry Crockett.

Fourteen months after groundbreaking, the Chandler Education Building and the First Federal Commons will be open to the public starting at 5 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 10. Major construction on the buildings and streetscape work will be complete by then, just in time for the 33rd annual Wooden Boat Festival, Sept. 11-13. Work on the adjacent Maritime Heritage Building will continue through the winter.

Port partnership

When Crockett joined the Port staff in 1999, the Northwest Maritime Center (NWMC) was a new idea and the property at the end of Water Street had yet to be purchased. "But

very quickly, the Port commissioners at the time saw that this was something the Port should try to partner with and to help because it would be a benefit to the entire community,” he recalls.



PHOTO TAKEN AUGUST 16, 2009.

The Port has taken the new Northwest Maritime Center into consideration when planning for its adjacent Point Hudson property.

Crockett accepted an invitation to serve on the Northwest Maritime Center’s architectural design committee, in part so he could better advise the commissioners on how to plan for Point Hudson when the operator’s long-term lease expired and it returned to Port control in 2002.

As an example of this, when the Port installed new docks and ramps at Point Hudson Marina last year and built the observation deck at the end of Water Street, its architecture was designed to harmonize with the Maritime Center’s yet-to-be-constructed public walkways. In future, a planned boardwalk will tie the two properties together and continue around the marina’s perimeter.

NWMC Executive Director Stan Cummings appreciates the Port’s role in the Northwest Maritime Center’s beginnings and growth.

“The Port has been a key partner in providing the facilities for our ever-expanding maritime programs and activities,” says Cummings. “With our new buildings at the end of Water Street connecting the historic downtown with the maritime heritage corridor and the rest of Point Hudson, I predict even more opportunities for synergies.”

Point Hudson leases

The Northwest Maritime Center and the affiliated Wooden Boat Foundation (WBF) currently lease a number of Point Hudson facilities as well as dock space from the Port. The question of which leases will continue will be determined over the coming months and years as the organizations grow into the new Maritime Center.



PHOTO TAKEN JANUARY 20, 2009.

The question of which Port facilities the Northwest Maritime Center & Wooden Boat Foundation continue to lease will be determined as the organizations grow into the new buildings.

For the past few years, the Northwest Maritime Center development staff has worked out of offices in the Port's administration building. This space will be vacated at the end of August as the staff moves into the new Maritime Heritage Building. (The Port has already heard from potential tenants interested in the water-view suite).

More offices, classrooms and the chandlery store occupy the Cupola House at the head of the marina, which has become something of an icon for the 31-year-old Wooden Boat Foundation. The current 5-year lease on that building expires at the end of January 2010, and Cummings says the board is slated to make the highly anticipated decision of whether or not to renew the lease at its October meeting. "They're in the driver's seat," says Crockett of the NWMC/WBF's pending decision. "The Cupola House is theirs if they want it." And if not, Crockett asserts the Port has a goal of finding another marine-related tenant.

The Rat Island Rowing & Sculling Club may continue to lease space for outdoor storage of its boats on the lawn between the Cupola House and Hudson Street (but rather than the current pass-through arrangement with the NWMC/WBF, would do so directly from the Port). Many of the Club's boats are moving to indoor racks in the Northwest Maritime Center's new boathouse, but not all of them. Rack spaces are limited, and there is currently a wait list for private kayaks and shells.

Cummings anticipates that the NWMC/WBF's boatshop space adjacent to Puget Sound Express will continue to be leased on a month-to-month basis for the foreseeable future. Although the Chandler Education Building encloses a large and airy boatshop on the ground floor, painting may need to be done offsite, as well as other tasks that release fumes not compatible with the public space.



PHOTO TAKEN FEBRUARY 5, 2009.

The Chandler Education Building under construction. Note that the groundfloor boatshop, visible at lower right, is open to classrooms on the second floor, where this tour group is standing.

The NWMC/WBF in-water fleet currently occupies most of one side of the center dock in Point Hudson Marina, and that moorage space will continue to be leased. Although the Maritime Center boasts a deep-water pier with floats for loading and temporary small-boat storage and launching, the floats are seasonal and must be removed in the winter.



PHOTO TAKEN AUGUST 11, 2009.

The Maritime Center's pier and seasonal floats must be supplemented with moorage at the adjacent Point Hudson Marina.

And the annual Wooden Boat Festival, one of the biggest events in this town of many festivals, will continue to be staged primarily on Port property at the Point Hudson Marina & RV Park. "This [the new Maritime Center] gives us a little bit of expansion room for the Festival, but not much," says Cummings. He notes that, at least for 2009,

admission to the Festival will not be required to enter the Maritime Center—tickets will be sold there, but the Festival gate will be located beyond it. Exhibits and activities there will be fully open to the public during the three-day event.

Although the NWMC/WBF will no longer be headquartered on Port property, Cummings foresees a continuing strong relationship between the Port and the Northwest Maritime Center. “The Port is our gateway to the water—and the population’s gateway to the water,” he says.

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