

International **Tug & OSV**

INCORPORATING SALVAGE NEWS

November/December 2011



Watertight integrity and stability of tugs

Joe Corvelli: Looking to offshore's next wave

North American Focus: Diversity keeps market afloat

Converting today into tomorrow... safely

During his four years as CEO at Gibraltar-based ship repair yard Gibdock, marine engineer and naval architect Joe Corvelli has noticed a growing focus on the offshore market. Dawn Gorman caught up with him to find out about the yard's OSV conversion work, its focus on health and safety, and Joe's own thoughts about the future of the offshore industry and the vessels that serve it.

Joe Corvelli describes himself as having salt water in his blood. He grew up on Long Island outside New York, boating and sailing at every opportunity, then did a degree in marine engineering and naval architecture at New York's Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, with the specific agenda that he "wanted to be hands-on, a practical kind of engineer".

His early career saw him working in operations for a shipping company, spending time in China and Japan, before opening his own business building custom sport fishing yachts and various commercial vessels. Ten years later, and feeling that he was now ready to move on to other things, he happened to hear from a former classmate at Webb Institute that Gibraltar-based ship repair yard Gibdock was looking to re-focus on commercial work and was looking for a new executive.

The rest, he says, is history, and, when we met up in London, he was just three

"I think the next wave, the next decade of major offshore investment, is going to be in the West Africa area, and, long-term, also in Libya and Tunisia."

days short of being in the post for four years, and clearly loving his work there. He acknowledges Gibraltar's 'micro community' – the total population is only 30,000 – and its long military history as foundations of Gibdock's success.

He explained: "The first dock at the yard was commissioned in 1903 for military use, and was not privatised until 1982. That history means many of the guys now at the yard literally grew up as apprentices there, and because the community is so small, they tend to view the yard like it is 'their' facility. We're a significant player in the marine industry in Gibraltar and are supported by the culture here, which leads to a sense of team and pride in the facility and in all the work that we do in the yard. That really sets us apart and means we offer absolute attention to customer service, enabling us to build long-term relationships with our clients, who in turn come back to see us regularly."

Gibdock's three drydocks range in length from 154m to 272m, supported by 10 cranes, a 300m x 9.5m wharf and a 435m x 11m mole. Work includes everything from full overhaul of tugs – such as the recent removal and overhaul of the two Voith Schneider propeller units onboard Boluda's 57-tonne bollard pull vessel *Siroco* (see page 15) – to major modification work on OSVs.

Joe said: "We're big enough to handle a nice conversion job on an offshore vessel, and clients tell us they prefer us to some of the big facilities with 12 docks and 9,000 people, where they say you get lost as a client. They tell us they feel like it matters when they're in our yard, that they're well cared for. Again that comes down to the culture of our people."

Geographically, the yard is very well placed, located at the crossroads of the



Mediterranean and Atlantic shipping lanes.

"The fact that a lot of ships transit through the Strait is certainly an advantage to us. It's a great maritime street corner: we have plenty of clients that are working in the Mediterranean or even off Italy who come in our direction, and they're even talking about drilling off the coast of Spain now. We're also in a good proximity to the North and West African markets, and because there aren't many facilities and yet so much offshore activity in those regions now, we are getting a lot of that work. I think the next wave, the next decade of major offshore investment, is going to be in the West Africa area, and, long-term, also in Libya and Tunisia. Some of the recent politics there have held things back slightly, but those are areas where there are good reserves and where there is going to be constant investment."

Gibdock has also tapped in to the Brazilian market, successfully building a long-term relationship with, amongst others, Norway's Solstad Offshore, for which last year it undertook sizeable conversions on two offshore vessels, *Normand Trym* and *Normand Vibran*, that were being repositioned to Brazil. A third vessel, the PSV

- ▲ Joe Corvelli.
- ◀ Joe with Simon Zdrojewski, superintendent engineer of Norbulk Shipping.
- ▼ The yard in Gibraltar.



Normand Vester, is currently undergoing conversion, with fresh water capacity being increased by converting two of the stability tanks from water ballast to fresh water, while eight mud tanks are being converted for increased fuel oil capacity.

“OSV work is project-orientated, with big long-term or medium- to long-term charters. The Solstad vessels were, I think, five-year charters. When the ship owner is making the commitment to serve their client in a long-term charter like that, they’ll often spend millions of dollars to convert a vessel, just to be able to service a certain client need. We’ve done significant installations on the aft deck of an OSV for the vessel to be able to launch or retrieve a semi-submersible, or some other offshore equipment, we’ve custom-built a landing platform so an OSV can take another smaller vessel on board, and so on.”

This sets the yard’s work for the OSV market apart from its tug work, which, while not so significant in terms of cost, or scope, brings with it its own high demands.

“You bring a complex piece of equipment like a tug to somebody and you have certain faith in the fact that they’re going to put it back together again the way they took it apart. There are a lot of moving pieces. Complicated regular maintenance and repair jobs: that’s the way to sum up our tug work.”

Offshore vessel work, meanwhile, centres, he says, around vessels that are built with the precise intention for them to be easily modified.

“When I was in the marine industry in the Gulf Coast 20 years ago, an OSV was like a pick-up truck and they were all just a big aft deck and ‘custom’ meant tie clips, and you put whatever you needed on the back deck. These days they’re much greater in size, with fancy tankage on board, DP 1 or 2 or 3: they are amazing vessels, with a lot packed into a small space, a lot of complexity, a lot of capability. We had a seismic vessel in recently, extremely high value vessel, state-of-the-art, basically set up to be able to accept new technology on a regular basis as the technology advances.

“I see the industry, and OSVs specifically, becoming more and more specialised. I think it’s only natural as the work gets more complex, offshore pushes further and further from the shore and new regulations are drawn up. Which is good for us in the conversion and custom market, because there’s more and more need for changing the specialisations.”

Joe also cites “the constant pressure for new capabilities in health and safety and other regulatory survey influences” as a driver for conversion work.

“You can’t go rebuilding a ship every five years just because you come up with a new rule. There’s going to be new things happening all the time.

Health and safety is, in fact, a fundamental focus at Gibdock, and Joe is proud of the certification of the company’s health

and safety management system.

“It’s been a big push of mine – not that we had safety issues, but I wanted to formalise our approach and make it part of our absolute culture to have a safety orientation in the yard. I share my thoughts on this regularly with my entire workforce, from top to bottom: not just because I want them to go home in the same condition at night, that is obviously the first reason, but because it is also smart business.

“The offshore industry is constantly pushing to improve health and safety and I’ve seen tremendous advances in this sector. They work in probably one of the more dangerous areas of the maritime sector, specifically because their business is so dynamic. One month they’re at one site and the next they’re at a different one: it’s not a standard trade, it’s not routine. From that comes the opportunity for new risks.

“When our clients come into the yard, they’re still going to maintain all their safety procedures on board their vessel, but quite frankly

this is a time when you really do have to pay specific attention to the details because it’s when peoples’ routines are broken that problems can occur. When they’re in the shipyard we work closely with them to keep us safe and them safe.

“Every vessel is different, so you have a lot of safety factors to consider – working at heights, in enclosed spaces, in high temperatures and so forth. But every vessel is uniquely different so we have to be constantly vigilant, constantly revise our risk assessments and be dynamic in our approach.”

Gibdock’s health and safety team works closely with the teams on board vessels.

“We take a holistic view on it: when a ship is in our shipyard, the health and safety of everybody involved is our responsibility – not just our employees but everybody in the yard, whether it’s a client, the client’s client, the charter party on board the vessel, subcontractors, guests, anybody on that vessel. It’s complicated, but it’s satisfying when you

“You can’t go rebuilding a ship every five years just because you come up with a new rule.”



▲ Joe with The Hon Peter R Caruana, Chief Minister of Gibraltar, on his visit to the yard on 12th April last year.

▼ Addressing Gibdock management.

see all those different parties coming together, and working hard to achieve something. I think it does make a difference, and really works towards building long-term relationships with our clients. When you bond at that level, it’s a bit deeper than just the commercial terms: you have a mutual respect for each other and each others’ procedures. Safety considerations are a big part of the future, especially in the offshore sector, and it’s definitely a big part of our future at Gibdock.”

