
Wood Towing Christens Mv. Kenny Billiot

—Photo by Nelson Spencer Jr.

The mv. Kenny Billiot was built by Gulf Island Marine Fabricators.

—Photo by Frank McCormack

Bonnie Regan Billiot, mother of the namesake, christens the mv. Kenny Billiot.

—Photo by Frank McCormack

Vessel is powered by twin Cummins K38-M engines.

—Photo by Frank McCormack

Wheelhouse of the mv. Kenny Billiot.

BY FRANK MCCORMACK

Avondale, La.-based Wood Resources, and the company's Waggaman, La., shipping branch Wood Towing, christened a new towboat January 24 along the Mississippi River in New Orleans.

The new vessel, measuring 64 feet, six inches long and 28 feet wide with a 10-foot draft, is the mv. Kenny Billiot, named after longtime Wood Towing employee Capt. Kenny Billiot Sr.

Billiot, who is in his 34th year with Wood Towing and his 25th year as a captain, said having a boat named after him is definitely an honor.

"I'd like to start by thanking Donald, Sarah, Pearce and Donald Jr. for giving me such a privilege," Billiot said during the ceremony, referring to Donald Wood Sr., who helped launch the company more than half a century ago, and his daughter and two sons who now lead the company. "It truly is an honor."

Wood Towing provides towing, fleeting, dredging and fill materials, and ship services on the Lower Mississippi River.

During the mv. Kenny Billiot's christening ceremony, Billiot admitted it took some time for him to grow accustomed to having his name on a towboat.

"It's pretty strange at first seeing a boat bear your name and hearing that boat called on the radio, but I'm starting to get used to it," he said. "When I started working here, who would have thought it was the start of a career that would span decades?"

Billiot also voiced his thanks to everyone who had a hand in building the mv. Kenny Billiot, from designer Entech & Associates to Gulf Island Marine Fabricators, which built the vessel.

"For the boat, all I can say is 'Wow.' It came out gorgeous, beautiful," he said.

Pearce Wood, vice president of Wood Resources, reflected thanks back on Billiot and vessel Capt. Terrel Williams, who he said played a major role in making the new towboat a success.

“Those guys came out with me religiously,” Pearce Wood said. “Thanks for the captains’ input on this. Without you, it wouldn’t be what it is.”

For example, Pearce Wood said even the distance from the throttle in the wheelhouse to the handles bears Williams’ mark. He said designers arranged the layout of the boat’s controls specifically to fit Williams’ reach.

“It’s such a wonderful boat and we are going to be proud of it for the next 40 years,” he said.

Kyle Smith of Kyle Smith Marine Surveying was also a part of the team that supported construction.

Sarah Louise Wood Ham, president of Wood Towing, also addressed the crowd gathered for the christening. Ham used the letters in Billiot’s name to tell people about the new towboat and the company as a whole.

Ham said “K” stands for “killing two birds with one stone.” That’s because, while Kenny Billiot Sr. is captain of the Jerry Aragon, his son, Kenny Billiot Jr. is relief captain on his namesake boat.

“E” stands for excellence and experience. “KB started decking here in 1979 when we were still called Point Landing,” she said.

“N” is for ‘input,’” Ham said. “Not only does KB operate boats and lead his crew like an expert, but he also brings a lot of great input to us as an advisor.”

Ham said the second “N” stands for nepotism. A total of nine members of the Billiot family have worked for Wood Resources over the years.

For “Y,” Ham asked “Why do we name our boats after our captains?” She answered that question with the “B” in Billiot.

“Because we have a great appreciation for our crews and this is our way of showing it,” she said. “Because they work 24/7, rain or shine, getting the job done and done well, even when conditions are horrible.”

“I,” she said, is for include. “I want to include our deckhands in this talk about crew appreciation,” she said. “They do a very important job and it’s sometimes a dangerous job.”

“L” stands for “Let me give you an example of some of the things our boats are used for.” Ham then offered the crowd a survey of the work Wood Towing does throughout the region.

The second “L” in Billiot stands for legacy, Ham said. The Wood family legacy is strong in the company. Ham’s grandfather, father and uncle built the company more than 50 years ago. She and her brothers then came aboard in the 1980s.

“I” stands for investment. From the investment in the new towboat to the family’s commitment to stay at the helm of the company, Wood Resources is investing in the future.

“O,” Ham joked, stands for “only one more letter in my speech.” And “T” stands for teamwork and thank you.

“Thank you to all the different teams that make it possible for our company to grow and prosper,” she said.

To conclude the christening ceremony, Billiot’s mother, Bonnie Regan Billiot, shattered a bottle of champagne over the rail of the towboat, with Kenny Billiot Sr. standing at her side. All the while, Relief Capt. Kenny Billiot Jr. looked on from the deck of the boat’s pilothouse.

Specifications

The mv. Kenny Billiot is equipped with twin Cummins K38-M Tier II engines from Cummins Mid-South that combine for 2,000 hp. Cummins Mid-South also supplied the boat’s Onan 55 kw. generators. Sewart Supply supplied the Twin Disc MG540 gears that have a 6:1 ratio. The boat’s 72-inch-diameter, four-blade stainless Hung Shen propellers came from Donavon Marine, while Gator Machine Shop supplied the rudders and shafts.

Donovan Marine also supplied Patterson 40-ton winches for the mv. Kenny Billiot, as well as the boat’s searchlights and air horn. Dale’s Welding & Fabricators built the doors.

The boat’s engine cooling system is from Duramax Grid Coolers, while engine alarms are by Unlimited Controls & Supply. Custom Hydraulics supplied the steering system, while the wastewater treatment system is by Owens Kleen Tank.

The Kenny Builliot carries up to 4,800 gallons of potable water, 360 gallons of lube oil, 16,500 gallons of fuel and 1,850 gallons of black water. The towboat has accommodations for six crew members and a single shower.

The pilothouse eye level stands at just under 30 feet. Inside the wheelhouse, a Rose Point navigation system and Furuno radars, supplied by Rhodes Electronics, are installed on an overhead panel, which frees up considerable work space for the crew. Also, the wheelhouse is painted predominantly black to minimize glare and make instrument panels easier to read.

Williams mentioned the wheelhouse—specifically the boat’s navigation system—as one of his favorite features of the mv. Kenny Billiot.

Gulf Island Marine Fabricators delivered the boat on December 31, 2012, and the boat has been at work for Turn Services since then, mainly pushing coal between Darrow and Myrtle Grove, La.

(Note: For more pictures from the mv. Kenny Billiot christening, see the WJ Photo Page on the inside back cover.)
