Boat, Ship Building Takes Place In Louisiana Industry

Baton Rouge — Boats and ship building took its place with oil, petrol-chemicals and forestry in 1967 in the forefront of Louisiana's fastest growing industries, according to the state Department of Commerce and Industry.

"Boats and ship building for years has been a growing factor in the state's economy but indications are that in 1967 this industry pushed ahead to unparalleled gains," said Seymour Weiss, a board member.

Weiss made the remarks as chairman of the board's "Louisiana Made" program, a project designed to make Louisianians more aware of the growing importance of Louisiana products to both the state and the world.

"Louisiana-made boats and ships are afloat in virtually every sea of the world," said Weiss. "From Vietnam to the North Sea, from Venezuela to Libya vessels built in Louisiana are plying trade routes and performing yeoman service in both military and exploration projects."

Rapid growth in the industry can be attributed to three basic factors:

- Establishment in recent years of South Louisiana as one of the major ship building centers of the nation.
- Development since the end of World War II of a boat building industry initially to serve oil and gas exploration offshore Louisiana and ultimately the entire world.
- Extension of this specialized technology to serve vital U.S. military needs.

Highlight of recent activities in ship building is the Avondale Shipyard Inc. facility at New Orleans. New contracts awarded the company during 1967 pushed Avondale's backlog of work orders to around $720 million, making it the busiest shipyard in the United States.

The company hired 2,000 new employees during the year, increasing its total to 8,000 nearly double the figure of five years ago. Although Avondale already is one of the largest industrial employers in Louisiana and ultimately the entire world.

A $20 million expansion program is under way at Avondale's main yard. Company officials said the program will transform the yard into one of the most modern and efficient shipyards in the world. Meanwhile, Avondale reports plans to add another 2,000 employees during the next two years to handle its mounting backlog of orders.

Somewhat obscured by the gigantic growth of Avondale has been the parallel growth of boat building for the offshore industry.

"Boat building for the offshore oil and gas industry was non-existent at the end of World War II," said William T. Hackett, executive director of the commerce and industry department. "Since then, however, this young industry has grown to significant proportions, with Louisiana becoming the world center for this kind of construction."

Industry sources estimated that several thousand of these small vessels have been built since the end of World War II.

Most of the vessels are crew supply boats ranging from 25-feet to 100-feet long and costing between $20,000 and $350,000. A vital role in Louisiana's economy, however, are large crew supply boats as long as 165 feet and costing up to $500,000 each. Still others are combination crew-supply boats.

"These crew boats have proved their usefulness not only to oil and gas interests off Louisiana but throughout the entire world," Hackett said. "By virtue of their speed, maneuverability and overall efficiency, they have also become extremely useful to the U.S. Navy."

One of the larger boat builders, Stewart Seacraft Division of Teldyne Co., in Berwick, is now doing the bulk of its work for the Navy. A Stewart official reported that last year alone Stewart delivered 104 50-foot crew boats to the Navy for use in Vietnam.

"The technology developed by Louisiana's boats and ship builders should be a source of pride of all Louisianians," said Weiss. "The vitality and efficiency of the industry, combined with the anticipated long range military and civilian needs seem to assure it an increasingly important role in Louisiana's economy, number, however, are large crew supply boats."