Port panel receives $12,400 boat bid

By BOBBY LAMB
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The Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission has received a bid on a tow boat that is $4,700 higher than an offer previously made by a company the commission discovered had ties to one of its members.

The port's engineering and executive committees Monday recommended that the full commission accept a $12,400 bid for the boat, known as the MV/10. The bid was submitted by Bert Currault of Lower River Marine Inc. in Kenner.

The only other bidder was G.L. Worsham of Sunshine Marine, who bid $5,500, which was $300 less than he submitted in a previous bid process.

The commission decided in April to readvertise the boat after receiving a $7,700 high bid from Big River Leasing Co. and a complaint alleging a conflict of interest involving a two-year lease on the boat.

Big River's $7,700 bid was submitted by Gloria Baker Henry, the sister-in-law of port Commissioner Calvin Ishmael. Henry was listed as an agent and secretary-treasurer for Big River, which did not participate in the latest bidding.

Big River's original bid was submitted in an envelope from Point Houmas Marine Services Inc. on which Point Houmas' name had been blacked out.

The boat had been leased from August 1986 through October 1988 for $500 per month to Point Houmas Fleeting Inc. and its apparent lease successor Point Houmas Marine Services Inc.

Port commissioners learned from newspaper reports that Ishmael, who has been on the commission since May 1986, manages Point Houmas and works out of the Donaldsonville Machine Shop. Ishmael had said both are owned by his sister-in-law.

Point Houmas pulled the MV/10 ashore around mid-year 1988, removed the vessel's mechanical parts and offered the port $5,000 for the boat as salvage last October.

Commissioners also were unsure whether all potential bidders in the first round knew that the MV/10's mechanical parts were stored at the Donaldsonville Machine Shop and were part of the proposed sale.

The commission clarified the location in the second bid process. The packet also included a document in which bidders were required to ensure that they had no conflicts of interest, Port Director Gary Pruitt said.

A marine survey commissioned after the initial bids were taken valued the boat at $10,000.

In a telephone interview Monday, Currault said the boat

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will need $25,000 to $30,000 in repairs. "We kind of rebuild all that ourselves," he said.

Currault said the small, 30-year-old MV/10 will be used to push a barge. The firm serves ships on the river with five crew and push boats.

Currault said he recently learned of the boat's availability from a chemical salesman. He said the boat's close locale made it a good prospect for Lower River Marine.

The firm was incorporated in 1984, according to the Secretary of State's office. Currault is listed as secretary. Currault said his son Troy is president. The firm has not submitted any annual reports required by the Secretary of State's office since its incorporation, officials said.