HISTORY OF HARBOR AND TERMINAL COMMISSION RECOUNTED

Port Of Vermilion: 29 Years Of Hard Work In The Making

By CHRIS RAND
Advertiser Area Writer

ABBEVILLE — The Port of Vermilion, for over a quarter century, an idea worked on by the Abbeville Harbor and Terminal District and the people of Vermilion Parish. Next Tuesday at 10:30 a.m., that idea will become a reality, as the Port is officially dedicated by Gov. Dave Treen and the Abbeville Harbor and Terminal District in a ceremony at the Port just below Perry.

From the acceptance of bids for construction, to the actual construction, the Port has remained in the news. With dedication ceremonies held for the facility only a few days ago, people are starting to ask about the group that got the whole project started nearly three decades ago — the Abbeville Harbor and Terminal District.

Formation Of District

The Abbeville Harbor and Terminal District (AHTD) is a board of commissioners which was organized under the rules set forth in Acts 1954, No. 613 of the legislature of the State of Louisiana.

According to Jimmy Vohriff, the only original commissioner still on the Board today, the AHTD was formed with the goal of developing an inland barge and docking facility along the Vermilion River in Abbeville.

Three sites, from just within the city of Abbeville to just south of Perry, were considered as possible locations for the facility.

But the dream of a port located in the city of Abbeville just never materialized.

The project failed, Vohriff says, for a number of reasons. First, because of a lack of money and the unavailability of a land mass big enough to build on a port in the city. Physical hindrances along the Vermilion river such as the Perry bridge were also a problem.

But the failure of the early plans may well have been for the best, Vohriff maintains, for in the long run, it required the AHTD to provide Vermilion Parish with a series of waterways which improved access to the Gulf and paved the way for the Intracoastal City and the Port.

Abbeville To The Gulf

"Abbeville to the Gulf" was its nickname. Nineteen miles long, 125 feet wide, and 12 feet deep, the Freshwater Channel occupied the Abbeville Harbor and Terminal District for over eighty years and paved the way for the Port of Vermilion.

Then, the District requested a $4.7 million grant for construction of the facility. This time the administration of Governor Treen appropriated $6.4 million for the project.

Though still $1 million dollars short, the money was enough for Vohriff and the AHTD to complete construction of the Port to the present stage and to allow for its dedication.

Just A Matter Of Time

The money received from the Treen administration was then used for the actual construction of the facility: constructing two, 1,000 foot long, 15 feet deep, 200 feet wide slips fronting on the Vermilion River, clearing necessary ground work, and acquiring the land so it could be used for industrial sites, and giving the Port a site of land near the river.

On Tuesday, Governor Treen travels to Vermilion Parish to dedicate what has been for some, the work of a lifetime.

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And now, Vohriff says, getting the Port to completion is and to its fullest potential is just a matter of time.

Despite the economic slowdown, the Port has leased out sites to three companies.

Abbeville mayor said this morning, "and that is what the Port is all about — providing signs of improvement in the economy."

And on Tuesday, commemorating over 30 years of hard work, the Governor travels to Vermilion Parish to dedicate what has been for some, the work of a lifetime.