

St. John notes several prospective projects that would rely heavily on ocean-based business. Having the right equipment to get the job done is one of the central elements to success in the marine transportation business. It's also something that's often overlooked, St. John says. The business involves more than just tugs and barges and big ships. It also involves cargo handling and container equipment and other specialized gear necessary for handling the goods through all the stages of transport.

"It's a huge component," St. John says.

She says Lynden is well-equipped for that; working with one of the largest fleets of vessels and handling and container equipment in the industry.

Downstream Vitus Marine

At Vitus Marine, success in Alaska waters relies heavily on a specialized fleet of articulated tug and barge (ATB) combinations. Mike Poston, Vitus's director of sales, says the tugs and barges play an integral role in the company's work.

"It's kind of the backbone of our system for village deliveries," he says.

While Vitus itself is a relative newcomer to Alaska, its leaders are veterans within the industry. Poston says they bring the experience necessary to bring marine solutions to Western Alaska's most challenging locations.

"We have a good team where everybody puts their heads together and we feel very confident in our ability to solve any problem that comes up," he says.

In 2009, the company partnered with the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative to build two ATB sets for work in the state's coastal waters, and the vessels began delivering fuel to coastal communities in 2012. The company—which operates throughout the Aleutian Islands, along Alaska's west coast, and up and down the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Bristol Bay river systems—also arranges charters for fuel deliveries from domestic and international sources.

Poston says the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative articulated tugs and barges remain Vitus Marine's primary vessels.

Historically, barges are hauled via tow wire. The ATBs operate by driving with the tug positioned in a notch in the stern of the barge, pushing the

cargo and avoiding having to reconnect upon arrival.

"That's the key to efficiency," Poston says. "They travel faster; they can operate in rougher weather that you commonly see in Western Alaska. We find that the equipment that we use is very effective, and that translates into savings."

The ATBs work well in about 90 percent of coastal locations, he says. The other 10 percent require even shallower drafts, and Vitus is up to the challenge.

In October 2014, the company announced the expansion of its shallow draft fleet: renovating a landing craft to work with barges in extremely shallow conditions and acquiring two additional ultra-shallow draft vessels for renovation and work in remote Alaska waters.

"It allows us to expand our operating areas," Poston says.

Poston says Vitus fuel barges also have freight capabilities—an important ability in an industry that demands flexibility. ⚙

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