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A full-service family of maritime companies, Florida-based Hendry Marine Industries is poised to expand its operations dramatically in a buoyant US marine sector. “There’s no doubt in our mind that with the calibre of leadership and calibre of employees we have, we will achieve this rapidly,” said Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Eric Smith. Colin Chinery reports.

The Gulf Coast’s one-stop shop for ship repair and maintenance, Hendry Marine Industries (HMI), is both a family of businesses and a legacy company. Proud of its 92-year history, the Florida-based business is bullish about its strategy and capability for imminent major growth.

A holding company owned by the employees and the founding Hendry family, HMI is made up of three primary subsidiary companies: Gulf Marine Repair Corporation, Universal Environmental Solutions and Anchor Sandblasting and Coatings.

Gulf Marine Repair, a shipyard located in Port Tampa Bay, specialises in the repair, conversion and modification of large ocean-going commercial vessels, including tugs and barges, dredges, small ships and harbour tugs. Vessels deployed by the US Coast Guard, the Maritime Administration, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are a significant input.

Unique capability

“The unique aspect of our facility is that we have the capability to dry dock any and all articulated tug and barge units that trade in the Jones act,” said HMI’s Vice president and Chief Commercial Officer, Eric Smith. The Jones Act requires all goods transported by water between US ports are carried on US flag ships, constructed in the United States, owned by US citizens, and crewed by US citizens and permanent residents.

“Working seven days a week, round the clock if necessary, we are equipped to meet all commercial needs from beginning to end, starting with gas-freeing and tank cleaning. We are one of the few shipyards nationwide that can handle this seamlessly; a big saving in time and money.”

The Hendry family moved into the maritime industry in 1926 when Captain FM Hendry entered the construction aggregate sector, and later dredging. The business passed to his son, Aaron W Hendry,
and under his visionary leadership, the company moved away from construction aggregate and dredging into ship repair and maintenance.

In 1988, Aaron Hendry bought Gulf Tampa Drydock, changing the name to Gulf Marine Repair. Six years ago, he launched Universal Environmental Solutions, enabling the shipyard to offer gas-freeing and cargo conversion, slop removal, lead and asbestos abatement, and brokered waste services. Last year, Anchor Sandblasting and Coatings was added to the brand folder.

"The unique aspect of these three businesses is that they work hand in glove to service a variety of customers both in the United States and across the globe," stated Mr Smith.

But while Gulf Marine Repair is inseparable from its 50-acre Tampa waterfront, Universal Environmental Solutions and Anchor Sandblasting and Coatings can replicate their business models in other locations. It's a powerful capability whose opportunities HMI is pursuing energetically.

"One of the things we are doing to hold fast to our plan to grow our business and create opportunities generationally, is looking at locations around the United States and possibly beyond, where we can replicate the two businesses," said Mr Smith.

"We are currently performing operations in the Hampton roads area of Norfolk Virginia, looking at other locations too, and in discussions with suitable companies and shipyards."
Calibre-driven

Mr Smith said HMI is very positive about both its expansion plans and capabilities.

"There's no doubt in my mind that with the calibre of leadership and calibre of employees we have, we will achieve this rapidly."

To meet increasing vessel size, the Tampa Bay yard acquired a new drydock from a shipyard in Haifa, installed in the Christmas holidays after being heavy lifted from Israel, and named after Aaron Hendry.

"We now have the ability to chase business that we were not able to do previously," noted HMI's Chief Commercial Officer.

Aaron Hendry, who died in 2016 aged 80, took enormous pride in the shipyard, valuing quality work and strong customer relationships. The ethos and relationship-based commercial strategy remains.

"I believe in the statement that people don't care how much you know, until you show them how much you care," said Mr Smith. "It's all about openness, transparency, integrity, honesty, under-promising and over-delivering. And you have to follow through. It's all about relationships."

Another priority and principle for Aaron Hendry was job provision and a motivated workforce, which currently stands at over 400. As such, in 2015 HMI established an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), making it a 49% employee-owned company.

For HMI, it was the perfect succession plan: the employee owners were willing buyers and the former owner, the Hendry family, happy to share the wealth with employees who worked hard to make the company successful. The ESOP has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on the company, creating broad-based ownership among all employees, and fostering an environment in which everyone understands their role in helping the company achieve its bottom line.

"We believe employees who have an ownership stake and make decisions day-to-day in each of their roles and responsibilities, look through a slightly different lens than if they were strictly
employees," said Mr Smith. "Stock ownership provides a sense of ownership that delivers increased production, dedication and pride in workmanship."

With Gulf Marine Repair, Universal Environmental Solutions and Anchor Sandblasting in place, the management team is looking to add further legs on the corporate stool to expand the Hendry Marine family platform.

"Overall, we see a tremendous amount of opportunity in the US maritime industry and marine space and are actively pursuing any and all of these to see how they fit nicely into our portfolio," revealed Mr Smith.

"The US economy is moving along in a favourable trajectory, which helps us along the way, and we see opportunities related to, for example, short sea shipping, LNG bunkering, vessel owning and operating, and the conversion of surplus PSVs and OSVs. There is much consolidation going on within the industry and we are looking at how we can become a catalyst and part of it."

For HMI, growth is inseparable from its values and history.

"We are very cognisant of the fact that this is a legacy organisation, and we want to keep that legacy and keep that tradition and trajectory," smiled Mr Smith.

Generational prosperity

HMI, said Mr Smith, is wholly committed to growing its family of companies in a way that creates business and employment opportunities in Tampa and around the United States for generations to come.

"This is our plan; this is our objective, and we are in the process of executing this as we speak," he said. "We deeply believe we have the capability to grow our business substantially over the next three, five and ten years, just doing what we are currently doing with the three companies in our current location in Tampa.

"But with our desire to replicate the Universal Environmental Solutions, and Anchor businesses outside of Tampa, we feel very confident in our growth and expansion strategy."

Mr Smith concluded: "There's a tremendous amount of opportunity within the industry. And with us poised to take advantage of this throughout the United States, it's very realistic to think that in 24 months we could be at the point of doubling our revenue."