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# Shipbuilder returns to build Navy vessels

**Though in Miss., U.S. Marine wants to keep 'presence in N.O.'**

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

**By Jen DeGregorio**

A shipbuilding company forced to leave New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina has returned to the city, where it is constructing a line of military vessels destined for the Middle Eastern nation of Bahrain.

United States Marine Inc. lost its shipyard on Chef Menteur Highway in eastern New Orleans during the 2005 storm and had to move its headquarters to Gulfport, Miss. But the company was determined to return to the Crescent City and in November began leasing space along the Industrial Canal from another major local shipbuilder, Trinity Yachts Inc.

"While Mississippi has been very good for us, we have many ties in New Orleans," said Barry Dreyfus, president and CEO of United States Marine. "We've always wanted a presence in New Orleans."

United States Marine's headquarters will remain in Mississippi while its new Industrial Canal space, along France Road, will serve as a second location. The company shares Trinity's equipment and work force, which it is using to complete a \$22 million Navy contract to build two vessels that will ultimately be used by Bahrain.

However, United States Marine plans by the end of the year to build its own shipbuilding operation on the Trinity Yachts land as well as hire between 50 and 75 employees to work on the Navy ships and other watercraft, Dreyfus said.

United States Marine's partnership with Trinity makes sense, as the two companies share a co-owner, John Dane III.

The two shipbuilders also share similar post-Katrina business challenges. The hurricane destroyed Trinity's shipyard and pushed the company to Gulfport, where it maintains its headquarters. The shipbuilder came back to New Orleans a year after the storm, but only after it was wooed back by its landlord, the Port of New Orleans.

The port agreed to sell Trinity nearly 50 acres of property that the company had once leased. William S. Smith, Trinity's vice president, told The Times-Picayune that the company would not have returned to the city without the chance to own its own land. Trinity has experienced a boom in business since reopening in New Orleans. But a work-force shortage has cut the company's employee base to about half of the 500 jobs Trinity counted before Katrina.

Still, both Trinity and United States Marine's return can be considered wins for the region, said Lisa Tomlin, director of the trades sector initiative for the business group Greater New Orleans Inc. Shipbuilding is part of the defense-manufacturing sector, one of the industries Tomlin's group is attempting to develop to boost the region's economic health. The marine manufacturing sector employed nearly 8,800 people in the Greater New Orleans region last year and provided an average annual wage of about \$47,000, according to a study completed for GNO Inc. in November.

The report identified defense manufacturing and three other sectors -- international commerce, energy and creative media -- as the region's best bets for economic



A ship's hull begins to take shape in the Industrial Canal shipyard United States Marine is leasing from Trinity Yachts. United States Marine has been in Gulfport since its eastern New Orleans shipyard was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, but it is using the New Orleans facility to fulfill a defense contract.