



This 100-ton lift will be something of a lightweight when a new crane — billed as the largest of its kind — arrives at the South Bay Boat Yard. The new one can hoist more than 600 tons. *Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune*

# South Bay yard is getting shipshape

## Makeover to give mega-yachts a lift

**By Shannon McMahon**  
STAFF WRITER

CHULA VISTA — Within the next year, some of the world's largest and most luxurious private yachts might be making a call on Chula Vista's bayfront.

That's once the South Bay Boat Yard, which opened in 1986, completes its \$6 million makeover.

Work began in early March, and the project, which includes the country's largest boat crane, is to be completed in December.

"We've moseyed along in the yacht business for 25 years," said Todd Roberts, vice president of the yard. "We were wandering through the woods, looking for our way. Now we've stepped forward."

South Bay Boat Yard has a lease with the San Diego Uni-

fied Port District for 9.45 acres ashore and 8.52 acres of water at the foot of G Street. The 35-year lease expires in 2020.

In January 2004, the port and the city wanted to move the boatyard because it was felt an on-site expansion or overhaul would disrupt bayfront development.

Environmentalists said they wanted it moved because industrial work harms marine life. The yard is adjacent to the Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge, near a trailer park on the bay.

And last month, Mayor Steve Padilla of Chula Vista reiterated his desire to see the yard moved.

"There is a greater potential for higher and better uses than an industrial use" there, Padilla said, adding that the city would be better served by a hotel or restaurant on the site.

However, the Port District

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# Bayfront facility keyed to mega-yachts

decided last June to allow the owners to overhaul the yard. The port also said the yard could remain until a better site is found.

The yard's footprint will remain during and after its remodel. Later, if it is forced to relocate, Roberts said the equipment can be broken down and moved.

Today, the yard is a maritime repair shop with everything from tugboats to tour ships parked on its lot. Welders, electricians and painters buzz about the boats, repairing them for private owners or the Navy.

Construction crews are ripping down some buildings and paving unused space to make room for offices and workshops, though the yard is remaining operational throughout the remodel.

The largest part of the project involves the addition of a travel lift that will hoist and move boats to dry work space.

It is to arrive in October and will be the largest of its kind in the United States, able to hoist more than 600 tons. The lift now in use at the yard can pick up 100 tons.

The new lift will be assembled on site and be operational in December. To accommodate it, the yard is adding two 150-foot-long piers, which handle craft up to 225 feet long and 54 feet wide.

The lift, using slings, will hoist boats from the water, carry them across a paved lot and set them on blocks in repair lots.

After the remodel, the yard will be renamed Marine Group LLC. It will continue under the same management, Roberts said.

The boatyard, one of nine on San Diego Bay, has 36 employees and annual revenues of about \$5 million. After the overhaul, Roberts expects to hire about 75 more employees and reach revenues of more than \$12 million.

"We think this will be a huge economic boon to San Diego





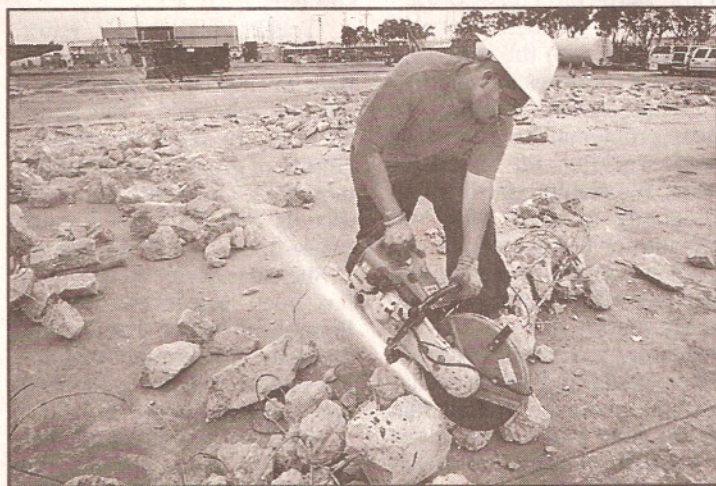
The "Rapture," a mega-yacht, is being prepared for sea the South Bay Boat Yard. The yacht belongs to the Waterman Academy.  
Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune photos

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**TODD ROBERTS,**  
vice president of the  
South Bay Boat Yard

Bay and will make it a destination for repair and refit efforts for mega-yachts," said Jim Hutzelman, assistant director for community services at the port.

It's all "very significant," he



Raul Escoto cut away concrete debris created during the \$6 million makeover at the boatyard in Chula Vista.

said, considering the money owners will be spending on "upholstery, fiberglass work, crews staying here for part if not all the time."

Mega-yachts are private boats that are 120 feet or longer, Roberts said, and fixing them, no matter the size, is big business. The cost of repairs range from \$300 to \$3 million,

though typical work runs \$25,000, Roberts said.

Work generally is divided into three categories: painting, building and interior design.

The yard services about 300 boats a year, Roberts said, and focuses on specialty vessels: yachts, oil skimmers, speed boats, security boats and the Navy's coastal combatant craft,



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which are smaller than destroyers but larger than barges.

The port district is looking for an alternate site for South Bay Boat Yard, and one possibility is Harbor Island, across from San Diego International Airport.

The port has said the yard will stay in the area even if it does not remain in Chula Vista, Hutzelman said.

**Shannon McMahon:**  
(619) 498-6634;  
shannon.mcmahon@uniontrib.com