

Biloxi Sun Herald

Coast Guard cutter gets keel-laying ceremony in Pascagoula

Published: September 5, 2012

PASCAGOULA -- Ingalls Shipbuilding held a keel authentication ceremony for National Security Cutter Hamilton on Wednesday.

Adm. Robert Papp, commandant of the Coast Guard, was the principal speaker at the ceremony, and his wife, Linda Papp, is the ship's sponsor.

This cutter is the sixth Coast Guard ship named after Alexander Hamilton and is the fourth of eight 418-foot vessels to be produced as part of the flagship of the Coast Guard modernization. The Hamilton began construction Aug. 30, 2011, and will be one of the most "technically advanced high-endurance cutters in existence" when it is complete, Papp said.

This fleet will replace the 378-foot Hamilton-class high-endurance cutters that have been in service since the 1960s.

"Right now, we're dealing with 45-year-old technology that's rusting and can't fully perform its missions," Papp said. "We need this new technology put in place as quickly as possible."

Ingalls President Irwin Edenzon hosted the ceremony in celebration of the Aug. 27 keel laying, the second of the five-part process involved in putting a new ship into service. Edenzon said these ships will have advanced electronics and propulsion systems.

"The aim is to build these ships at a stable cost while improving efficiency," Edenzon said. "We're delivering great ships. We're proud to be building for the Coast Guard."

Linda Papp served as authenticator and signed her initials into a steel plate that will be welded to the keel. The sponsor is always a woman, whose "spirit and presence" will represent that of the ship.

"When they called me a couple weeks ago, I was truly overwhelmed with honor," she said. "So few have this opportunity. I feel so blessed."

Linda Papp, who is the ombudsman at large for the Coast Guard, said she has been in this position for a long time and it has enabled her to regularly meet with families and find out what their needs are.

Edenzon said Linda Papp is a "fantastic supporter and friend of the shipyard."

Robert Papp said the first three cutters, which are in service, have been “doing great seizing drugs, dealing with fisheries and conducting rescues.”

Papp said, “Just imagine all of the tremendous feats (the Hamilton) will accomplish. She will be able to cross the ever-changing oceans, complete her missions, and bring her Coast Guard back safely.”

The Hamilton is about 25 percent complete. The launch date is set for August 2013. The delivery date is September 2014.