



# REAPING SHIP REPAIRER

*excellence in the Gulf of Mexico*

From a small scale crew of engineers, International Ship Repair (ISR) has become one of the biggest operators in the Gulf of Mexico, with a constant flow of domestic and international clients seeking the company's expertise. Operating several dry docks from its Tampa shipyard, the family-run company is now planning to ramp up further and secure more vessel renovation projects. Andy Probert discovered more from Senior Vice President Hugo Ortiz.

Attentive and fast are the work-force of International Ship Repairs (ISR) when it comes to turning around variety of vessels ready for ocean life after their transformations at the Florida shipyard.

The 25-acre yard bristles with cutting-edge technology matched by quality engineering crews that have helped build ISR's reputation for its fast-track, large steel replacement capabilities.

The company completed a 890-tonne job in just 78 days for Gulf Coast Transit - an average of more than 11 tonnes per day. Keeping ships out of the dock and moving in the water where they belong is consistently underscored as repair jobs are completed on time, on budget, and with superior craftsmanship.

Headquartered in the Port of Tampa, ISR is ideally located for vessels trading in the south-eastern US, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

Founded by Robert Del Valle in 1973, the company began with just eight members of staff who were deployed as a sea-going engineering crew to solve repair issues as vessels sailed onwards.

### Grown at pace

George and Carl Lorton bought ISR in 1990. The brothers sparked dramatic growth by adding dry dock capabilities at the shipyard. In 1997, ISR expanded its comprehensive repair services to include conversion capabilities for the lengthening and repowering of ships.

When CEO George Lorton gained sole ownership of ISR, the company added several dry docks, including the largest floating dry dock in Florida, affording the company the largest number of operational dry docks in the state.

The main yard and seven outfitting piers now provide nearly 4,000ft of berthing space with on-site support services. Other facilities

offer 3,000ft for topside repair, and the shipyard can accommodate Panamax size vessels.

Senior Vice President, Hugo Ortiz, said: "As demand from clients to bring us larger vessels and to handle bigger projects, so ISR has grown at pace to match the need for greater capacity."

With a staff complement reaching 200 people, investments have been consistently ploughed into new shore and floating equipment, including various cranes, such as a 275-tonne Manitowoc Crawler Crane, as well as tug boats and deck barges.

ISR has also developed highly-qualified and experienced teams to handle repair competencies from welding and pipefitting to ship fitting, painting and coating, in addition to manual and electrical services.

Three dry docks are pressed into regular service as they range in metric tonnage, with two having lift displacements of 600 and 6,000 tonnes. The biggest - dubbed 'The





Beast' – weighs in at 36,000 tonnes and is 257m long and 38m wide and caters up to Panamax vessel size.

Mr Ortiz added: "Because of the quality of our service and repeat business with clients that we have developed long-term relations with, we are considered as the premier leading shipyard in the Gulf of Mexico. But the market is becoming more competitive by the day."

### Rooted in commercial shipping

While some shipyards favour military contracts, ISR is firmly planted in the commercial shipping sector, both domestic and abroad, while also having completed a number of contracts for the US Coast Guard.

Mr Ortiz asserted: "We have proved to ourselves that revenue is generated from high-volume, short-stay repair projects enabling vessels to have minimal

downtime for owners. We are highly focused on fast-track renovations, repairs and conversions, and we have achieved that consistently over the decades.

"ISR has taken steps in recent years to establish more in-house services, and today our crews fully complete 80% of all contracts. This ensures efficiency and strict quality control."

He highlighted that Tampa is blessed with satellite companies that ISR can call on to respond to handle specialist work, such as electronics, hydraulics, machining, and mechanical.

Surviving in the commercial market, remarked Mr Ortiz, has been one of continuous cycles with a flow of tankers, then gas carriers, container vessels, multi-purpose carriers, and then back to tankers.

"Our target has always been to grow between 7% and 10% annually, and we usually hit these targets," he said.

### International outlook

The balance of domestic and international clients seeking ISR's services changed from a 50/50 split in the early 2000s to 40:60 by the start of the 2020s.

"Because we have brokers in Germany, England, Monaco, Denmark, Greece, Singapore, and Canada, we see a rising inflow of vessels from European and Asian clients requiring all manner of repairs ISR is experienced in," Mr Ortiz added.

"There are seasons and years that we see a majority of one type of vessel, such as tankers, and then it moves on to another, such as gas carriers. It appears to happen in cycles, but we are geared up no matter what comes through."

For the USCG Harry Claiborne, ISR finished its core of projects, such as steering propulsion systems overhauls, tank blasting and various pipe repairs, within 45 days. The company has

also achieved significant overhauls and improvements on two 250-capacity ferries for a client in Puerto Rico.

ISR's recent projects include handling a floatel for the energy sector, acting as a floating accommodation vessel with a capacity for 400 people; another general carrier for repairs from Singapore and a Spanish-based catamaran. Crews have also worked on repairing a support vessel dedicated to the US Coast Guard and another vessel that requires the propellers' removal for an overhaul.

Looking ahead, he said: "We try to accommodate everything within our expertise and ISR is presently fully booked out for the next five months."

### Innovative approach

While ISR remains busy, the company is acutely aware of the limitations of the channel within which it works and is in talks with local government agencies with a view to dredging operations to enable ISR to take on deeper and bigger vessels.

Mr Ortiz said: "It's a shame that we have a big dry dock that we cannot utilise to its full potential because of the draft limitations. We hope that talks with the Port Authority and local government will be successful.

"On occasion, when we worked on some specialist vessels that were 700ft wide, we took our biggest floating dock

out to deeper water, and we were able to complete the jobs. But manoeuvring it is highly complex and requires a lot of planning, so the option to dredge deeper would be a practical solution."

To ensure uninterrupted workflow during the pandemic, ISR adopted strict criteria and internal protocols for its staff to follow, with daily production meetings to oversee changing safety requirements.

"We have an open-door policy, and we will consider all types of repairs because anything is possible with our team. We can complete the impossible because we are highly innovative in our approach to whatever complexities we face on a project," he added.

Material shortages, supply chain concerns, and staff shortages caused by Covid-19 remain the major challenges to the company, but it remains highly flexible to ensure vessel repairs are always completed on time and safely.

Mr Ortiz concluded: "We are well-drilled in looking after clients' interests and try to save them money, without sacrificing on quality. We look to bring alternatives to the table, think out of the box, and see what we can achieve.

"The overriding approach has always been to achieve clients' priorities first and that is what has cemented our longevity and a well-earned reputation in the industry." ■

