

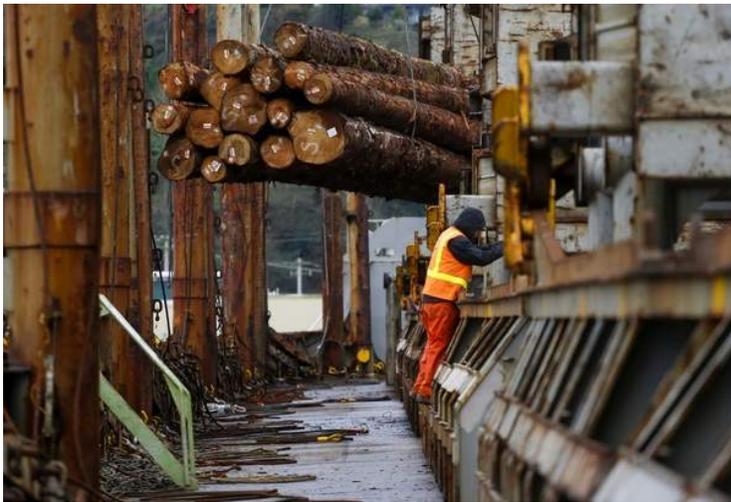


Logs stack up to big business

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Longshoremen from the Local 50 JOSHUA BESSEX — THE DAILY ASTORIAN chapter of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union load logs onto the Ken Rei bulk carrier Dec. 16.

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The Ken Rei on Sunday left with nearly 5 million board feet of timber, with the help of many local employees and a Filipino ship crew.

The bulk carrier Ken Rei steamed out of the Port of Astoria Sunday with nearly 5 million board feet of timber destined for Lanshan, China.

Bringing the load of one of Clatsop County's most valuable commodities together is an interplay of employees from the Port of Astoria, Astoria Forest Products, longshoremen and the crew of the Ken Rei.

Logs are a main breadwinner for the Port, which earns around \$100,000 per ship through moorage, wharfage, security and

other fees. Twelve log ships have called at the Port, and that's just the beginning.

"Murphy Overseas would like to see upward of over 40 ships per year," said Robert Evert, the Port's permit and projects coordinator, about the company's goal of developing Pier 3 into a log-sorting, storage, debarking and export terminal.

Astoria Forest Products, a subsidiary of Murphy Overseas USA LLC, assumed Westerlund Log Handlers leases on piers 1 and 3 in April. Westerlund has been embroiled in a lawsuit with log buyer China National Building Materials.

Loading logs

Crews from Astoria Forest Products take the logs from Pier 3, where more than 10 million board feet can be stored, to Pier 1, where longshoremen from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 50 take over.

Each of the four cranes loading logs into the Ken Rei involves an eight-man “gang” of longshoremen, said the Port’s Executive Director Jim Knight.

Drivers bring the logs clutched in front loaders to the foot of the vessel, where more longshoremen tie cables around the bundles. Crane operators lift the bundles up and drop them into the ship’s holds, while Knight said more longshoremen watch over the entire procession to ensure safety and efficiency. Altogether, he said, it can take 40 to 50 longshoremen to load a vessel like the Ken Rei.

The ILWU has been making headlines recently during its continued contract negotiations with the Pacific Maritime Association. Longshoremen on West Coast ports have been accused of purposely slowing work and causing backups, but Knight said the Local 50 in Astoria has been loading ships as quickly as ever.

“To do 1 million board feet a day is a rough industry goal mark,” he said, adding that it depends on a combination of work ethic, equipment used for loading, the efficiency of a work site’s layout and the complexity in log species being loaded. The Local 50 crews took just over five days for about 5 million board feet.

“If the longshore pulls this off in four or five days, they’re doing pretty good,” said Knight, adding that the Local 50 set a record with the Ken Rei for loading the most it ever has on the first day, putting more than 1 million board feet on the Ken Rei Dec. 15.

The president of the ILWU Local 50 was unavailable for comment.

Vanuatu boat, Filipino crew

Taking over once the logs are on the Ken Rei is a Filipino crew of about 20. The carrier is flagged to the Republic of Vanuatu, a small island nation in the southern Pacific Ocean.

“Filipinos are popular with ship owners,” said the vessel’s Capt. Vicar Calix, adding that the crew is hired through a manning agency in Manila and signed to a nine-month contract to do several runs between China and the U.S. Aside from loading, he said, it takes about 17 days on an ideal trip across the Pacific, mostly to ports in China.

Out at sea, Calix and his staff navigate the vessel and chart its course based on company directives, while giving orders to the engine room below.

“We control the power of the vessel,” said Chief Engineer Benjamin Mailed, who with his crew down below operate the Ken Rei’s 9,300 horsepower engine.

To give a tour of the entire engine, Mailed must ascend several stories. At the top of the engine is the control

room, from where the engine room crew gets orders from the pilothouse on how much power to give the engine.

Cruising at an economical speed of about 12 to 13 knots (nautical miles) per hour, he said, the engine still consumes more than 18 metric tons — or more than 5,500 gallons — of fuel per day. In rough weather, he added, the ship slows to 7 to 8 knots and burns even more.

The Ken Rei runs on one of three tanks, depending on the emission standards wherever it is. The two main tanks each hold 594 cubic meters — nearly 157,000 gallons — of high-sulfur bunker fuel. Within the waters of the U.S., the ship switches to a third tank, burning a low-sulfur variety that meets emissions controls. It often refuels in Russia before or after unloading.

“We Filipinos are competent in doing this job,” said Mailed, adding that about 25 percent of global shippers use Filipino crews. Mailed said he attended a maritime academy in the Philippines and has worked on ships for 32 years, advancing his way from a deck wiper to chief engineer.

The Ken Rei and its crew should be in Lanshan by early January to unload its goods. The Port expects the next log ship in mid-January.

For Calix and the crew of the Ken Rei, it'll be yet another Pacific round-trip, bringing one of the Pacific Northwest's biggest commodities to Asia's markets and coming back with empty holds ready for more. “I hope we can come back in February.”