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Tide goes out on woman-owned tug operator

Staten Island-based Henry Marine Service declares Chapter 11 amid hard times in the port; company's 15 minutes of fame came in 2003 when its tug was first on scene of fatal ferry crash.

By Carl Gaines

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The tide has gone out on one of New York's few woman-owned tugboat companies. On Friday, Staten Island-based Henry Marine Service, Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

The move comes at a time when the recession continues to depress traffic volumes for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. A Port spokesman noted that the numbers of loaded containers handled by the port rose 9.6% in the first quarter, but is still 6% below the same quarter of 2008, before the recession began.

The decrease in traffic at the port has caused many companies to cut back.

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Henry Marine Service, which is owned by Dorothy Julian, made the news in 2003 when one of its tugs, the Dorothy J, was the first on the scene when a Staten Island ferry slammed into a concrete pier at the St. George ferry terminal, killing 10 and injuring many more. The Dorothy J towed the damaged ferry, the Andrew J. Barbieri, away and held it in place for several days following the tragedy. Subsequently, Henry Marine Service filed a lawsuit seeking \$6 million in compensation from the city for its part in the rescue. That case is still ongoing. Ms. Julian started Henry Marine Service in 1999, when she bought the Dorothy J from a company in Massachusetts. Now the future of one of the few female operators in a traditionally male-dominated industry is uncertain. "It has been pretty traditionally a masculine culture," said Jack Putnam, the museum historian at the South Street Seaport Museum. "Female seafarers have to put up with a lot wherever they go."

When reached for comment, Ms. Julian would only say that "this has been a very difficult time." The company's bankruptcy petition was filed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the Eastern District of New York.

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