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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

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.
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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