

North Vancouver says bon voyage to maritime relic

Diesel engine among artifacts North Vancouver archives shipping out

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

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The North Vancouver Museum and Archives is ready to lose some weight: about 22,000 pounds.

A six-cylinder, 11-ton tugboat engine is the biggest item on the long list of artifacts and objects North Vancouver's chroniclers are looking to ship out.

After getting District of North Vancouver council's blessing at a meeting Feb. 2, the NVMA will try to sell the motor at public auction after holding onto it for more than 17 years.

Built in 1951, the engine is 20 feet long, eight feet wide, and nine feet high.

The big, green motor powered the tugboat The Reliant, cutting the waters off the Sunshine Coast for 18 years for a logging company, according to NVMA collection manager Magdalena Moore.

Longtime North Vancouver resident Jeffery Harbottle picked up the tugboat "sort of as a hobby," Moore said.

Harbottle eventually sold the boat but he bought back the engine and restored it, according to Moore.

"He really cared about it and he wanted it in a museum," she said.

The direct-reverse diesel engine represents a transition in tugboat engine technology, according to Moore.

While the Department of Canadian Heritage "strongly encourages" placing pieces of maritime history in Canadian museums, the NVMA found no takers among 13 public, non-profit institutions including the Vancouver Museum and the Britannia Heritage Shipyards.

"It's so big that it's beyond most museums' capability to take on," Moore explained.

The City of North Vancouver already signed off on bidding bon voyage to the relic.

While the engine can still turn over and rumble to life, the NVMA no longer has the expert volunteers who can conduct the maintenance needed to keep the engine shipshape.

The District of North Vancouver considered mounting the engine as a public display piece in 2013 but ruled out the idea after discovering the effort required to remove the fluids and seal the cumbersome engine's moving parts.

Besides having no anticipated use for research, the engine has only a tenuous relationship to the area.

“We’re now in a place where it doesn’t have a strong connection to North Vancouver beyond this hobbyist’s interest, and it’s giant,” Moore said.

Purchasing managers for the City and District of North Vancouver have both said the engine could be useful to another municipality as a backup generator.

Besides the engine, the keepers of North Vancouver’s history are looking to clean 66 artifacts and 258 other pieces out of their closet.