

A reborn Mosquito Fleet may be coming to Edmonds
By Chris Keuss, Executive Director, the Port of Edmonds

When Victor Hugo spoke of the power of an idea whose time has come, it is doubtful that he thought the same good idea might succeed twice. But it could happen right here in Edmonds.

In the mid- to late-1800s, long before today's ferry system began operating, the so-called Mosquito Fleet began plying the waters between Puget Sound communities. For much of that time automobiles and airplanes didn't exist, roads were often either impassable or non-existent, and many towns were not served by rail. However, passengers could move quickly and inexpensively by water between shorefront communities from Olympia to Port Townsend and beyond.

Now fast-forward three generations. People still seek better ways to travel between Puget Sound cities, and water travel is still capable of providing speed, convenience and economy. Enter Harry Dudley, Captain, U.S. Coast Guard retired.

Utilizing twenty-first century technology and modern vessels, Captain Dudley hopes to regenerate a contemporary version of the Mosquito boat legacy. Fittingly, he is the great-grandson of one of the Mosquito Fleet originators.

His company is called NAVILINX. It consists of partner operators of vessels and aircraft that provide transportation up and down Puget Sound and into southern British Columbia.

According to Dudley, there will be operators making both scheduled and on-demand trips.

Potential users will go to the NAVILINX website, input where and when they want to go. The LINX part of NAVILINX will then link them to the best options. Dudley himself operates one of the vessels.

Captain Dudley has presented his plan and credentials to the Port Commission here in Edmonds and they have agreed to lease business moorage to him for use as an Edmonds embarkation and debarkation point for boat passengers.

He is particularly interested in The Port of Edmonds, he says, not only because of our attractiveness as a destination, but because of our nearness to land-based transportation such as Sound Transit's Sounder train, Amtrak and bus service connecting to inland communities.

With the Hood Canal bridge scheduled to close for six weeks starting May 1, he feels now is a particularly good time to begin water service to and from Port Townsend and other communities impacted by the closure. They are working to get their website up and running by then.

Since retiring from the Coast Guard a few years ago, Captain Dudley has never been far from Northwest maritime affairs. Among other things, he is chair of the Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners, the state agency charged with overseeing regulations for large ships and their pilots when they are underway on our inland waters.

Those of us here at the Port of Edmonds wish Captain Dudley and NAVILINX well in their venture. This may well be an idea whose time has come ... again.

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