Keel Laid for First-in-Class T-ATS



An artist rendering of the future USNS Navajo (T-TATS 6). U.S. Navy photo illustration

HOUMA, La. – Gulf Island Shipyard held a keel laying ceremony on Oct. 30 for the future USNS Navajo (T-ATS 6), the lead ship of the Navy's new class of towing, salvage and rescue vessels. The ceremony was held at the Houma Terrebonne Civic Center in Houma, Louisiana, Naval Sea Systems Command said in an Oct. 31 release.

A keel laying is the ceremonial recognition of the start of a ship's construction and the joining of the ship's modular components. The keel serves as the symbolic backbone of the ship and is said to be "truly and fairly laid" with the etching of an honoree's initials into the keel plate.

On hand to authenticate the keel were Jocelyn Billy, the ship's sponsor; Jonathan Nez, president of Navajo Nation; and Seth Damon, the speaker of the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

"We are honored to have so many members of Navajo Nation in attendance to celebrate this early milestone in the shipbuilding process," said Mike Kosar, support ships, boats and craft program manager, Program Executive Office Ships. "These ships are critical to the operations of our fleet and will soon sail with the resilience and determination of the Navajo people of which they honor."

The Navajo-class will provide ocean-going tug, salvage and rescue capabilities to support fleet operations. The current capabilities are provided by three T-ATF 166 and two T-ARS 50 class ships, which reach the end of their expected service lives starting in 2020.

Navajo-class ships will be capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems. The platform will be 263 feet long, have a beam of 59 feet and can carry a load of 1,796 tons.

In addition to T-ATS 6, Gulf Island Shipyard is under contract for the detail design and construction of the future USNS Cherokee Nation (T-ATS 7) and USNS Saginaw Ojibwe Anishinabek (T-ATS 8).