Keel Laid for Future USNS Cherokee Nation



An artist rendering of the future USNS Cherokee Nation (T-ATS 7). U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Paul L. Archer

HOUMA, La. – A keel-laying ceremony was held Feb. 12 for the future USNS Cherokee Nation (T-ATS 7), the second ship of the Navy's Navajo class of towing, salvage and rescue vessels. The ceremony was held near Gulf Island Shipyard at the Houma Terrebonne Civic Center.

The ceremony formally marks the start of a ship's life and the joining of the ship's modular components. The keel serves as the symbolic backbone of the ship.

In attendance to authenticate the keel was Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, Chuck Hoskin Jr., and the ship's sponsor and deputy speaker of the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council, Victoria Mitchell Vazquez.

During the ceremony, the keel authenticators etched their initials into the keel plate and declared it to be "truly and fairly laid."

"We are honored to have so many representatives of the Cherokee Nation in attendance to celebrate this early milestone," said Mike Kosar, support ships, boats and craft program manager, Program Executive Office Ships. "The ship is critical to the operations of our fleet and will soon sail with the pride and determination of the Cherokee people, which it is named to 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, several of which will reach the end of their expected service lives later this year.

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 nearly 2,000 tons.

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