

Cedar King

Tug of the Month March 2017

The history of the tug Cedar King, Dunlap Towing Company and the history of Olympia's Willie family, owners of Olympia Towing, Co.

By Les Eldridge

For Olympia Harbor Days Tugboat Races and Festival, an Olympia Kiwanis Club Event

Cedar King is one of the most familiar tugs on the waters of Olympia's Budd Inlet, usually seen moving log rafts from West Bay, and a frequent participant in Olympia Harbor Days' annual tug races held each Labor Day weekend. She was built in 1970 by Reliable Steel of Olympia for the Olympia Towing Company, founded by Milton Willie in 1927 and run by the Willie family for three generations until its sale to Dunlap Towing of La Conner, WA in 1989. She is still a working tug for Dunlap Towing Company and West Bay Chip Reload, Olympia.



Photo Credit: Olympia Harbor Days

Cedar King is 37 feet, 7 inches length-over-all, with a beam of almost 14 feet, and draws five feet, 7 inches. This 19-ton tug is powered by a 350 horsepower engine. She is skippered by Gary Sanford. Sanford and Cedar King were recognized at the 2016 Skippers Dinner, sponsored by Lucky Eagle Casino, for their years of volunteer service to the annual Olympia Harbor Days Tugboat Races, now celebrating 44 years of maritime history.



Photo Credit: Karla Fowler c2012



Photo Credit: Karla Fowler c2012



Photo Credit: Olympia Kiwanis Club c2016

Her towing lineage for Dunlap and Olympia Towing is remarkable. Olympia Towing numbered fewer than a half-dozen tugs in 1951. It specialized in sand and gravel towing under the second generation, Gordon Willie. His tug **Sunset** won one of the very early Olympia Harbor Days races, in 1976. Third generation cousins Mike and Mac split the operation, Mac running the towing end and Mike heading up sand and gravel operations.

The 1989 sale of the towing company to Dunlap Towing of La Conner engendered significant growth to the "down-Sound" company. Gordon Newell's "Ships of the Inland Sea" lists seven tugs owned by Dunlap in 1951. Today the company boasts 22 tugs, including **Cedar King**, and tows in Alaska waters and up and down the Pacific Coast, moving logs, oil, containerized cargo and assisting large ships. Dunlap is a long-time strong supporter of Olympia

Harbor Days. Among Dunlap's tugs is one of the most unusually named boats on the coast, the **Pull and Be Damned**. The name is an old rowing command from the eighteenth century. More information about Dunlap Towing can be found at <http://www.dunlaptowing.com>.



Photo Credit: Olympia Harbor Days

In the 2016 Olympia Harbor Days race completion, **Cedar King** won the "Small Tug" event with a time of 11 minutes, 12 seconds over three other tugs. I believe her best performance occurred in the 2015 "Small Tug" race, when her skipper Gary Sanford and his wife Anita displayed the ultimate in good sportsmanship. Competing that year were **Cedar King**, **Atka**, skippered by Alan Glaser, noted boat designer and former South Sound Maritime Heritage Association member, and **Maggie B**, skippered by Michael "Tug" Buse, clearly the sentimental favorite.

In 2014, Tug Buse's dad, Mike, a frequent winner in the Small Tug category, brought **Maggie B** up-Sound toward Olympia for the races when he suffered a stroke, was hospitalized, and died a few days later. Mike had always dreamed that **Maggie B** would be chosen as logo tug for the race event. In 2015, she was named logo tug, and son "Tug" Buse, with his mother Penny, looked forward to racing and memorializing Mike during the race.



Maggie B was leading **Cedar King** and **Atka** in the last 200 yards of the 2015 race when her engine blew.



Photo Credit Karla Fowler c2012

Cedar King and **Atka** stopped immediately, Gary Sanford secured **Maggie B** to **Cedar King's** starboard side, and with **Atka** escorting, pushed her over the finish line, making sure she was in first place! What sportsmanship! What "tugmanship!"



Photo Credit Karla Fowler c2012

As **Maggie B** crossed the line, Penny scattered Mike's ashes and some rose petals on the water as a bagpiper aboard played "Amazing Grace". It was a truly memorable moment.



Photo credit: Drew Phillips

Sources: "Ships of the Inland Sea" by Gordon Newell, "Tugboats on Puget Sound" by Chuck Fowler and Captain Mark Freeman, (Arcadia), The Olympian Newspaper, interview with Mike Willie.

About Les Eldridge: Les is president of South Sound Maritime Heritage Association and author of a number of maritime histories, and a series of novels of the American Civil War at sea. He lectures frequently ashore and afloat, and narrates the OHD race each year. For more, see EldridgeSeaSaga.com.

Tug of the Month is sponsored by Olympia Harbor Days Tugboat Races and Festival, an Olympia Kiwanis Club event. The free 3-day community gathering takes place every Labor Day weekend on the Olympia waterfront. It is in its 44th year. For attendance info, see www.HarborDays.com or on Facebook@OlympiaHarborDays. Questions to the executive director at info@harbordays.com.