Mosquito Fleet Sustainable Shipping - Olympia Schooner Company interview

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Hoyle Hodges founded the new Olympia Schooner Company in the Puget Sound. This year it has instituted delivery of fresh produce as part of a business plan to at least break even with sailing cargo and eventually passengers. The company began as the Mosquito Fleet Sustainable Shipping project at Evergreen State College where Hoyle studied.

When we saw his video here at Sail Transport Network central in June, we were inspired to learn more. Here's the interview we conducted:

STN: Hoyle, your schooner shipment of produce is exciting if not historic! We want to spread the word on activities such as yours. We share your concerns about high quality goods needing to arrive without the usual carbon footprint in the unfolding post-peak oil era.

What do you think of the potential for greater and greater volumes of trade via sailboats for products now shipped by highly polluting bunker fuel?

HH: I'm very encouraged to see some of the efforts out there like STN, Sailing Vessel Kwai, French wine-sailing barque Belem, Atlantis Merchant Sailing Company (aka Fair Transport) and Olympia Schooner Company.

I do think that we need new ships to really begin to make a difference. Sailing old fashioned brigs, barques, and schooners does not give us the efficiency of scale needed to be competitive with modern container ships. There are new sailing cargo ship designs out there like B9 in Ireland and others on the drawing boards. We need to be able to say; ship coffee from Kona to Oakland at 2-3 cents a pound vs. 70 cents that it would cost using a small vessel with only a ton or two of capacity. As romantic as sailing the old style ships is, we need the modern equivalent of the Clipper Ships that can produce high speeds, high cargo volume, low maintenance and small crew sizes.

STN: Is the niche market for sail-transported goods something with large potential, or must we all wait until oil shortages hit?

HH: I think that $5.00 dollar per gallon gas is the tipping point in the United States. One of the areas we investigated within Puget Sound is serving as a "Brokerage" or "Hub" matching cargo loads with sailing vessels. Marinas are full of sailboats which spend 90% of their life docked. Thus the cargo capacity exists with many small vessels vs. a few large ones. I think in a few areas this could be a workable model, but for most cargos and most areas, larger vessels are going to be key. Once we reach the oil price tipping point, than Sail Transport is going to receive a lot of attention. Passenger transport is a large part of our plan, whether they are paying passengers or volunteer crew from local youth or disabled veterans as we reach peak oil passengers as well as cargos becomes more viable.

STN: Do you agree that sail power is a neglected form of renewable energy in government policy and subsidies?

HH: Yes, you won't find any grants or subsidies related to sail transport. Government policy will only change if we and our supporters "squeak" loud enough to our elected representatives. Right now there is no incentive for them to help us, but, let gas lines form like they did during the Oil Embargo and I have a feeling we will receive plenty of support.

STN: Are you doing any collaborations such as with small businesses?

HH:Right now we are researching various organic farms, vintners, honey growers, etc. We want to establish a large enough customer base that some of the larger farms will shift a segment of their production to us. Given our location very close to the Olympia Farmers Market it is easy enough to fill orders right now, as our customer base grows, having dedicated amounts of product from dedicated farms and vendors will be key to our supply chain management.

STN: What's next for Mosquito Fleet Sustainable Shipping?

HH:Mosquito Fleet Sustainable Shipping started as a project at The Evergreen State College as part of their Business Sustainability program taught by Rebecca Chamberlain and Bob McIntosh. We now operate as Olympia Schooner Company and sail the Pinky Schooner Pleiades out of Olympia. The Mosquito Fleet project was a success as a proof of concept and we are continuing to grow our customer base. Right now we are trying to get 10 customers in 20 locations around South Puget Sound, this gives us a base income of $2000.00 a month if each customer pays a $10.00 Sail Transport Fee. So we charge each customer a flat fee of $10.00 per box/bag of produce per delivery. Larger cargos will be negotiated on a case by case basis. This Sunday we are targeting the Key Peninsula and have already signed up customers, with delivery taking place at Long Branch docks.

STN: Are there crewing opportunities for your next shipment or other ways to support your efforts?

HH: Crew is always welcome and just putting out the word that we are out here trying to make a difference is a huge help to us.

STN: Looking far ahead, what do you see as the future of trade and travel in an increasingly greenhouse warmed world?

HH: We are literally running out of places to build new roads. Even in places where there is enough room, politically new roads are a minefield for elected officials. When you look at a place like the I-5 corridor and Puget Sound it is very easy to see that water borne travel will become increasingly important as an alternative to traffic choked and increased tolls. Right now on Puget Sound there are East to West ferries for the most part, and not many, if any North - South running vessels. This will change as the cost associated with operating a vehicle becomes too expensive for the middle class.

STN: How long have you been thinking about sailing as something useful for society?

HH: Forever!

STN: Are you primarily having fun and showing we can be a Do It Yourself community, in the Puget Sound, or are you thinking that sail power can get us away from oil dependence and/or global-warming propulsion?

HH:I think we are doing both. Sailing is by its very nature fun for the most part, and we are trying to show what can be done in South Puget Sound. Part of what we do is education, by taking passengers on 2-3 hour Charters. We get to expose them to the idea of Sail Transport. We also attend various festivals and shows, so even tied up at the dock we

are talking to hundreds of people a day. Sail Transport is going to help us wean ourselves from oil dependence along with other promising emerging technologies; already I am seeing an increase in Hybrid power sail boats that have a generator powering batteries just like a Prius.

STN: Are you doing regular deliveries with your schooner?

HH:We are not quite at the regular delivery stage for produce yet, we are building our customer base step by step. Passenger Charters have been fairly regular so Olympia Schooner Company is moving forward in the right direction. Our business plan calls for 200 cargo customers per month, and 120 full day passengers per month.

STN: Had you heard of STN before? From where?

HH:I found STN on the internet and had been following Dave [Reid] and his Sail Transport Company. Dave and I met at Point Hudson Marina in late December of 2011. We had gotten slammed going around Point Wilson the day before and he crossed the Strait of Juan de Fuca in gusts up to 60 and had ripped out his main sail. I met him the next morning when I saw the STN burgee he was flying.

STN: What advice do you have for others thinking of putting a sail transport project together?

HH:Have fun -- it is a lot of work to put together so you must enjoy what you are doing. It is not all fun sailing; there is a lot of back end work from building web sites to networking with farmers, bikers etc.

STN: Can we get some background on you and your crew -- age, where you're from, how long have you been sailing?

Here are the data:

Hoyle Hodges age 50, retired U.S. Army Paratrooper, Command Sergeant Major, born Sebastopol, CA, Sailing 12 years

Elmira Hodges age 32, from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1st Mate, and expert Cook, Sailing 6 years

Eamon Kennedy 30, born on Vashon Island, experienced Tall Ship Sailor and our Captain, Sailing entire life

Betty Duncan,(my sister) 43, from Sebastopol, CA. Onboard naturalist. Sailing 6 years

Heidi Hodges 5, sailor and boat princess, Sailing 5 years.

STN: We would like to send you gratis our STN burgee, and you're invited to consider yourself part of the Sail Transport Network!

HH: Please send the STN burgee -- it will fly above all others.

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Hoyle Hodges is located in Olympia, WA, and his website is olympiaschoonercompany.com

Video of the Olympic Schooner Company in action:

youtube.com

Recent publicity in local media of the Puget Sound:

thenewstribune.com
Olympia sailor banks on repeat of Mosquito Fleet --
"Olympia resident Hoyle Hodges and his 59-foot wooden schooner are a throwback to the days when Puget Sound was the main transportation corridor for people, produce and cargo from Bellingham to Olympia." -
by John Dodge, July 9, 2012 [Thumbnail photo at top courtesy News Tribune, Tacoma, WA]

See the above CultureChange.org article on SailTransportNetwork.com