

85 ton Travel Lift now at Abel's Boat yard

By Roy McNett
and Kevin Lock

There's a new guy in town. And he's big. Abel's boat yard (Astillero Magdalena) now has an 85 ton Travel Lift to serve the needs of Rio Dulce boaters. The huge machine is available for emergency haulouts as well as scheduled hull and bottom service, including power washing, blasting, repainting as well as fiberglass, welding and woodworking services. Yard manager and administrator Abel Castro (known to most boaters as Abel Junior) said their haulout and dry storage yard presently can handle up to 15 boats but work is underway to clear another area behind the yard for even more storage. The new Travel Lift is in addition to Abel's three boat railway systems. They have two 150 ton railways and one 75 ton railway. And yes, Abel's can handle catamarans up to 32 feet in width. Abel Senior has been in business on the Rio Dulce for 25 years. His son, Abel Junior, joined the family business 5 years ago. The yard has 27 employees. Abel can be contacted at 7930 5059 or Cellular Phone 5200 7941 or email astillerorio@yahoo.com Below is a history of three generations of Abel's family compiled with the assistance of Kevin Lock.

During the decade of the 1920's, a nine-year-old boy named Juan de la Cruz Ramirez Vasquez, immigrated from Corozal, Belize to Livingston, Izabal, Guatemala to seek for a better life for his brother and sister.

During his childhood, he did an apprenticeship by working as a fisherman in Livingston. After a couple of years he returned to his country of Belize to a town called Punta Gorda. There he worked with Chinese businessmen as a fisherman.

In 1933, Juan Ramirez returned to Livingston, Guatemala to seek different opportunities and to learn better ways to survive in life. First he started working with the "United Fruit Company", which was an organization that transported fruits from all over Izabal to Livingston for world distribution.

During that time, Juan Ramirez had various experiences where he learned many things about boats. Then he started to travel more around the area of Izabal, one of those places was San Francisco del Mar. In San Francisco del Mar was the place where Juan Ramirez met Natividad Ramirez Degrueth, who became his wife in 1941.

After Juan and Natividad Ramirez got married, they moved to Livingston, Guatemala to experience a new life as a married couple. In the year 1944, the first and only son of Juan and Natividad Ramirez was born, which they named Jose Abel Ramirez Y Ramirez.

After a couple of years their son was born, the Ramirez Family left Livingston to go to Puerto Barrios. By this time, Juan Ramirez Vasquez, became a respected local fisherman and entrepreneur.

From all the hard work Juan Ramirez did, he then decided to learn navigation at "Amondendesent Coast Navigation School" of Santa Barbara located in California, United States via post mail (correspondence mail?). He studied day and night until he understood all of the course material.

After several years, he finally accomplished his goal and graduated receiving his diploma as a "Boat Captain". The main reason he really wanted to be a licensed navigator was once again, to improve the quality of life for his family and to teach his son Abel Ramirez the trade.

Abel Ramirez grew up to be a well educated, knowledgeable man by all the techniques his father taught him, from the different works on how to operate a boat and then learning how to build one.

All these experiences lead the Ramirez family to building their first boat which was 22 feet long and named "Nati" propelled by a 33 horse power Peterbuilt engine that towed barges up to 100 feet in length. This was the first boat that helped the Ramirez's start transporting material, food, machinery, and equipment from Puerto Barrios to Modesto Mendez (now known as Cadenas).

Thanks to the help of "Nati", the Ramirez's had a better overview of the world of business and were ready for a new challenge. In the early 1960's, Juan Ramirez sold "Nati" to start his new project on building a new boat.

This 35 feet boat was dubbed "Sarita" and was mainly used to push barges from one place another. But this boat was also commonly used to take tourists on tours around Izabal.

After Juan and his son Abel Ramirez noticed they were making good profit with "Sarita" and the business, they decided to make a new vessel. In 1973, the Ramirez family started to work on their new boat that was going to be much larger than "Sarita", expected to be 45 feet in length with central engine 80 hp Detroit Diesel. For three years they worked on the vessel until it was done, and named it "Magdalena".

“Magdalena” was a stronger boat, which made it possible to be employed by the Canadian company “Transmetals L” for the transporting of copper ores. Subsequently, it was also hired by other companies like “Chevron Exmibal” for transporting fuel and nickel from El Estor to Puerto Barrios. Water transport remained an important tool for the lack of sufficient transport roads connecting this region with other departments of Guatemala.

In the late 1970s, with the combination of the Magdalena's success and being a close family of action with amazing determination, persistence, patience, ingenuity, and still maintaining their business of shipping, the family officially documented their business “Transportes Magdalena,” in the mercantile registry and the legend continues.

Due to the nature and size of the Magdalena, maintenance was difficult, which required building a pulley operated track to haul the vessel out of water for servicing.

Abel Ramirez started building the marine railway in 1987, and completed after six months of work. Initially, the use of the track also provided a particular form of charity for others in need.

This, along with quality and craftsmanship of the family vessel, caught the eye of many who in turn, wanted or needed servicing of their vessel. With the growing interest, more ships arrived and the demand for this slide became an opportunity to provide a service that would accommodate these other boats that came to Rio Dulce, Izabal.

In 1989, the first boat was hoisted. Subsequently, Abel Ramirez began the construction of another track; due to the large number of vessels seeking such service in the year 1990. The capacity was expanded in order to care for the ships that needed it, but the number of runners was insufficient and it became necessary to build one more slide, which came into operation in 1995, providing service to hundreds of boats each year.

Later on, in the late 1990s the name of the business was changed to “Astillero Magdalena” because the business was dedicated to work more with the shipyard than with transportation. Now the business has grown into a big and successful one.

“Thanks to the help of all our customers, and we are willing to provide you with more projects that we have in progress. We really appreciate your support,” said Abel Jr. He noted, “With over 27 years of experience and service to the Rio Dulce, Astillero Magdalena "Abel's" has established an esteemed reputation for service and craftsmanship. No job is too large or too small for us to accommodate quality service for your boating needs.” Abel’s offers engine repair, hull and topside repair and painting as well as long to short term storage. Services include all kinds of repairs, from machines, plastic, weather protection, sails, woodworking, hydraulic, stainless, welding, transformations and painting. “Here at Abel's we understand that it is impossible to be excellent in every aspect of what is needed to build or repair a boat. In our years of service we have located other professionals in the areas where we lack the equipment or skills to provide you the best of services. You will always be notified of these areas and who we associate with and their guarantees prior to any work being done on your vessel,” he explained. Telephone: 7930 5059 ~ Telefax: 7930 5060 ~ Cel: 5200 7941 ~ email: astillerorio@yahoo.com