



Taking small steps at a time

A large variety of service companies contribute to efficient maritime transport in many ways, ranging from providing towage and mooring to crew tenders and ship's stores. One such company is MMPS that from Vlissingen takes care of the transport of people, parts, and stores to vessels on the North Sea and at the Western Scheldt River.

MMPS, which is part of Minderhoud Techniek, stands for Minderhoud Maritime & Port Services. It was founded in the Spring of 2021, and has its homebase in the so-called Binnenhaven in Vlissingen, close to the North Sea and the entrance to the Western Scheldt River. PortNews talks with Bas Minderhoud, owner of Minderhoud Techniek and Lenny Gerards, business unit manager of MMPS.

Freelance welder

Having worked for various companies in different roles in the North Sea Port area, Lenny Gerards has a long career in the maritime services and thus brings in ample experience to the young company. For Bas Minderhoud the maritime world is



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Tender vessel Zeemeeuw forms the base of MMPS.



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not new either, as a large part of his company's assignments lies in ship repair and maintenance.

Bas Minderhoud started his career as freelance welder around twenty years ago. "Starting as a welder, I first worked mainly in general steel construction," he says, "but soon I got involved in civil waterworks and ship repair, too. He continues, "As a freelancer I started working for a company that was mainly active in the repair of fishing vessels. To make a long story short, the owner of this company had no successor and when he wanted to retire, he asked me if I was interested in taking over his company. So it happened, and in 2011 I took over his activities. Fortunately, I had a good start with the existing customers I took over. However, with the declining fishery in Zeeland, I successfully searched for customers in other sectors."

Expansion

Today, Minderhoud Techniek has a broad scope of activities. With ship repair as the largest activity, it also operates for various on- and offshore industries. "We have a very extensive and varied portfolio", Bas Minderhoud says. "We recently constructed a new fencing for the monumental Lange Jan church tower in Middelburg. For DOC (Dutch Offshore Contractors), that has a terminal just a few minutes away from us, we act as house contractor for steel construction works, such as the carousels for their spooling activities, but also for mobilisation of their pontoons. We have also constructed pipelines for sand replenishment, and we execute repair works on cranes. Throughout the years, we have been able to seriously expand our activities." The expansion resulted in lack of space at the company's location and therefore Minderhoud Techniek recently acquired a neighbouring warehouse. "The new warehouse will be mainly used for storage and for the construction of new offices", Bas Minderhoud explains. "This way our current facilities can be used dedicatedly for construction and repair activities."

Zeemeeuw

A few years ago, Lenny Gerards became acquainted with Bas Minderhoud and his company when she was working at a maritime service company in Vlissingen. They found out they got along well, and hence decided to join forces. "I always had a dream of becoming more independent in the maritime services", Lenny Gerards voices, "and when the opportunity presented itself, Bas and I decided to rent tender vessel Zeemeeuw. This formed the basis of MMPS, which we started in May 2021. By the end of that year, we could buy the Zeemeeuw, which made our operation much more flexible. MMPS mainly operates at the Western Scheldt River and the North Sea where we transport crew, technicians, spare parts, and stores to vessels. With the Zeemeeuw we bring persons and goods to vessels at the North Sea anchorages such as Steenbank and Wandelaar, and of course to anchorages at the Western Scheldt River. Apart from this, the Zeemeeuw can also be used for diving support, surveying, and as guard vessel."

Two heads are better than one

Most of MMPS's trips are arranged in close collaboration with shipping agents in Zeeland, Antwerp, and Rotterdam. "Although some ship owners prefer to do business with us directly, we highly value the efforts of the shipping agents. Therefore, we keep this direct business to the minimum", Lenny Gerards explains. "We think that collaborating with the agents and other local maritime service providers is more profitable for everyone, as two heads are better than one. This is also why we often work together with the Vlissingse Bootliedenwacht (VLB, the Vlissingen boatmen). This is a company that also ships stores and parts to vessels anchored



Bas Minderhoud, owner of Minderhoud Techniek and Lenny Gerards, business unit manager of MMPS.

at the Western Scheldt River. When one of the agents asks us for a trip to vessels on the Western Scheldt anchorages that we cannot take care of ourselves, for example because the shipment of spare parts requires a crane, we are not afraid to advise them to contact VLB. This also works vice versa.”

Advantages

Most of the journeys with the Zeemeeuw are scheduled ahead, which makes most of MMPS’s work quite plannable. “Although bad weather can affect our work, most of the trips we made are booked in an early stage”, Lenny Gerards elaborates. “Agents know soon enough when a vessel arrives at the anchorage and in most cases the vessels place their orders for transport in time. This scheduled work leaves us plenty of room to also accept more last-minute assignments. One of our advantages is that from our Vlissingen base, we can be at sea very fast.” Apart from the location, Lenny Gerards also points out some other advantages. “What is also beneficial for us is that we can make use of Minderhoud Techniek’s facilities, people, and technical expertise. They are always helpful to lend a hand with a forklift truck, and their staff can help to solve most technical issues on the Zeemeeuw.” With Minderhoud Techniek, MMPS also has the ability of arranging ship repair at the anchorages themselves, although this has no priority for Lenny Gerards. “Together with Minderhoud Techniek, we can carry out small repairs on vessels at the anchorages ourselves. However, most vessel owners and agents have their own contacts for this kind of work, and we do not intend to compete with these contacts. Nevertheless, in case of an emergency, we are ready to assist with the technicians of Minderhoud Techniek.”

Zeeland nature

Since its establishment in 2011, Minderhoud Techniek has been doing quite well and the future for MMPS also looks bright.

“ Growing is not so difficult. It is more challenging to stay on a certain level, even when business is not going so well. This is why we are acting cautiously and only take small steps at a time. I guess this has to do with our down to earth and modest Zeeland nature.

This does not mean Bas Minderhoud and Lenny Gerards are focussing on a strong growth by quick wins. “Of course, growth is good for business”, Bas Minderhoud says. However, growing is not so difficult. It is more challenging to stay on a certain level, even when business is not going so well. This is why we are acting cautiously and only take small steps at a time. I guess this has to do with our down to earth and modest Zeeland nature.” In her 24-year career in maritime business in and around North Sea Port, Lenny Gerards has, apart from a lot of experience, also built up a large network. “Through the years, people in our industry have learned that I am someone you can trust and rely on. Simply said, I do what I say, and in case we are not able to help, I will be honest about this and advise or try to help our customer to find a solution. This honesty fits perfectly with the modest and down to earth Zeeland approach Bas mentioned above. I would say this is convincing proof that we as a team and our companies fit perfectly here in North Sea Port.”