Corsican Voyageur Wintering in Kodiak

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{audio}/images/stories/mp3/100915.tugboat.mp3{/audio}

Phillipe Hercher aboard his converted French Navy tug Le Manguier. Maria Jose Riquelme del Valle photo

Jacob Resneck/KMXT

An odd-looking vessel will be wintering in Kodiak this year. Le Manguier [leh-MONG-ee-ay] - that's French for Mango Tree - is moored up in Kodiak's St. Herman Harbor. KMXT's Jacob Resneck caught up with its skipper who is preparing for next year's Arctic voyage.

The seventy-foot former tug boat was bought at auction in after being decommissioned by the French Navy. Its skipper is Philippe Hercher who purchased it for 20,000 euros - about $26,000 dollars in 2002.

-- (hercher4 26 sec)

He says nearly $400,000 dollars has

since been spent retrofitting the tug which now has two large A-frame sailing masts, solar panels and a new 450 horsepower engine.

Last year he and his wife and daughter left his native island of Corsica in the Mediterranean to explore the North Sea and Arctic. They landed in Scandinavia, Russia and decided to skip Japan last fall and instead headed to Alaska.

Le Manguier was here for the May Crab Festival and Hercher says he's picked Kodiak as his winter port.

-- (hercher2 26 sec)

He'll return to France next week but plans to return in February to prepare for the next voyage.

-- (hercher5 18 sec)

He's also trying spread a message of environmental sustainability. He's made some basic additions like solar panels and recycles heat from the engine and added more efficient LED lights.

He's also trying to teach and learn from other seafarers on ways to make sea travel more environmentally sustainable. He says his voyages aren't pleasure cruises.

-- (hercher8 18 sec)

Already he's in talks with

researchers about taking samples of sea water in the Bering Sea to help scientists measure acidification in the Arctic Sea.

-- (hercher6 18 sec)

The 55-year-old skipper will be
joined by his wife and daughter early next year before the 250,000-pound tugboat steams out of Kodiak's harbor this spring.