

'Queen of the Fleet' Headed to Mexican Scrapyard

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The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Storis in 2007 when it left Kodiak for the last time. The decommissioned cutter, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, will be towed to Mexico and cut up for scrap metal. US Coast Guard photo

Jay Barrett/KMXT

The one-time longest serving U.S. Coast Guard cutter, the former Queen of the Fleet, the Storis, will not become a maritime museum in Juneau or Ohio or even Kodiak.

Instead, it will be towed Friday to Mexico and cut up for scrap metal.

The Storis was sold this summer at auction by the federal General Services Administration to a scrap metal dealer for \$71,000 — a fraction of the cost to build it in 1942. It was decommissioned in 2007 after serving through World War II, and then in Alaska waters, first out of Juneau, and then Kodiak.

Joe Geldhof, a Juneau attorney, is the secretary of the Storis Museum, the non-profit that was trying to save the Storis from being broken up for scrap. He spoke via mobile phone from Breezewood, Pennsylvania.

"It's a sad day for all of us who worked all over the United States people were working to save the Storis. Unfortunately a lot of history and a great museum potential will be lost here."

Geldhof said he and the museum do not harbor any hard feelings toward the businessman who bought the Storis, but thinks the GSA bungled the entire proceedings.

"We do harbor a strong sense that the General Service Administration botched the disposal. They didn't give non-profits the opportunity to select the Storis before it was put on the scrap market."

He also blames petty personal politics by a then-United States Senator for keeping the Storis from being transferred to the museum.

"There is another person who actually is culpable in ruining the museum deal, and that's a guy named Jim DeMint, who was routinely putting a hold on the congressional authorization to transfer it to the non-profit museum. And DeMint apparently had a snit to pick with the Alaska Delegation, and he frankly queered the deal a couple years running."

DeMint was a one-term Republican senator from South Carolina.

Geldhof says the Storis Museum organization still has some money left over and the board will meet to decide what to do next to memorialize the ship and those who served on it:

"Probably with one or more really high-quality museum-grade models and displays, perhaps in Kodiak, perhaps in Juneau. We didn't save the ship, but we're working now to try to remember everybody who served on it and memorialize, to the extent we can, a wonderful ship that served the United States and the Coast Guard and the

citizens of our country well.”

Friday, a tug will begin towing the Storis from the Suisun Bay mothball fleet storage in California to Ensenada, Mexico, where it will be stripped down and cut up for its scrap metal value. Its final fate comes less than a year after the Storis was named to the National Register of Historic Places.