



Under a rainbow, the Nina Otaki was pulled from the beach at Beckett Point by the tugboat Vulcan. Photo courtesy of Tyler Vega

Six months later, the 78-foot Nina Otaki is free

Boat pulled from Beckett Point beach

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With the roar of a tugboat engine and the scrape of hull across rocky shore, the 78-foot schooner Nina Otaki was pulled from the beach at Beckett Point June 6, six months after a winter storm washed it ashore.

The Nina, a 63-ton ship of iron-reinforced concrete, dragged its anchors and ran aground on Dec. 20, 2018 in the midst of a howling gale and lay on the beach like a wrecked pirate ship for six months before the crew of the tugboat Vulcan, captained by owner Christian Lint, helped pull the Nina back into the water.

While not the first time the Nina has been beached, it is the longest time the boat has sat on shore. In 2017, the Nina was beached at Fort Worden and was rescued by a crew of volunteers from Salish Rescue, a volunteer organization that provides assistance to boaters in the Puget Sound.

When she washed ashore a second time, rescue efforts that took place on New Year's Day were not fruitful.

"It took the combination of having the right boat and a captain willing to do it," said Tyler Vega, who has taken responsibility for the Nina. "It's a ton of weight off my chest. It's been a crazy intense and challenging part of my life for the last six months."

Vega, who works at Dailey Computer Store in Port Townsend and is a local politician most well-known for his recent run for congress in Washington's 6th Congressional District on the Progressive Party ticket, says he is not the official owner of the boat, but that he has taken responsibility for getting it off the beach, along with a group of his friends, who he calls his "crew."

Vega originally bought the Nina Otaki in 2016 from the boat's builder. In September of 2018, he sold it to a friend, but he is unsure if the paperwork was processed properly. Right now, the boat doesn't really have an owner, Vega said.

While trying to sort out the paperwork with the Coast Guard and settle a bill for the Coast Guard's work at defueling the boat while it was on shore, Vega is trying to fix up the Nina so he can sell it.

"Unfortunately I don't have the kind of money it would take to fix it up properly," he said. "I want to get her to the point where she can cross the strait to a



The tugboat Vulcan is owned by Christian Lint, who helped tug the Nina Otaki from the beach at Beckett Point. Leader photo by Rainier Powers

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Tyler Vega

CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE
FORMER OWNER OF NINA OTAKI

Canadian couple who are interested in buying her and fixing her up."

If that plan falls through, Vega and his crew have ideas for how the Nina could help with the affordable housing issue in Jefferson County.

"We're trying to recreate the energy of the Boiler Room, but on the water," he said. "We have a housing crisis here and part of the plan for the vessel to begin with was to try and help with this issue."

The Boiler Room was a youth center located downtown Port Townsend, which offered free food every day, job training for

young people looking to advance their skill sets; programs to become a better self and more. It closed its doors in 2018.

If Vega were to keep the Nina, he envisions it being turned into a coffee shop with living quarters. Parked at the Union Wharf during the day, it could be a place for those in need of shelter to get warm, have a cup of coffee and hang out. Then, at night it could anchor in Port Townsend Bay, providing housing for some that need it.

"For the moment, it's all just a conversation," he said. "The first step is to clean the ship up and fix it. All those branches beyond that first step are almost irrelevant right now."

Vega said he will likely keep the boat at anchor for now at the south tip of Discovery Bay, fixing what he can from the water. His next stop will be Boat Haven, to do more renovations.

Besides fixing up the Nina Otaki, Vega has a lot on his plate. In May, he filed to run for city council, position 7. He will be running against incumbent David Faber.

Washing up on shore again won't be a problem, he said, since they now have 49 anchors - nearly 2 tons - which Vega and his crew had used to try and winch the boat off the beach bit by bit.

It took the strength of a tug boat along with a high tide to pull the boat off the beach, removing it from the sight and

minds of those who live at Beckett Point, who had the boat in their front yards for six months.

"They've been very patient, but their patience wore thin several months ago," Vega said.

According to state statute, DNR's Derelict Vessel Removal Program is responsible for addressing the problem of derelict or abandoned vessels in Washington's waters. But that program comes at a cost to taxpayers.

When an entity, such as the Port of Port Townsend, removes a derelict vessel from its property, it can seek reimbursement from DNR, according to Port Deputy Director Eric Toews. However, DNR's website states that "due to a continued increase, both in dollar and number, of reimbursement requests and the Derelict Vessel Removal Account's low level of funds, the Derelict Vessel Removal Program will be accepting reimbursement applications, but will be withholding payments until June 2019."

The Nina Otaki is listed on DNR's inventory of "vessels of concern," but was categorized as "priority 5," which is a vessel that does not present a threat to human safety, is not in danger of sinking and does not have high priority for DNR to remove it. As of April 2019, DNR's list of "vessels of concern" had 154 boats on it.

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