

BUSINESS

Cruising right along

Ports officials pleased with tourist season

By TOM PETERS Business Reporter

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Some called it record breaking, others said it was a milestone season but anyway you look at it, Atlantic Canada's 2009 cruise season had cash registers ringing.

The bottom line for cruise lines may not have been as good as past years, as cruise companies trimmed prices to attract travellers, but overall the region's cruise industry has been hailed as another strong year.

Final figures haven't been compiled from all of the larger ports in Atlantic Canada, but in 2008 the industry was worth an estimated \$81 million. The industry is expecting to reach that or a higher number this year.

The Port of Halifax had 118 vessel calls and 227,000 passengers. Estimated direct economic impact is \$50 million. But the season had additional significance. The port welcomed its two-millionth passenger since cruise lines first started visiting here in 1980.

The "2009 has been a milestone season," said Cathy McGrail, manager of cruise development for the Halifax Port Authority.

"This year we celebrated over two million cruise visitors to our port, welcomed the second largest ship ever built by the Cunard Line, Queen Victoria, and had a record breaking day on Oct. 8, welcoming five vessels and 11,000 passengers."

Although the Port of Sydney doesn't get as many calls from cruise lines as Halifax, the business is an important part of Cape Breton's tourism season.

The port hosted 46 vessel calls, welcomed more than 62,000 passengers and 26,000 crew members. It had scheduled 50 calls but poor weather and a medical emergency kept four ships away.

Port officials were pleased with the year. Although eco-

omic impact numbers were not available, the economic benefit is expected to be between \$5 million and \$6 million. In 2008 the port had 50 ship calls and an impact of nearly \$8 million.

While the Port of Halifax tends to get the press, the Port of Saint John has been slowly building a very substantial cruise business.

It was another record year for Saint John, with 73 ships carrying 186,500 passengers calling on the city.

"We are very pleased with yet another record year in cruise," Al Soppitt, president and CEO for the Saint John Port Authority, said in a release.

"We are excited about the future prospects and growth potential of this sector, which will continue to make a significant contribution to the province's annual tourism results."

Betty MacMillan, the Saint John port's manager of business development, called it an especially rewarding season.

"In spite of the worldwide economic downturn, our numbers continue to grow in this very important sector," she said. "It was also a great honour to have our city named as one of the top three ports of call in the world at the Seatrade Insider Cruise Awards."

In 2007 the Port of Charlottetown opened its refurbished cruise pier and the investment of several millions of dollars has paid off. The port was in danger of losing cruise business but has turned its cruise sector around with the new infrastructure.

The port hosted 40 ships in 2009, 59,014 passengers and 26,563 crewmembers.

"We're thrilled with the final numbers for the 2009 season," Corryn Morrissey, the port's cruise development officer, said in an email.

"The cruise industry has seen outstanding growth in the region and is only continuing to grow."

Financial figures for the port were not available.

Charlottetown's cruise numbers are expected to grow in 2010 with 44 ships tentatively scheduled to visit.

In Corner Brook, cruise tourism is an important economic generator, says port manager and CEO Jackie Chow.

"It is estimated that the economic impact of the season to Corner Brook and the surrounding region is more than \$480,000 in direct spending alone," she said in a release.

Corner Brook had 10 ships call on the port in 2009. They brought about 6,600 passengers, an increase of 27 per cent over the 2008 season.

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