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Nichols fails to snag ferry contract; WSF chooses Todd

By JENNIFER CONWAY

A contract that would have brought approximately \$200 million in business and could have helped to retain the 310-person workforce at **Nichols** Brothers Boat Builders went instead to a Seattle shipyard last week.

Washington State Ferries announced that Todd Pacific Shipyards of Seattle was the top contender to build four new ferries. **Nichols** Brothers was also in the hunt, along with J.M. Martinac Shipbuilding of Tacoma, for the contract.

"You win some and you lose some," said Matt **Nichols**, CEO of **Nichols** Brothers.

He said the ferry contract was one of many jobs the company continuously bids on, and said not being awarded the contract would probably not affect the company.

"We've got a lot of stuff we're working on," **Nichols** said.

According to Washington State Ferries spokeswoman Celia Schorr, **Nichols** Brothers withstood a first-round cut from a list of five shipyards vying to build the ferries. The contract is to build four, 130-car vessels. The ferries will be approximately 342 feet long, 83 feet wide and have a cruise speed of 17 knots.

WSF hired an outside firm to evaluate the financial information and capabilities of all the potential companies who expressed an interest in the contract, and Todd was the company that came out on top.

"Todd was the only one that met the financial aspects of the qualifications," Schorr said.

In addition, she said the chosen shipyard needed the physical capacity as well as the financial ability to simultaneously work on up to three ferry vessels at the same time.

"This is a very big project," she said.

In the 1990s, **Nichols** Brothers was one of three shipyards vying for a contract to build three Jumbo Mark II class ferry boats that hold 200 cars. Todd Pacific was also awarded that contract by under-bidding **Nichols** Brothers and built the vessels between 1997 and 1999.

A large portion of the money to build the vessels will be raised by the nickel-per-gallon gas tax hike approved by state legislature in 2003. Additionally, funds will be raised through revenues from fares, fees and bonds.
