Contact: Jeanne Kouhestani, NOAA
301-713-7693; 301-787-7269 (cell)
Cynthia Borries, VT Halter Marine
228-696-6837; 228-596-9549 (cell)

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NOAA and VT Halter Marine Launch Third Fisheries Survey Vessel
Ship to be Homeported in Pascagoula, Miss.

A new NOAA fisheries survey vessel, launched today in Mississippi, will be able to study fish quietly without altering their behavior.

The ship, christened *Pisces* by Dr. Annette Nevin Shelby, professor emerita at Georgetown University and wife of Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama, has been designed to meet NOAA Fisheries' specific data collection requirements as well as the new standards for a low acoustic signature set by the International Council for Exploration of the Seas.

Pisces is the third of four new fisheries survey vessels of the same class. She will be homeported in Pascagoula, Miss., when placed into operation in late 2008, and will support NOAA Fisheries research and assessments in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea, and along the U.S. southeastern seaboard.

Pisces was named by a team of students from Sacred Heart School in Southaven, Miss., which won a regional NOAA contest to name the ship and subsequently participated in her keel laying ceremony in June 2006. The contest was an educational initiative to help students learn more about their region's marine and coastal environment as well as to generate a greater interest in scientific studies.

"The christening and launch of *Pisces* is a major step in the revitalization of our NOAA fleet," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr., Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "This new ultra quiet ship continues our course for the future of fisheries and marine ecosystem research in the region."

Pisces is the third of four planned 208-ft. fisheries survey vessels to be built by VT Halter Marine that are replacing aging ships in the NOAA fleet. Her capabilities will far exceed those of older NOAA ships, including Pascagoula-based *Oregon II.*

"VT Halter Marine has a proven global track record of designing and constructing ships that meet our clients' specific requirements. We are particularly delighted to be working with NOAA on this third vessel of the same design. Not only will she greatly increase NOAA's technical capabilities at sea just as her sister ships are doing, she will support research in our own Gulf region," said Boyd E. King, CEO of VT Halter Marine, Inc.

The NOAA fleet of research and survey ships and aircraft is operated, managed and maintained by NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, which includes commissioned officers of the NOAA Corps and civilians. The NOAA Corps is one of the nation's seven uniformed services, and, as part of NOAA, is under the U.S. Department of Commerce.

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NOAA Fisheries is the lead federal agency responsible for the stewardship of the nation's offshore living marine resources and their habitat. NOAA Fisheries manages, conserves and protects fish, whales, dolphins, sea turtles and other living creatures in the ocean.

VT Halter Marine**,** the marine operations of VT Systems, is based in Pascagoula, Miss., and is a leader in the design and construction of medium-sized ships in the United States. VT Halter Marine designs, builds and repairs a wide variety of ocean-going vessels such as patrol vessels, oil recovery vessels, oil cargo vessels, ferries, logistic support vessels and survey vessels.

This year NOAA is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: http://www.noaa.gov
NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations: http://www.nmao.noaa.gov
NOAA Fisheries: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/
VT Halter Marine: http://www.vthaltermarine.com