

Wrangell man looks to retire, sell former ferry

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A little over a year after being put back in the water, the Rainforest Islander is for sale again. Owner Eric Yancey has been operating the Islander under Breakaway Ferry and Freight. He has also operated the tour charter company Breakaway Adventures since the late '80s. Now, however, the 61-year-old is looking toward retirement.

"Boat's been running great for this past 14 months that I've had it, or whatever it's at now," Yancey said. "The fact that the Rainforest Islander's for sale, I've had a few people kind of go, 'What in the world? You just got that,' and I'll go like, 'The whole thing's about Eric trying to kind of retire and trying to have a semi-normal-ish sort of life.'"

In his year of running Breakaway Ferry and Freight in Wrangell, Yancey said he was kept busy hauling cargo and people all over Southeast. Ketchikan and Juneau were some of his most common stops, he said, as well as Petersburg. The farthest he's traveled was out to Hyder, he said, about 200 miles one way.

Cars were the most common cargo he transported, which he said the Islander is equipped to carry six to eight at a time. Small boats on trailers were also normal to ship around. While his boat could carry as many as 28 people at a time, Yancey said the most he normally saw on the Islander was about 10 at once. That was fine by him, he said, as it made keeping everyone COVID-safe easier.

Yancey purchased the 65-foot-long landing craft after the North End Ferry Authority failed in its attempt to operate scheduled service be-

tween Coffman Cove, Wrangell and Petersburg. The ferry service stopped in 2016, not even a year old.

The boat spent several years in Wrangell's boat yard, where it went in 2016 to repair a crack in its hull.

The Islander was really busy when the Alaska Marine Highway System was not serving Wrangell due to breakdowns in the fleet, Yancey said. Now that ferry service has returned to some level of normalcy, things have slowed down a bit for him.

"I definitely noticed as soon as the ferries started running, it was definitely fewer calls," he said.

Separate from the Islander, Yancey sold Breakaway Adventures to one of his employees, Spenser Stavee, about two weeks ago. Under Yancey, Breakaway Adventures operated with four charter boats, according to its website, but Yancey said Stavee only purchased one boat with the company.

The Islander is for sale, and Yancey said he has spoken with some people interested in buying it, but for now he still runs it.



The Rainforest Islander is docked in Wrangell and is for sale — the next step in its life from Haines to Coffman Cove to Wrangell. Eric Yancey purchased the Islander a little over a year ago, running a freight business alongside his charter company.

Photo by Caleb Vierkant / Wrangell Sentinel



Eric Yancey discusses his plans for retirement while pulling Breakaway Adventure's Freedom Chaser out of its slip.

Photo by Caleb Vierkant / Wrangell Sentinel

"I've been working seven days a week, literally, for 20 years, pretty much year-round," Yancey said. "I had bypass surgery here this last December, and just kind of went you know what? I have just had it. ... I love being on a boat, talking to people, and providing a service — whether a sightseeing service or moving their vehicles and stuff — but I just kind of go, 'You know what? It's just time for me to try and chill a little bit.'"