Vita Expands into Michigan with Electric Rib Purchase by Freshwater Research & Innovation Center

September 22, 2026 – Vita Power has expanded into Michigan with the delivery of an all-electric Vita Seal rigid inflatable boat (RIB) procured by the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center in Traverse City. The Seal will be the Center's research and training vessel, operating from Discovery Pier on West Grand Traverse Bay, where the Center is now under construction. The 24-foot Seal is the electric research vessel named in the state-supported BlueTech Startup Studio and Electric Research Vessel project announced in July.

The vessel arrived at Discovery Pier Marina in September and is now operating from the dock, where it charges on an Aqua superPower DC fast charger installed at the marina. It is Vita's first delivery in Michigan and adds to the electric workboats the company has in service with ports, municipal harbor authorities, research organizations and sailing clubs elsewhere in the United States and globally.

A Shared Platform for the Great Lakes

The Freshwater Research & Innovation Center is a partnership of Discovery Pier, Northwestern Michigan College, Michigan Technological University, 20Fathoms and Traverse Connect. Its first phase, a 35,000-square-foot building with research, laboratory, classroom and business-incubation space, is under construction on the Discovery Pier campus with completion expected in 2027. The Center is designed to give students, researchers and startups direct access to Lake Michigan, with working dock space and research vessels alongside the labs.

The Seal will be the Center's on-water platform for hands-on workforce training, freshwater research and the testing and demonstration of new BlueTech technologies in real Great Lakes conditions. It will be paired with an Outland Technology ROV 3000 remotely operated vehicle acquired under the same project, so the Center can carry out inspection, sampling and sensor work both on and below the surface.

"The addition of the Vita Power Seal is an important step in bringing the vision for the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center to life. This vessel will be much more than a way to get out on the water – it will be a shared platform for

hands-on workforce training, research, and the testing and demonstration of new BlueTech technologies in real-world Great Lakes conditions. Combined with the other capabilities we are building at the Center, it will help connect students, researchers, entrepreneurs, and companies and accelerate the development and deployment of technologies that benefit our Great Lakes and Michigan's growing blue economy," said Matt McDonough, CEO of Discovery Pier, which hosts the Center on its West Grand Traverse Bay campus.

An Open-Deck Platform for Research and Dive Operations

The Seal's open-deck layout gives researchers and dive teams a clear working platform. A center console leaves space fore and aft for sampling gear, dive equipment and ROV launch and recovery, and the inflatable collar provides a stable, low-freeboard edge for divers entering and leaving the water and for handling instruments over the side. Its 160hp peak electric propulsion gives instant, controllable torque for holding station and close-quarters maneuvering around moorings, buoys and dive sites.

The boat is also light on the water it works in. With no exhaust, no fuel or oil to spill and almost no noise, it can operate in sensitive habitats and close to wildlife without disturbing them, and it will not contaminate water samples or interfere with acoustic and water-quality instruments.

"Michigan is a natural next step for Vita in the US. The Great Lakes combine a serious freshwater research community with real state support for maritime innovation, and the work a research vessel does, mostly at low speed close to shore, holding position, launching an ROV or running sensors, is where a quiet, fume-free boat with instant torque and a full charge every morning makes a real difference. We are proud to see this Seal putting students, researchers and entrepreneurs on the water in Traverse City, and we look forward to supporting the Center and other Great Lakes operators from here," said Scott Canning, VP Business Development

Supported by Michigan's Maritime Innovation Grant Program

The Center procured the Seal under the BlueTech Startup Studio and Electric Research Vessel project, one of five projects selected in July 2026 by the Michigan Office of Future Mobility and Electrification through the Michigan Mobility Funding Platform's Michigan Maritime Innovation Grant Program. The

program committed $1.5 million in state funding, leveraging a further $2 million in private investment, to projects that strengthen the state's maritime economy. The Traverse City project pairs the electric research vessel and ROV with a dedicated BlueTech Startup Studio to support maritime technology companies locatingresearch, development and operations in Michigan.

"These projects demonstrate how emerging technologies, entrepreneurs and public-private partnerships can strengthen our maritime economy while accelerating real-world innovation," said Justine Johnson, Chief Mobility Officer for the State of Michigan (announcement)

Dockside Fast Charging

The Seal is supported by Aqua superPower's existing DC fast-charging network in northern Michigan. With locations at Discovery Pier, Northport, and Elk Rapids.

For media enquiries, write to press@vita-power.com