



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

MSC • NOAA • ARMY COE • MARAD

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## MSC Rear Adm. Mewbourne Releases 2017-2020 Voyage Plan

As part of the Military Sealift Command's planning strategy, the agency's new commander, Rear Admiral Dee Mewbourne, has released a Voyage Plan setting out MSC's strategic vision for 2017-2020. The document contains five sections: Mission, Vision, Pillars, Strategic Themes and Guiding Principles.

In a recent interview, Mewbourne was asked about the document and its focus and emphasis on the people who work for MSC.

Here is the Admiral's response: "This was absolutely intentional. MSC is committed to our workforce. When my MSC teammates read our Voyage Plan, I want them to see how much they are valued. At the end of the day, MSC is a people organization. We do a great job of recruiting professional talent, and we need to continue bringing in the best and the brightest. We do a good job of training our people. But we need to keep pushing the envelope to improve in this area, too.

"We need to make sure our people are taken care of," he continued. "We

must make sure our people are able to develop to their fullest potential. From the most senior to the most junior, MSC is dedicated to the success of our people."

The SIU looks forward to working with Adm. Mewbourne and the MSC team to help ensure these principles remain at the forefront of the agency's goals. With the consolidation of MSC from the Washington Navy Yard down to Norfolk, Virginia, MSC has lost many seasoned, career professionals who understood the history and background of important policies impacting federal mariners.

The entire interview can be read at: <http://www.msc.navy.mil/publications/MSCVoyagePlan.pdf>

The SIU wants to hear from you. Your suggestions and concerns are vital. Change comes about most effectively when mariners speak up and share information about what is working in the fleet and what needs improvement.

Send your comments, questions and suggestions to: [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)

### NOAA Ship Bigelow Completes Survey



The Seafarers-crewed *Henry B. Bigelow* returns to its Newport, Rhode Island homeport on Nov. 10 after completing the North Atlantic autumn bottom trawl survey three days ahead of schedule. The ship conducted trawl samples at 376 separate stations ranging from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, to Nova Scotia, Canada. Federal and state managers use data from the North Atlantic bottom trawl survey to set regulations based on measured abundance, distribution, size and age composition of fish stocks of economically and ecologically important fish species. (Photo by David Chevrier / Northeast Fisheries Science Center)

## Know Your Benefits and How to Secure Them

### Key Info Offered for Effective Retirement Planning

Over the years, the SIU *Federal Mariner* has published a number of pieces about retirement issues and related topics to help protect your retirement benefits. Regardless of when you plan to retire, it's important to prepare carefully before submitting your application. To best protect yourself, continue reading.

#### Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Backlog in Retirement Application Processing

For a long while now, OPM has been unable to keep up with the number of retirement applications federal employees submit each year. In October 2016 OPM reported that only 58 percent of retirement applications were processed in 60 or fewer days. For those applications which take longer than 60 days to process the average number of days to complete a retirement application is 91. Following are some steps you can take to help ensure that your retirement application process goes as smoothly as possible.

#### Your Application Must Follow OPM Submission Guidelines

In mid-November 2016, OPM issued a letter stating that the agency – effective immediately – is "no longer accepting corrections on certain benefits election forms."

The message from Kenneth J. Zawodny Jr., associate director retirement services, read in part, "A number of retirement packages have been received by the Office of Personnel Management that contain corrections on certain benefits election forms. In some cases it is impossible to tell if these corrections are valid. Effective immediately, we will not accept corrections (scratch-outs, white-outs, line-outs, or any other type of correction actions) in the named sections on the following forms. New forms must be completed in lieu of any alterations to previously entered information."

The list is as follows, according to the letter:

#### Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) Forms

CSRS Immediate Retirement Application, SF 2801: Section F- Annuity Election

CSRS Immediate Retirement Application, SF 2801-2: Spouse's Consent to Survivor Election

CSRS Deferred Application OPM Form 1496A: Section C- Annuity Election

CSRS Deferred Application OPM Form 1496A: Schedule A- Election of Former Spouse Survivor Annuity or Combination Current/Former Spouse Annuity

CSRS Deferred Application OPM Form 1496A: Schedule B-Spouse's Consent to Survivor Election

Designation of Beneficiary SF 2808 (CSRS) Sections B and C

#### Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) Forms

FERS Immediate Retirement Application, SF 3107: Section D- Annuity Election;

FERS Immediate Retirement Application, SF 3107-2: Spouse's Consent to Survivor Election

Application for Deferred/Postponed Retirement FERS, RI 92-19: Section F-Annuity Election

Application for Deferred/Postponed Retirement FERS, RI 92-19: Schedule A-Spouse's Consent to Survivor Election

Designation of Beneficiary SF 3102 (FERS): Sections B and C

**Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Forms**  
Continuation of Life Insurance Coverage (SF 2818): Items 7-14

Designation of Beneficiary for FEGLI (SF 2823): Sections B, C, and D

The letter concluded, "If you send in any of the above forms with corrections, OPM will contact you or the retiree for a completed form containing no correction. The information in BAL 12-102 'Acceptance of Photocopies of Signed Documents in Retirement Application Packages and other Agency Submissions' remains OPM's current guidance regarding photocopies and scans...."

#### Additional Tips to Consider

The most important thing you can do when thinking about your retirement choices is research. The federal retirement system is confusing and complicated. Speak with a financial planner who is very knowledgeable about the federal retirement system and who can provide you with the correct information. Ask your agency retirement representatives to help with your questions. If your agency offers a retirement seminar take advantage of that learning opportunity. For SIU members, you may also seek information from your union representative.

It's important to get the most detailed estimate possible of what your monthly income will be, and also to be sure about the date upon which you will receive your full retirement benefit. OPM ([www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)) advises that interim payments, which amount to a portion of the employee's final monthly payment, may start when OPM receives all records for the retiring employee. This is generally paid on the first day of the month. OPM notes it will try to provide you with income until the application process is completed. This is why it is very important to make sure you have budgeted enough savings to meet your expenses while you wait for your full benefit to be paid each month.

### SUISUN Reserve Fleet Note

Over the past several months, SUISUN Bay Reserve Fleet representatives in California and Washington, D.C., have been working with SIU Assistant Vice President Chet Wheeler and SIU Headquarters staff in Camp Springs, Maryland, to update the Reserve Fleet collective bargaining agreement and negotiate over a drug testing policy. Meetings will be conducted for SIU bargaining unit members in the near future to provide updates and answer questions.



## President's Column

### We Are One Crew

Election Day hadn't even ended when the SIU began working to promote the importance of government seafaring work and the U.S. Merchant Mariner in the next congress. Whether it's an election year or not, the SIU's representation on behalf of federal mariners before the House and Senate never stop.

SIU-backed candidates in the House and Senate fared very well on November 8, as reported elsewhere in this edition. The results reaffirmed what we already knew: Our union's bipartisan approach is the way to go.



Michael Sacco

Although the SIU-supported candidate didn't win the White House, we are more than ready and willing to work with the next administration when it comes to promoting a strong American-flag maritime industry as well as workers' rights. That would have been true no matter who won.

I can't think of another industry that's more in line with boosting American jobs and security than ours. Federal mariners and seafarers promote national, economic and homeland security. Whether those are seagoing jobs or jobs protecting the Reserve fleet, America needs to keep these jobs or we'll be at significant risk. That's why the SIU supports a wide range of laws, including the Maritime Security Program and cargo preference (to cite just two examples), each of which provides support for a strong maritime industry.

Whether or not the next administration's policies back our industry remains to be seen, but we will do everything possible to maintain and revitalize our merchant marine and the mariners who work in these jobs. Our policy has always been that we support those who support maritime, regardless of party affiliation.

One last word on the elections: I know that most if not all presidential contests bring out emotions, but this election cycle seemed extreme. As I'm writing this column, there are protests across the country, and I'm told the viciousness on social media has only gotten worse.

For the SIU, it's time to unite and move forward as Americans and as the union family we've always been. Our job is to maintain, promote and protect, the federal vessel fleet at NOAA, ACOE, MSC and SUISUN Bay, to support, workers' rights and the overall U.S. Merchant Marine, no matter who's in the House, the Senate, or the White House.

We've already rolled up our sleeves and gotten to work, and that's where our focus will remain. The elections are over. Let's stick together and stand up for an industry that our great country simply cannot do without.

### Happy Holidays

Whatever your plans for the holidays, I wish every active and retired federal mariner and your families the best of everything. If you're sailing, thank you for your dedication, and I hope you can enjoy the holidays with your SIU brothers and sisters. If you're on the beach, may you enjoy good times with family and friends. No matter what, please be safe.

At this time of year in particular, I also always think of our women and men wearing the uniforms of our armed services. I thank all of you for your service and pray for your safe returns.

### SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, President

Augustin Tellez, Executive Vice President

David Heindel, Secretary-Treasurer

George Tricker, Vice President Contracts

Kermett Mangram,  
Vice President Government Services

Chester Wheeler,  
Asst. Vice President Government Services

## Inquiring Mariner

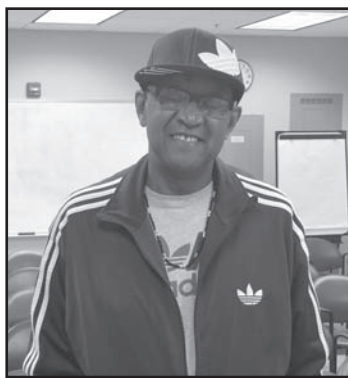
This quarter's question was answered by SIU Government Services Division members on both the east and west coasts

**Question: What was one of your favorite ships and what made it so?**



James Gibbs  
Bosun

Mine was the *Kilauea*, an ammunition ship. The reasons are the ship's mission and the places and ports I got to visit.



Jerry Wilson  
Assistant Cook

My favorite ship was the *USNS Alan Shepard*. I had a wonderful chief cook that trained me and fine-tuned my skills. I was part of the first crew to go aboard when it left the shipyard.



Kathleen Kilman  
Supply Utility

The *Ponce*. I liked it because that's where I became a shellback by crossing the Equator. It was an awesome experience.



Shatonn Fowler  
AB

It was the *USNS Supply* and it was because we had a good crew that was willing to teach you whatever you needed to learn to do your job better.



Laura Thomas  
Yeoman Storekeeper

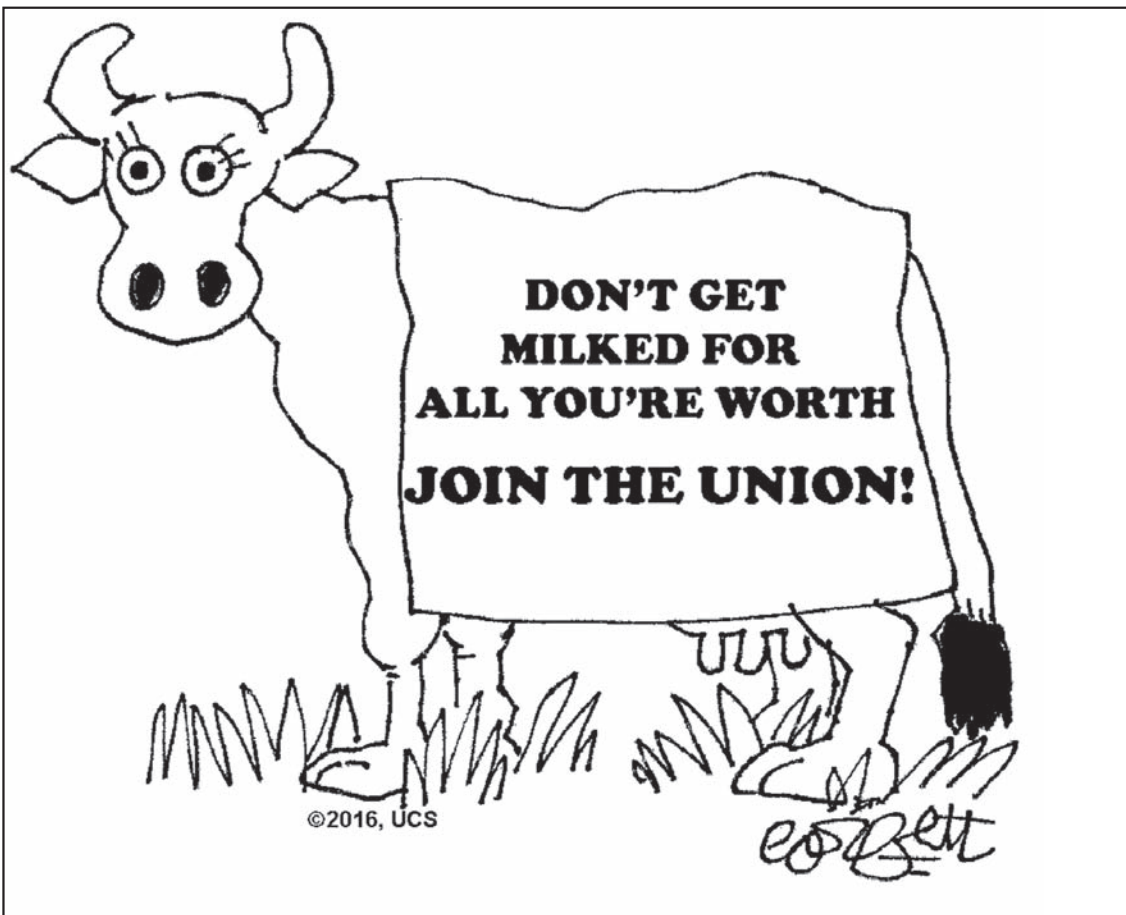
My favorite was the *USNS Chambers*. It was just a good ship with good people including a great supply officer, and that ship hit nice ports.

## NOAA Note: Shore Leave Agreement Approved

In the July-September 2016 Federal Mariner (page 1) we reported that the SIU had completed negotiations on shore leave entitlements on behalf of federal mariners sailing in the NOAA fleet. At the time, SIU was waiting to hear if the MOU reached in those meetings would receive the agency head approval required by federal law. The MOU has received the required approval and will be implemented in January 2017.

There are numerous benefits to the NOAA wage mariners as a result of the SIU's advocacy. Most importantly, shore leave will be

accrued consistently for all mariners. The collective bargaining agreement language is now much clearer, with (hopefully) fewer disputes and questions as a result. Communication with NOAA representatives has improved, so it is anticipated that any problems which may arise under the new agreement will be resolved quickly. Questions about the applicability and interpretation of the new agreement may be sent to SIU Government Services Representatives Kate Hunt at [khunt@seafarers.org](mailto:khunt@seafarers.org) or Sam Spain at [sspain@seafarers.org](mailto:sspain@seafarers.org).





# SIU-Backed House and Senate Candidates Fare Well on Election Day; Labor Federation Pres. Vows to Push Forward for Working Families

Seafarers-backed candidates in the House and Senate fared well on Nov. 8. This election is especially important for federal mariners. If the incoming presidential administration carries out the policy changes discussed during the election campaign, federal employee rights may be negatively impacted. Having labor-friendly House and Senate representatives will be important.

After the election, SIU Political and Legislative Director Brian Schoeneman noted, “Most attention will be focused on the presidential election, but for the SIU, this election was largely a confirmation that our bipartisan way of doing business is the best path forward. Our willingness to support elected officials and candidates from both sides of the aisle who are committed to protecting and defending the United States Merchant Marine resulted an overall 90 percent win rate for our bipartisan roster of SIU-supported candidates.”

In the House, 98 of the 106 SIU-backed candidates won their respective races. On the Senate side, of the 17 races where the SIU provided support, 13 of the candidates won and four lost.

He added, “This election, as most do, demonstrates that the SIU continues to make a difference for candidates running for office.”

The afternoon following Election Day, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka stated, “Donald Trump has been elected president. America is a democratic nation, and the voters have spoken. The AFL-CIO (the largest federation of unions in the United States) accepts the outcome of this election, and offers our congratulations to President-Elect Trump.”

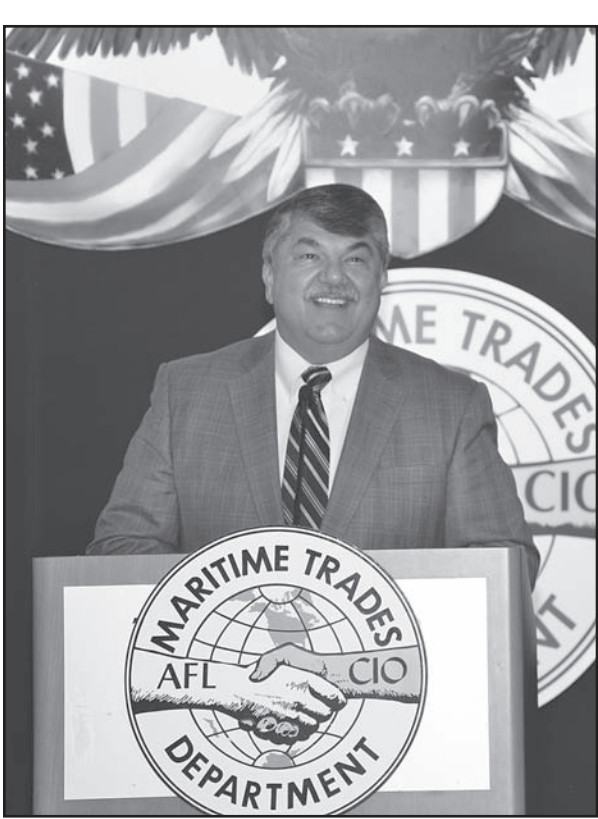
Trumka also pointed out, “The president-elect made promises in this campaign – on trade, on restoring manufacturing, on reviving our communities. We will work to make many of those promises a reality. If he is willing

to work with us, consistent with our values, we are ready to work with him. But make no mistake, we can never back down from our values. The presence of racism, misogyny, and anti-immigrant appeals caused damage in this campaign and we must all try to repair it with inclusion, decency and honesty.”

He concluded, “As we move forward, the labor movement is committed to defending our American democracy. Ultimately, the fundamental duty of America’s president, symbolized by swearing to uphold our Constitution, is to protect and preserve our democracy and the institutions that make it real. We hope to work with President-Elect Trump to help him carry out this solemn responsibility. Regardless, America’s labor movement will protect our democracy and safeguard the most vulnerable among us. This election is a statement about our broken economic and political rules. Therefore, the work of the labor movement continues with fresh urgency. The change voters cried out for in this campaign can be found by standing together in unions. The election is over. But we are more committed than ever to helping working people win a voice on the job and in our democracy. We will never stop striving to represent everyone, fighting for basic human dignity, expanding our diversity and growing our ranks to give working people a strong, united voice.”

As a result of the work of unions and other organizations advocating for the rights of working people, four states voted to increase their respective minimum wages, delivering the promise of a pay raise to more than two million workers in Arizona, Colorado, Maine and Washington State. The measures in Arizona and Washington require employers to offer workers paid sick days.

Additionally, voters in Virginia rejected a proposed amendment that would have added a so-called “right-



AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

to-work” law to the state constitution. These laws make it difficult, if not impossible for workers to get strong union representation and protection in their work places.

## How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy. The union’s website – [www.seafarers.org](http://www.seafarers.org) – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at:

[www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp](http://www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp)

Forms are also available under “union forms” in the SIU membership tab.

### Contact Information

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Email: [sspain@seafarers.org](mailto:sspain@seafarers.org)

## CIVMAR Note: SIU Advocates for CIVMARS Impacted by DFAS/MSC Overpayment Error

Earlier this fall, the SIU learned that more than 300 MSC mariners were negatively impacted as a result of an overpayment error by DFAS/MSC. DFAS required repayment of the errors, and CIVMARS were notified that they could face automatic deduction from wages – creating potential problems for the CIVMAR’S ability to meet other automatically deducted bills.

Some CIVMARS were notified late and had difficulty with the extensive paperwork which needed to be signed and returned to DFAS in a matter of weeks. Instructions provided were unclear and were not getting to the impacted CIVMARS in all cases. CIVMARS contacted the SIU requesting assistance; the SIU immediately contacted MSC representatives.

The union negotiated a revised fleet-wide notice. Because there was an undue delay in the re-issuance of this notice, the SIU also notified CIVMARS to ensure they had the correct email addresses and phone numbers of the appropriate MSC staff with direct interface with DFAS. The goal was to ensure the amounts deducted were accurate and the errors were completely addressed.

The SIU continues to assist individual mariners who are impacted by this error. If you are still experiencing problems, contact [siufedmariner@seafarers.org](mailto:siufedmariner@seafarers.org)



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# El Faro Memorial Dedicated at SIU Hall in Jacksonville

*Editor's note: During SIU election years, the union normally refrains from publishing photos of anyone who is on the ballot. An exception is being made this quarter for the El Faro anniversary coverage, due to the important nature of the content and our desire to help ensure its historical accuracy.*

SIU President Michael Sacco opened his speech at the at the SIU hall in Jacksonville, Florida, on Oct. 1 with a reminder: "One year ago, I promised that we will never forget the men and women of the El Faro's final crew. Today, both here and in Piney Point, Maryland, the SIU is living up to that solemn pledge."

In early October 2015, the maritime community, in both the private and government fleets, was rocked with the loss of the 33 crew members of the roll-on/roll-off containership El Faro, operated by Tote Maritime. The vessel, crewed in all unlicensed positions by SIU members, sank near the Bahamas on Oct. 1, 2015 during Hurricane Joaquin.

One year later, many of the families and friends of those lost gathered at the SIU Jacksonville hall for a time of remembrance, as well as the dedication of a memorial lighthouse built on the property. The lighthouse, adorned with 33 stars, serves as a daily reminder of the 17 SIU members, 11 members of the Seafarers-affiliated American Maritime Officers (AMO) and five Polish nationals who perished on that fateful voyage.

President Sacco also told those gathered: "This monument here in Jacksonville is a fitting tribute to the 33 individuals who were lost in the hurricane one year ago. It's a reminder of the bravery it takes to go to sea under any circumstances. And it's a permanent fixture that honors the SIU members, AMO members and Polish riding-gang members who last set sail from this port and left us last year."

The ceremony began with an emotional address from Capt. Jeffrey Dixon, commanding officer of Coast Guard Sector Jacksonville, who offered his heartfelt condolences as well as advice on coping with the loss. Dixon told the crowd of roughly 300 attendees, "It does get better.... You just have to take one step. And then another. Take one day at a time, and it gets a little easier."

He made it clear that his speech was not being made on behalf of the Coast Guard, but that his remarks were meant as a personal conveyance of sympathy to the families gathered outside the hall. He described having to relay the news that the Coast Guard was suspending their search as one of the hardest things he's ever had to do.

He was followed by speakers who offered sentiments of support and perseverance, including SIU Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel, Vice President Government Services Kermet Mangram, Vice President Gulf Coast Dean Corgey, Assistant Vice President Archie Ware, AMO President Paul Doell, and a representative from the Office of Senator Bill Nelson (D-Florida.)

In addition to the lighthouse, several other memorials have been added to the union hall, including a brick display that includes the names of all 17 SIU members who served aboard the El Faro, as well as many gifts donated by members.



Above, from left, VP Atlantic Coast Joseph Soresi, VP Great Lakes and Inland Waters Tom Orzechowski, Executive VP Augie Tellez and Port Agent Pat Vandegrift start the ceremony in Piney Point. Below, members gather for a moment of silence at the hall in Puerto Rico.



From left to right: SIU VP Gulf Coast Dean Corgey, Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel and President Michael Sacco greet USCG Capt. Jeffery Dixon.

During his remarks, Ware informed all those in attendance that, even in the face of such personal tragedy, relatives of El Faro crew members James Porter and Frank Hamm will soon depart Florida and attend the SIU-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education as part of the apprentice program. Additionally, members of Jackie Jones, Jr.'s family are currently sailing as C-book SIU mariners, continuing a legacy of service under the U.S flag.

Following the remarks, President Sacco was presented with a memorial plaque created by Bob Hunt, a retired Jacksonville local who followed the story and became deeply involved. Hunt attended every National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) hearing on the sinking, and decided to donate the plaque a token of his empathy for the families. Members of each family in attendance also received mementos of the anniversary, in both a public presentation and a private memorial inside the union hall.

After the event at the union hall, invited guests attended a separate memorial dedication hosted by Tote at nearby Dames Point. The waterfront park located there was renamed the El Faro Memorial Park, marked by another lighthouse statue, the beam of which points southeast toward Puerto Rico. Eventually, a similar lighthouse will be installed in Puerto Rico, with its beam pointed toward Jacksonville.

The park includes a memorial walk, which will be decorated with personalized nameplates from each of the families. The path itself is aligned with the nautical route between Jacksonville and San Juan, the intended destination of the El Faro.

Many SIU members at sea on Oct. 1 also conducted memorial ceremonies, while moments of silence were observed at all SIU halls at 11 a.m. local time.

The SIU also conducted a brief ceremony in Piney Point, at the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Education and Training, where a formal dedication had taken place earlier in the year. The previous ceremony involved memorial bricks, a plaque and a bell inscribed with the ship's name that is affixed to a miniature lighthouse. During the recent ceremony at the school, remarks were offered by SIU Executive Vice President Augie Tellez and Vice President Great Lakes Tom Orzechowski. Vice President Atlantic Coast Joseph Soresi read the "Seamen's Prayer," and Port Agent Pat Vandegrift read the 33 names as Apprentice William Cannon rang the bell.

A lifelong Seafarer who grew up in an SIU family, Tellez noted that the El Faro was the fourth Seafarers-crewed vessel lost that he has personally been involved with, one way or another.

"These are things that happen," he said. "These are the perils of the sea.... It doesn't happen often, but it does happen. We should be aware of it but we shouldn't be afraid of it."

He described the El Faro's sinking as "one of those situations when everything converged to make a bad



The SIU dedicated a memorial lighthouse (above) at the hall in Jacksonville, Florida (home port for many of the crew and also the last point of departure for the ship).

thing happen to good people." In addition to remembering the El Faro crew, he asked that everyone at the gathering also keep in mind all mariners whose lives have been lost at sea dating back to the union's earliest years.

The NTSB's investigation into the contributing factors of the loss is ongoing. The vessel's voyage data recorder (VDR) was recovered, and the data is in the process of being analyzed. Once the final audio transcript has been prepared, the NTSB will schedule a final Marine Board of Investigation hearing.