



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

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## SIU Celebrates National Maritime Day in Nation's Capital

The SIU made a typically strong showing for this year's National Maritime Day observance in the nation's capital. Union officials and an enthusiastic group of apprentices from the SIU-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education – two of whom played key roles in the ceremony – were on hand at Department of Transportation (DOT) headquarters for the annual gathering May 22.

The SIU contingent included President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez, Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel, Vice President Contracts George Tricker, Vice President Great Lakes Tom Orzechowski and Port Agent Victor Nunez. Paul Hall Center Apprentice **Shannon Gail Peterson** served as the official wreath-tender while fellow Apprentice **Charles Patchin** sounded eight bells, consistent with tradition.

Hosted by the DOT's Maritime Administration, the ceremony drew hundreds of people from all segments of the industry. This year's theme was "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community."

Speakers were (in order) Deputy Maritime Administrator Richard Balzano (master of ceremonies); Rear Adm. Margaret Kibben, USN (Ret), who also gave the invocation; Maritime Administrator Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, USN (Ret); Gen. Stephen Lyons, USA, commander of the U.S. Transportation Command; Rear Adm. Timothy Gallaudet, Ph.D., USN (Ret), assistance sec-



From left: SIU President Michael Sacco, Exec. VP Augie Tellez, VP Great Lakes Tom Orzechowski and Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

retary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and deputy NOAA administrator; Jennifer Boykin (keynote), president, Newport News Shipbuilding; and The Hon. Jennifer Gonzalez Colon, commissioner, Puerto Rico.

Awards were presented to: Capt. Arthur R. Murray Jr. for his service as a merchant mariner during World War II; Andrew Bouchot of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, who saved the life of a stowaway while training at sea; and Catherine Morrison, a real-life "Rosie the Riveter" who worked as a welder during World War II. The administration also showed a video highlighting the historic role women have played in various components of the American maritime industry.

The speakers covered an array of maritime topics. In addition to remarks consistent with this year's theme, many also reinforced the ongoing, indispensable role of the U.S. Merchant Marine as America's fourth arm of defense. Several recognized the Paul Hall Center apprentices and thanked them for attending.

Buzby stated, "As we celebrate our industry today, I salute all the women from the maritime industry, afloat and ashore, who continue to make a difference.... Maritime Day celebrates our indispensable industry and commemorates a historic yet largely forgotten technological achievement: the first trans-Atlantic crossing of a ship under steam power, the *SS Savannah*. Its voyage from Savannah, Georgia, to Liverpool, England, that took place began on May 22, 1819, and marked the passing of the era of sail power and the coming of the first industrial age, which would transform

the speed of commerce and the entire nature of naval warfare. That's part of why Maritime Day is so important. It's a time to honor those who served, too many of whom gave their lives as patriotic merchant mariners."

He said the day offers a chance "to pause to remind ourselves of just how critical maritime issues are to the security and prosperity of this island nation of ours – something that's generally out of the public's focus. It's also up to us to ensure that there is always a new generation of American mariners prepared to relieve the watch."

"Two centuries on from the historic cruise of the *Savannah*, America's strength still rises and falls with the health of the maritime community," Buzby concluded. "We will need it to meet the challenges ahead, and I have great confidence in the future because of the people here today."

Lyons opened his speech by "recognizing the hard-working men and women of the United States Merchant Marine and the maritime industry that have made and continue to make significant economic and national security contributions to the United States of America in peace time and war."

He recalled the crucial service of World War II mariners specifically and the U.S. Merchant Marine in general through the centuries, which he said "has made significant contributions to our nation's survival."

Lyons noted that upwards of 9,000 civilian U.S. seamen died in World War II (including more than 1,200 SIU members), either during the formal hostilities or afterward as a result of injuries sustained.

"Fast forward to today," he stated. "The DOD and TRANSCOM continue to depend on U.S.-flag merchant ships, their incredible trade networks, and our incredible mariners – exceptional mariners who sail. These ships that carry important exports in peace time rapidly transition to a Navy auxiliary in war time, delivering the vast majority of supplies and equipment to protect and sustain our military forces globally."

He described the merchant marine as "an essential part of our DOD war plan. This is why I remain a strong advocate of Administrator Buzby and MARAD's selfless work to preserve emergency preparedness programs like VISA, and incentive programs like the Maritime Security Program. It's vitally important to the United States of America to retain the viability of a fleet of ships that sail underneath the U.S. flag. This fleet provides assured access to the United States Transportation Command and the Department of Defense, and these programs and the work that MARAD does are critical to our national security."

He concluded, "To all the merchant mariners around the globe, thank you for your patriotism, for your support, and your unwavering commitment to defend our great nation. Together, we deliver."

### President Trump Issues Proclamation for National Maritime Day 2019

*On National Maritime Day, we honor the men and women who, throughout our history, have served with professionalism, dedication, and patriotism in the United States Merchant Marine. We recognize these seafaring merchant mariners for helping to fuel our economy, maintain our sea power, and support our national security.*

*Merchant mariners extend goodwill into all parts of the world, serving as a peaceful United States presence on international waterways. Today, American mariners facilitate the import and export of billions of dollars of goods, including fuel, agricultural products, and raw materials through the Marine Transportation System. They are also among the first to respond to help their fellow citizens in the wake of national disasters.*

*During times of war, merchant mariners courageously sail into combat zones to provide sealift for the Department of Defense, carrying weapons and supplies to America's fighting forces. In every conflict, United States citizen mariners have answered the call to duty and risked their lives. Some have sadly made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.*

*Because the United States Merchant Marine plays a central role in bringing American goods to market and in bolstering our military readiness abroad, we must encourage more people to pursue career opportunities on America's waterways and the oceans of the world. For this reason, I recently signed an Executive Order to help veterans of the Armed Forces transition seamlessly into civilian careers in the United States Merchant Marine by allowing them to apply relevant military training and experience toward becoming credentialed merchant mariners. This will help support a robust, well-equipped, and safe merchant fleet crewed by well-trained mariners.*

*The Congress, by a joint resolution approved May 20, 1933, has designated May 22 of each year as "National Maritime Day" to commemorate the first trans-oceanic voyage by a steamship in 1819 by the S.S. Savannah. By this resolution, the Congress has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation calling for its appropriate observance.*

*NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 22, 2019, as National Maritime Day. I call upon the people of the United States to mark this observance and to display the flag of the United States at their homes and in their communities. I also request that all ships sailing under the American flag dress ship on that day.*

*IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twentieth day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand nineteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-third. -- DONALD J. TRUMP*

### CIVMAR MEETING

Members of the SIU Government Services Division met in mid-May in Norfolk, Virginia, with SIU VP Government Services Kate Hunt (standing fourth from left) and SIU Government Services Representative Sam Spain (standing far left).





## President's Column

### Solidarity Prevails Again

Recently, some 31,000 unionized grocery workers approved a new contract on the heels of an 11-day strike in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The agreement between the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and Stop & Shop's parent company, Netherlands-based Ahold Delhaize, preserves health care and retirement benefits, provides wage increases, and maintains time-and-a-half pay on Sunday for current members, the union reported.



Michael Sacco

Strikes are always an absolute last resort, but in this case, workers had little choice. The company had proposed unreasonable cuts to workers' take-home pay, health care and pension benefits. That's despite management taking in more than \$2 billion in 2018 and authorizing over \$4 billion in stock buybacks from 2017 to 2019, the UFCW noted.

In fact, Ahold Delhaize (which also owns the viciously anti-union Food Lion chain) sought to cut pension benefits by more than 70 percent, raise health care premiums by nearly 90 percent and exclude spouses from health coverage.

But the real story here is the workers' solidarity and the outpouring of community support that buoyed members and their families from the five UFCW locals. Like the unionized teachers who've also stood up and stood together in recent years in numerous states, the grocery workers said enough is enough and proved grassroots action works. They demonstrated that unions very clearly still have power and relevance.

The SIU supported this job action at rallies and with other assistance, and we'll be there for our union brothers and sisters with money, marbles and chalk wherever and whenever needed.

#### Autonomous Vessels

Much has already been written about the possible use of autonomous ships, and several European-based firms currently are testing crewless vessels.

Considering the news we often see about massive, global-scale hacking and data breaches, ransomware and more, hey, what could possibly go wrong on 1,000-foot ships totally controlled by computers? On a more serious note, fatalities in some of the early usage of driverless automobiles are the ultimate signal that caution is in order.

Listen, we've never tried to stand in the way of progress. In our industry, the norm 30 years ago provided crews on container ships and tankers somewhere in the range of 35 to 40 mariners top to bottom. Today, as technology develops into automated systems, crew sizes for vessels three to four times larger are in the 18-22 range.

But automation should be a tool to assist workers in making their jobs safer and more efficient – not a means to replace them.

Very simply, workers and the need for jobs must be part of the discussion regarding automation. As systems and technology evolve, so must workers and their unions. We will identify the new opportunities that present themselves in the years ahead. We'll develop and provide training and education to prepare our members for these new avenues.

The SIU and the labor movement as a whole will make sure people are prominently considered as changes continue affecting everyday life. We'll ensure that new technologies being introduced into our industry are done with safety in the forefront of planning, and we'll stand up for our members and other workers to make sure they reap the benefits of such change and are not cast overboard.

Even though autonomous ships on any sort of significant scale are many, many years away, our bottom line is that the human element must be as important as financial factors and convenience when change is considered and implemented.

### SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, President

Augustin Tellez, Executive Vice President

David Heindel, Secretary-Treasurer

George Tricker, Vice President Contracts

Kate Hunt,

Vice President Government Services

Joe Vincenzo,

Asst. Vice President Government Services

### Honored in 'The Big Apple'

The SIU was well-represented both on the dais and in the audience April 25 in New York City, during the Seafarers International House's 19th annual Setting the Course awards banquet. This year's honorees were (from left) SIU ITF East Coast Coordinator Ricky Esopa; Lois Zabrocky, president and CEO, International Seaways, Inc.; SIU VP Government Services Kate Hunt; and Bill Woodhour, president and CEO of SIU-contracted Maersk Line, Limited. They each received an "Outstanding Friend of Seafarers Award" for helping improve mariners' lives. The SIU was out in force for the event; attendees included President Michael Sacco, Executive VP Augie Tellez, Secretary-Treasurer David Heindel, VP Contracts George Tricker, VP Atlantic Coast Joseph Soresi, Asst. VP Pat Vandegrift, Port Agent Mark von Siegel, Safety Director Osvaldo Ramos, Patrolman Ray Henderson, Patrolman Edwin Ruiz, Seafarers Plans Administrator Margaret Bowen and SIU ITF Inspector Shwe Aung.



## Military Sealift Command Christens CIVMAR-CREWED USNS Guam in Japan

New jobs are on the way for SIU CIVMARS following the recent christening of a high-speed transport vessel.

The U.S. Military Sealift Command (MSC) on April 27 christened the *USNS Guam* during a ceremony at Naha Military Port in Naha, Japan. Speakers included U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Harry B. Harris Jr.; Guam Rep. Michael San Nicholas; Lt. Gen. Eric M. Smith, commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF); Rear Adm. Robert T. Clark, deputy commander of MSC; and Mrs. Bruni Bradley, a 25-year Navy veteran, the ambassador's wife and the vessel's sponsor.

The vessel will carry SIU Government Services Division mariners.

"The Navy has a glorious history of naming ships after heroes, epic battles and key places in the U.S., and this ship is no exception," said Harris, who is also a retired Navy admiral. "Guam is the site of one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific campaign (of World War II).

"Although most of the greatest generation are no longer with us, we can hear their stories of duty, honor and courage," Harris continued. "Their spirits walk among us, and with us, and call out to us.

Today, we've answered their call with an innovative ship, which serves as a reminder of their heroism and a tribute to a beautiful place called Guam, U.S.A."

The ceremony concluded with the traditional breaking of a champagne bottle against the ship's hull.

The aluminum-hull catamaran, 373 feet long, was built in 2008 as a civilian fast ferry boat for the Hawaii Superferry company, capable of carrying more than 800 passengers and nearly 300 cars. It was acquired by the Navy from the Department of Transportation in 2012 and underwent renovations before it became operational in late 2017.

The *USNS Guam's* design allows for the ship to be fast, maneuverable and reconfigurable to fit a variety of military operations. The true value of the vessel, according to Smith, is this flexibility, which he described as "from supporting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; to transporting Marines, Sailors and equipment throughout the Indo-Pacific theater. This ship is vital to us," he said. "It carries the most precious cargo that there is: The Marines and Sailors of the III MEF."

Earlier plans to christen the ship in Guam were thwarted by unforeseen typhoons in the region, which necessitated the venue change to Japan.



Marines walk past the high-speed transport *USNS Guam* after the christening on April 27. (Photo by Grady T. Fontana)



# SIU Asst. VP Wheeler Retires after 55 Years of Service

Anyone familiar with longtime SIU Government Services Division Assistant Vice President Chester “Chet” Wheeler won’t be surprised by the fact he’s staying quite active in retirement.

A tireless worker throughout his decades as a mariner and an official, Wheeler, 74, officially called it a career earlier this year. He’s enjoying the new lifestyle, but if the particulars of a given day have changed, the pace isn’t much different.

“It’s fine and I’m busy,” said Wheeler, who lives with his wife in Cobb, California. “I realize now all the things my wife did without me, and now those are my jobs. I’ve remodeled a house and was already helping out at a senior center, which I’m continuing. I’m service-oriented anyway, but it’s nice to be able to give back. There are some real characters there.”

Wheeler also plans to accommodate his wife’s request for European travel – admittedly not a huge concession from someone who cited travel as the highlight of his 32 years as a mariner.

He cited “family considerations” as the driving force behind his retirement, which officially commenced March 28. Wheeler also said he thoroughly enjoyed both his time at sea and the years spent working as an official.

SIU Vice President West Coast Nick Marrone stated, “Chet had a very steady attitude towards his fairness and diligence in representing his mariners. He definitely was dedicated. He grew up in that fleet and was involved as a delegate under Buck Mercer (the late vice president of the union’s Government Services Division). Chet understood the complexities of the Military Sealift Command (MSC) and was able to navigate effectively through the various processes.”

SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt said, “Chet and I worked well together over the years. I always respected him as a union representative who really had the best interests of the mariners at heart.”

Wheeler came ashore to work for the union in 1997, first as a representative and soon thereafter as an assistant vice president. Prior to the SIU’s merger with the National Maritime Union in 2001, he handled all West Coast representational efforts for MSC and the Suisun Bay reserve fleet. In fact, since 1997, Wheeler was involved in every MSC and Suisun Bay contract negotiation and “instruction and policy” negotiation.

Colleagues described him as instrumental in ensuring the safety and health of mariners by negotiating afloat and ashore habitability agreements, watch hours, standards for shipboard water potability and air quality, and shipyard working conditions. He was a guiding force in the three-year negotiation of Civilian Mariner Personnel Instruction (CMPI) 610, a key document covering hours of work and overtime pay. Wheeler also played leading roles in representing mariners aboard joint high-speed vessels, and in securing significant compensatory time for travel for many CIVMARS.

“Most importantly,” said retired SIU Counsel Deb Kleinberg, who worked very closely with Wheeler, “Chet guided thousands of CIVMARS, wage mariners and Suisun Bay boat handlers, rep-



SIU Asst. VP Chet Wheeler (fourth from left) was most at home with fellow CIVMARS. He’s pictured with rank-and-file members and other SIU officials in 2016 in San Diego, during a Maritime Trades Department meeting.

resenting employees in grievances and disciplinary actions, and assisting employees who were injured or ill. He helped mariners leave their vessel assignments to attend to ill family members. He assisted many employees with the medical exam process, retirement counseling, workers’ compensation advocacy and making sure mariners could return home from afar when sick or injured.”

Never one to worry about popularity, Wheeler definitely earned respect and appreciation both from fellow officials and from rank-and-file members. This was reflected by his having not one but two retirement parties – the first at the Oakland, California, SIU hiring hall in February, the second closer to his home in northern California in late April.

At those gatherings, Wheeler received large binders packed with appreciative messages from people he represented and worked with through the years. Here’s a small sampling of those sentiments:

“Thanks for all the advice, support, wisdom and guidance you so gracefully gave to all the mariners. You will be sorely missed.” – Bill Machie, Second Asst. Engineer

“Thank you for looking out for us, your brother CIVMARS, all these years. You always commanded attention with your booming voice and no-nonsense talks about our rights. Many mariners benefited from your advice.” – Rob Cruz

“I have known you for close to 20 years and have admired your work and indefatigable efforts to make the working conditions, quarters and lives of CIVMARS better. I have seen firsthand how CIVMARS and agency folks alike respected, liked and in some cases, loved you.” – Joe Vincenzo, SIU Asst. VP



Wheeler (left) is pictured with SIU President Michael Sacco in 2008.

“It has been an honor to have worked with you. I have learned so much from you and am grateful for all of your efforts. Your dedication to the Seafarers is unmatched.” – John Madden, SIU Associate Counsel

When presenting the albums, Kleinberg said, “If a person’s career is measured by how many people he has supported and helped during their life’s work, then your career is truly without measure. You were instrumental in helping me and all you have come in contact with, obtain a better understanding and appreciation of the unique working environment of federal mariners. Your extraordinary passion, hard work, persistence and exceptional dedication to seagoing workers and their families inspired me each day to live up to your example. I know for certain that your advocacy and unwavering efforts will never be duplicated.”

Reflecting primarily on his time as an official, Wheeler said, “I’m proud of the representation we gave them. It was a 24/7 job and it’s a complicated unit. Also, issues affecting government services can also affect the private sector.”

Wheeler said Kleinberg was “the best support I could have,” and expressed solid confidence in Vincenzo as his successor.

Moreover, Wheeler said that while he never was pressured to enter the maritime industry, it came naturally. “My grandfather was an indentured servant in the Swedish merchant marine beginning when he was 10 years old,” he noted. “My uncles all went to sea and I grew up around water on the coast. I was surrounded by seamen. But I didn’t have to go to sea; I like it.”

He said his fondest memory of shipboard life is “I got to travel a lot of places. In the old days, when I sailed, it took maybe a week or two weeks to unload. There were lots of adventures.”

His advice for those entering the industry? “Get as much out of it as you can,” Wheeler replied. “It’s an adventure. Make this your adventure. The other thing is, learn everything you can. We have a great school (the union-affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education). Keep going back and keep learning. It’s a wonderful occupation and I’m really glad I did it.”

## How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting you workplace rights. 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:

<https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/civmar-news/>

Forms are also available under “SIU Forms” in the ABOUT tab.

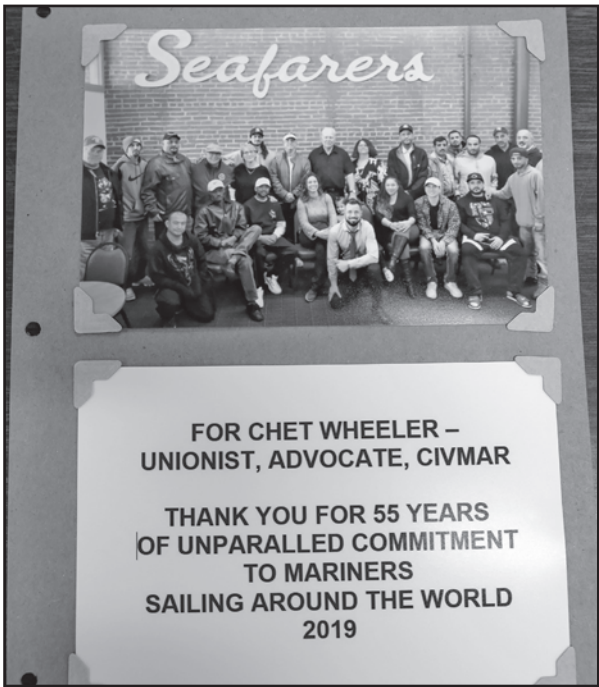
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Cover page of Wheeler’s tribute album





Aboard the *Gordon Gunter* are (from left) Bosun Jerome Taylor, AB Angie Ullman, Fisherman Warren Brown, Junior Engineer Wynzavian Parker and Wiper Ty Ballance.

# With NOAA Crews in Mississippi

Members of the SIU Government Services Division who sail aboard National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) vessels consistently meet the challenge of living up to the agency’s lofty goals.

So said SIU Safety Director/Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain following recent visits to several NOAA vessels in their home port of Pascagoula, Mississippi. SIU Port Agent Jimmy White (based in Mobile, Alabama) also helped service the ships; the meetings included reviews of

a new, five-year agreement covering the crews.

According to the NOAA website, the agency, “enriches life through science. Our reach goes from the surface of the sun to the depths of the ocean floor as we work to keep the public informed of the changing environment around them. From daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, and climate monitoring to fisheries management, coastal restoration and supporting marine commerce, NOAA’s products and services support economic vitality and affect more than

one-third of America’s gross domestic product. NOAA’s dedicated scientists use cutting-edge research and high-tech instrumentation to provide citizens, planners, emergency managers and other decision makers with reliable information they need when they need it.”

SIU NOAA crews do their part, said Spain, who cited three of the vessels serviced in Pascagoula. Mariners from the *Oregon II* (one of the vessels serviced in Pascagoula) assist in operations related to conducting various fisheries, plankton and marine mammal surveys in the Gulf

of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Crews from the *Gordon Gunter*, operating in those same areas, help monitor the “health and abundance of fisheries resources and marine mammals,” according to the agency. And, NOAA crews also ably operate the *Pisces*, described by the agency as a “state-of-the-art, acoustically quiet fisheries survey vessel ... built for a wide range of living marine resource surveys and ecosystem projects. The ship focuses primarily on U.S. waters from the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and South Atlantic to North Carolina.”



Aboard the *Pisces* (standing, from left in photo above) are Fisherman Christopher Rowly, Second Cook Dana Reid, GVA Austin Patti, (seated) GVA Michael Fountain, Junior Engineer Travis Martin, Chief Bosun James Walker and Charles Knott. In photo below, the *Pisces* is shown dockside in Pascagoula, Mississippi.



The *Oregon II* (photo above) is pictured at sunset (NOAA photo). Pictured aboard the vessel in photo below are (back row, from left) SIU Safety Director/Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain, Skilled Fisherman Charles Godwin, AB John Kent, Junior Engineer James McDade, (front) Wiper O.C. Hill, Lead Fisherman Chris Nichols and Fisherman Christopher Rawley.

