



# THE FEDERAL MARINER

MSC • NOAA • ARMY COE • MARAD

Volume 14 • ISSUE 1  
January - March 2023



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION'S GOVERNMENT SERVICES DIVISION

## Longtime SIU President Michael Sacco Retires

Michael Sacco, the longest-serving president in Seafarers International Union history, has retired.

"I am in good health and good spirits," he stated. "But I have often heard that you simply know when it's time to retire, and this is the time."

Sacco, 86, formalized his plan Feb. 13 during a meeting of the SIU Executive Board near Orlando, Florida.

AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said, "Mike Sacco's distinguished career in trade unionism is an inspiration to all of us. Mike's leadership at the Seafarers International Union benefited generations of merchant mariners and all working people. Mike led his union with integrity and a fighting spirit that he learned as a rank-and-file member. It's been an honor to have him serve on the AFL-CIO Executive Council for more than three decades, always quick to offer sage advice and guidance about the future of our movement. We wish Mike nothing but the best in retirement and know he'll always be ready to take up any fight that boosts working people."

SIU President David Heindel – unanimously approved to that post by the union's executive board – described Sacco as "an inspiration to members and officials alike. Under Mike's leadership, the SIU has become a respected powerhouse in maritime circles around the globe. We've been together since I was a trainee back in the early 1970s, and I know Mike has dedicated his whole life to the SIU. We all owe him a debt of gratitude."

Heindel added, "On behalf of the entire organization, I also thank Mike's family, and in particular his wife, Sophie, for



Michael Sacco

their sacrifices and support of his time that was required to foster the SIU's growth. It has been great working with Mike over the years. And while he may be dropping an anchor, he has agreed to continue to be an advisor as President Emeritus. Here's to a well-deserved and happy retirement, Chief!"

Sacco served as president of the SIU's Atlantic, Gulf, Lakes and Inland Waters (AGLIW) for nearly 35 years, beginning in June 1988. He also worked as president of both the Seafarers International Union of North America (a federation of auton-

mous unions that includes the SIU AGLIW) and the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) throughout the same period.

Moreover, in November 1991, at its 19th Biennial Constitutional Convention, Sacco was elected a vice president of the AFL-CIO, the federation of 60 national and international unions representing more than 14 million workers in the United States. He eventually became the senior vice president of the AFL-CIO Executive Council as its longest-serving member.

A protege of the late SIU President Paul Hall, Sacco from 1980 to 1988 directed the SIU AGLIW's Great Lakes and Inland Waters division as vice president. Based in St. Louis, he served as secretary-treasurer of the Greater St. Louis Area and Vicinity Port Council (an MTD-chartered organization) and as an executive board member of the Missouri State AFL-CIO.

Sacco also was vice president of the Seafarers Harry Lundeberg School of Seamanship from 1968 to 1979. The school, located on the grounds of the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education in Piney Point, Maryland, prepares men and women for a career aboard U.S.-flag commercial vessels and provides upgrading opportunities to active members.

He became associated with the SIU in 1958 and shipped aboard U.S.-flag merchant vessels until he came ashore during the 1960s to serve the SIU in a succession of union posts, including those of patrolman, port agent and headquarters representative.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Sacco served in the U.S. Air Force from 1954 to 1958.

## David Heindel Takes Helm as Union's Fourth President

Following unanimous approval of the SIU Executive Board, David Heindel became the union's fourth president, effective Feb. 14.

The board convened Feb. 13 near Orlando, Florida. SIU President Michael Sacco announced his retirement and then nominated Heindel (who has served as the union's secretary-treasurer since 1997) as his successor. SIU Executive Vice President Augie Tellez seconded the nomination; the unanimous vote followed.

Subsequently, the board unanimously approved the respective appointments of Tom Orzechowski as secretary-

treasurer and Bryan Powell as vice president of the SIU's Great Lakes and Inland Waters sector. Orzechowski had served as Lakes vice president since 2003; Powell had been an assistant vice president since 2007.

"Dave will do a great job and he has my complete confidence," Sacco stated. "He has proven himself throughout his lifetime of service to the SIU. We are also fortunate to have outstanding leadership throughout our executive board, and I know this will be a seamless transition."

"Dave and I have worked well together for many years and will continue doing so," Tellez said. "He's well-qualified for the job and I'm excited about this next chapter of SIU history. The new administration is well-positioned to meet the challenges ahead."

Heindel began his career with the SIU in 1973, when he graduated from the program for entry-level mariners conducted at the union's affiliated training facility in Piney Point, Maryland. He primarily sailed aboard deep-sea vessels as a member of the engine department before coming ashore in 1980 to work as a patrolman in his native New Orleans.

Among the other jobs he has held with the union are patrolman at the SIU halls in Philadelphia and Baltimore, port agent at the Philadelphia hall, and assistant vice president of the SIU's Gulf Coast region.

Heindel also formerly served as a vice president of the Pennsylvania State AFL-CIO and the Philadelphia Central Labor Council. He also was secretary-treasurer of the Delaware Valley and Vicinity Maritime Port Council of the AFL-CIO's Maritime Trades Department.

In August 2002, he was elected vice chairman of the International Transport Workers' Federation's (ITF's) Seafarers' Section. Since then, he extensively has worked – both domestically and as part of U.S. delegations in international forums – with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the International Labor Organization and the International Maritime Organization on shipboard and port-security issues as well as the international project for a new Seafarers Identity Document. He helped protect mariners' rights under the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (which took effect July 2004), and he helped secure a new agreement for tens of thousands of mariners worldwide under the ITF's International Bargaining Forum.

During the ITF Congress in August 2006, he was elected to a four-year term as first vice chair of the Seafarers' Sec-

tion. At the ITF Congress in August 2010, he was elected chair of the ITF's Seafarers' Section, thereby becoming only the second American ever to hold that post. He was re-elected at the ITF Congress in August 2014, then re-elected again in October 2018.

In 2015, he was appointed to the U.S. Labor Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and Trade Policy. He was reappointed to that position in 2017.

Orzechowski graduated in 1991 from the trainee program in Piney Point. He sailed in the deck department, both in the deep sea and inland divisions.

Orzechowski came ashore in 1996, when he was elected port agent at the SIU hall in St. Louis.

Two years later, in 1998, he was elected vice president

of the SIUNA-affiliated Seafarers Entertainment and Allied Trades Union (a position he still holds). In 2000, he was elected to the SIU executive board as vice president of the union's Lakes and Inland Waters sector. He was re-elected in all subsequent elections and also serves as a vice president on the Seafarers International Union of North America Executive Board.

Additionally, for the past several years, he has served as acting vice president of the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education.

Powell launched his career with the SIU via the apprentice program in 1993. He then came ashore in 1999 to work as a union official. Since then, while actively working on organizing and start-up projects nationally, Powell has served in several locations, including Baltimore; St. Louis; Camp Springs, Maryland; Piney Point; Houston; Jacksonville, Florida; Wilmington/Los Angeles; Seattle/Tacoma; Oakland, California; Mobile, Alabama; Honolulu; and Algonac/Detroit.



Pictured from left at the conclusion of the most recent Maritime Trades Department meeting are SIU Exec. VP Augie Tellez, SIU President Emeritus Michael Sacco, and SIU President David Heindel.



Tom Orzechowski  
SIU Secretary-Treasurer



## President's Column

### A Winning Team

Although I am new to the office of president, the SIU – along with my family – has been the focal point of my entire adult life, as many of you know. I started sailing as a teenager, eventually came ashore to work for the union, and am grateful to have enjoyed the membership's support which allowed



David Heindel

me to remain part of this great organization for nearly 50 years.

Following in the footsteps of Mike Sacco is no easy task. However many accolades Mike receives for his 35 years at the helm as our president and his lifetime of service, he deserves all of those and more. He's truly one of a kind and he did a fantastic job.

Longtime Seafarers know what Mike has meant not just to us but to the broader U.S.-flag industry. In particular for those of you who are new to the SIU, be sure to take the time to read the tributes about Mike on our website. They're worth your time and they'll help give you some appreciation for his work.

It's no overstatement to say that Mike stabilized the industry. He came in at a difficult time and began turning things around right away, even though it wasn't easy. Those of us who worked for Mike know that he was tough but fair. He demanded results, but he was reasonable.

Mike's charisma and energy are readily apparent to anyone who's met him. He always made himself available to talk with Seafarers. Something else that has always stood out to me is his foresight. His vision and determination were the foundations of so many key developments for the SIU, from being the industry's spokesperson for the Maritime Security Program to updating our hiring halls to merging with the NMU to constantly modernizing Piney Point and so much more.

While Mike and I have different styles, his policies will continue in my administration. Mike designed a winning model and put together a winning team. I'm not about to fix something that isn't broken. At the same time, I of course will bring my own vision and my own approach to the office. And don't think for a minute that I'm too proud to call Mike if I need advice. He is the ultimate lifeline, and I'm grateful to know he's available.

Throughout my entire time with the SIU, I've always believed that the first priority of every official should be supporting the rank-and-file members. You have my pledge that I will continue doing so to the best of my ability – and we will get the job done. We will stay on our toes and we'll win the battles so that Seafarers can continue working on American-flag vessels.

Many of you know about our current challenges. Manpower is at the top of that list, and of course that's not just for our union or our industry but for so many different occupations around the world. We are formally recruiting all over the country, but word of mouth is still effective. Please keep an eye out for the next generation of prospective members. Bring them to the halls and show them what we're all about.

Something else we've been working on is new job opportunities in the wind-energy sector. This may sound like a far-off development but it's actually here now. I think this sector will be vital for us moving forward, and that's why we've been involved and we'll remain involved.

Brothers and sisters, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead our union, but I also know that it'll continue to be a team effort. We are, as always, stronger together, and at the same time I will work day and night to keep the SIU strong.

## SIU Directory

**David Heindel, President**

**Augustin Tellez, Executive Vice President**

**Tom Orzechowski, Secretary-Treasurer**

**George Tricker, Vice President Contracts**

**Nicholas Celona,**  
*Vice President Government Services*

**Joe Vincenzo,**  
*Asst. Vice President Government Services*

**WWW.SEAFARERS.ORG**



## Retired SIU Government Services Asst. VP 'Chet' Wheeler Dies at 77

The union is mourning the loss of retired SIU Assistant Vice President Chester "Chet" Wheeler, who passed away March 10 in California at age 77. He had had been battling cancer.

Wheeler retired in 2019, following 22 years of service as an official. Previously, he sailed with the union for 32 years, beginning in the mid-1960s, mostly as a civil service mariner with MSC.

SIU Vice President Government Services Nicholas Celona stated, "Chet was absolutely tireless in his work on behalf of the membership. He set a high standard and consistently did a great job handling issues in an often-complex sector of the industry. He will be missed."

SIU Assistant Vice President Government Services Joe Vincenzo said Wheeler "was a friend who made a real difference in the lives of CIVMARS. Whether in the everyday routine of handling premium pay disputes or sorting through pending disciplinary matters to make life a little easier for our mariners, his impact can hardly be overstated. It was a privilege to observe him up close and personal and to accompany him servicing ships up at the Navy base in Bremerton, Washington, and to work with him on issues of consequence both abroad and right here at home."

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 until he retired.

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.

Retired SIU Counsel Deborah Kleinberg, who was a close friend and worked with Wheeler day-to-day for 22 years, noted, "Chet was a beloved husband,



Chet Wheeler

father and grandfather. Chet's life was filled with purpose and the desire to be of service. He was a natural teacher and shared his vast knowledge freely. In his personal life, and over the course of his career, he helped many thousands of people. His legacy will be how he aided people through their most difficult times, his incredible generosity, integrity, and most of all, loyalty to his family, friends, and the mariners he represented throughout his lifetime and the SIU."

Upon his retirement, Wheeler offered the following advice for those entering the industry: "Get as much out of it as you can. 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). Look out for your fellow shipmates. It's a wonderful occupation and I'm really glad I did it."

Donations in Wheeler's memory may be made to: Hospice Services of Lake County, 1862 Parallel Drive, Lakeport, California 95453, Phone (707) 263-6222.

## SIU CIVMARS Assist with Rescue at Sea

SIU CIVMARS from the fleet replenishment oiler *USNS John Lewis* helped give an early holiday gift to a boater stranded at sea, when the ship answered a distress call off the coast of Southern California, the U.S. Military Sealift Command (MSC) reported.

The *Lewis* received a distress call from a man whose sailboat had been damaged in a storm that tore the sails and caused the boat to take on water. Once the boater was located, the ship maneuvered next to the damaged sailboat. The man on the sailboat then climbed the *Lewis*' pilot ladder. After boarding the ship, he was given a security check, a medical examination, a shower, a hot meal, clothes and a ride to San Diego.

"Once we got this poor guy on board, we found out that he had been stranded for five days!" said

Capt. Dan Glazier, the *John Lewis*' civil service master. "I'm glad we were in the area and were able to help. Everything has a purpose, and now this guy can make it home for the holidays rather than the alternative, stuck on the ocean."

The 746-foot *Lewis* is the first of the new John Lewis-class of fleet replenishment oilers, and one of MSC's newest ships, having been christened in 2021 and accepted into MSC's fleet in 2022. It has the ability to carry 162,000 barrels of diesel ship fuel, aviation fuel and dry stores cargo. The upgraded oiler is built with double hulls to protect against oil spills, and it features strengthened cargo and ballast tanks.

The crew of the *USNS John Lewis* includes members of the SIU Government Services Division.

## How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting your 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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# Members Team Up Aboard NOAA Ship Ronald Brown

When Recertified Bosun **Greg Jackson** earlier this year took a temporary job aboard a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) vessel, he didn't know what to expect.

It turned out that working side-by-side with members of the SIU Government Services Division aboard the *Ronald H. Brown* agreed with him.

"It was a pleasant experience," Jackson stated. "It reinforced that we are all just merchant seamen and never too old to learn new things."

The *Brown* is NOAA's largest vessel. Its missions include collecting and assessing scientific data above and below the ocean surface, "allowing us to simultaneously measure the atmosphere and the ocean and increase our understanding of global climatic changes and other issues,"

the agency noted. Some of the crew members are represented by the SIU.

"The food was great," Jackson added. "Just working alongside the NOAA crew was enjoyable. No matter where we come from or who we work for, we're all seamen and all here for a reason."

AB **John Hampton** – like Jackson a member of the SIU's Atlantic, Gulf, Lakes and Inland Waters – was part of the same voyage and came away with a similar outlook.

"The NOAA crew were some of the most generous, fun-loving people I've ever sailed with," he said. "We took the ship from Rhode Island to Brazil and it was a really good experience. We had guys from all walks of life when it comes to sailing. We all shared our experiences and our knowledge with one another. I enjoyed my time and learned a lot."



Deck gang members, from left: Michael Lastinger, Gregory Jackson, Michael Burke, Harrison Bruce, Jared Van Borgen, John Hampton, Jeff Greely



Executive Officer Aaron Maggied, Commanding Officer Marc Moser



Anna McAuliffe, NOAA Scientist



Chief Engineer Alan Currie, Recertified Bosun Greg Jackson



OMU Mark Watson



Chief Cook Deandre Speight, Chief Steward Emir Porter, Second Cook Ashley Pape

## Gen. Van Ovost Emphasizes Nation's Reliance on U.S. Merchant Marine

The commanding officer of the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) recently provided a powerful, detailed description of why the nation must maintain a strong U.S. Merchant Marine.

Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost gave her remarks via recorded video that was shown Feb. 16, during the first day of the winter meeting of the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) Executive Board meeting near Orlando, Florida. She briefly reviewed the American maritime industry's centuries-old reliability before underscoring the ongoing need to boost the mariner pool and U.S. shipbuilding capacity.

The video also included remarks from U.S. Army Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and from Ukrainian government official Oleksandra Azarkhina (the nation's deputy administrator of infrastructure). Both thanked MTD-affiliated unions for their support.

Van Ovost said that USTRANSCOM leaders "recognize that your success drives our own."

She continued, "Our country's heritage as a maritime power has endured since the very founding of this great union. Our ability to protect our coasts, sustain our industries, support our allies, and project power abroad is a national strength built on the water. Because it wasn't just the conveyances that enabled our increased integration with the world; it was due in large part to the companies, unions, and workers who created a thriving maritime ecosystem."

The general noted the wartime service of civilian mariners throughout the country's history along with their ongoing service in times of peace. "This is the legacy that your organization carries forward – one of dedication, hard work, professionalism, and patriotism," she stated. "This remains true today as your efforts continue to support commercial partners' ships and those of the Maritime Administration that USTRANSCOM employs to fulfill our global mission. Deterring potential adversaries and projecting America's military power abroad just isn't feasible without you."

After describing the U.S. Merchant Marine's service in "every major operation or humanitarian event [which] enabled the achievement of our national objectives" since the middle of the last century, she underscored the reduced number of domestic shipyards and the drop in

shipboard manpower. Van Ovost summarized the situation with this stark comment: "From the supply chain to the dry docks, we have reduced the margins of monetary risk at the cost of our national security."

Nevertheless, current developments have returned a spotlight to maritime's importance.

"Recent global events have once again invigorated the focus and support for the business of deployment, sustainment, and maneuver that only you can provide, and together we deliver," Van Ovost said. "This includes our current endeavors to support our NATO allies and supply Ukraine with the materials needed to defend their country against Russia's unprovoked war. With your help, we've delivered millions of pounds of ammunition, weapons, vehicles, and artillery systems at a volume that only surface shipping can facilitate. Ukraine's success on the battlefield is a direct reflection of your support and something we'll need even more in the future."

"In the complexities of today's global competition, the fundamental need to retain this advantage has not changed," she continued. "Neither has the impact of those who labor to ensure its vitality. I argue their importance has only grown, which is why I am such a strong advocate for those involved with the maritime industry.... This is something we cannot afford to get wrong; the stakes are too high and countries like China are leveraging their capacity to produce all manner of ships to erode our once-clear strategic advantage."

She then pointed out recent components of the National Defense Authorization Act that support the Jones Act, the new Tanker Security Program and other maritime staples that signal "positive changes.... This focus on your industry is a renewed recognition of just how critical your contributions are to the success of our nation. They also represent an increased opportunity for employment, growth for our economy, and decreased risk to national security."

Finally, she thanked outgoing SIU/MTD President Michael Sacco for his many years of dedicated, effective leadership and support.

Immediately after the video was shown, Sacco recalled the SIU's involvement with USTRANSCOM's earliest operations after its founding in 1989. He credited SIU Executive Vice President Augie Tellez for his work with the agency.



# At Sea and Ashore with the SIU



SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain (third from left) meets with CIVMARS in Norfolk, Virginia, aboard the *Robert E. Peary*.



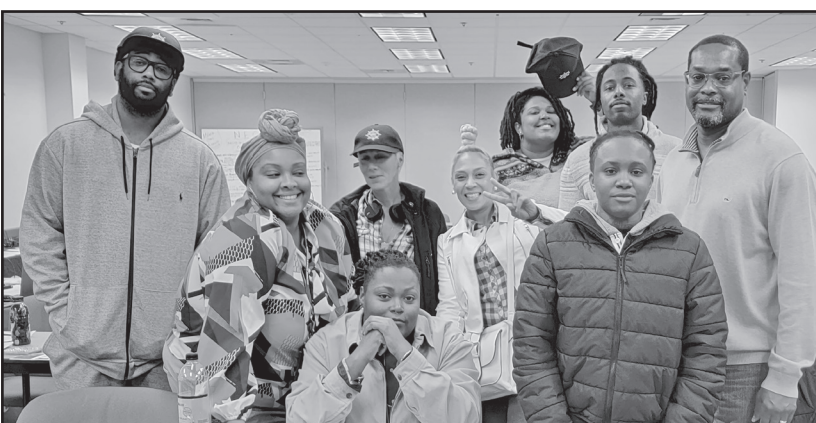
OS Jermaine Ivory (above) waits to load additional stores on the *William McLean* in Norfolk, Virginia, while AB Diaz Lopez (directly below) gets ready to pick up the next cargo aboard the ship.



Promoting the interests of SIU Government Services Division members at the most recent Maritime Trades Department meeting are (from left) SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo, VP Nicholas Celona and Representative Sam Spain.



Crew members are pictured aboard the Army Corps dredges *Yaquina* (above) and *Essayons* (below). Thanks to SIU Assistant VP Joe Vincenzo for the photos.



SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain (right) meets with CIVMARS in Norfolk, Virginia, as part of new-employee orientation.