



GROWING THE BUSINESS

To sell the System we need to reach out to customers of choice

The Seaway 2003 Trade Mission to Belgium and the Netherlands is now behind us but I want to begin my comments with hearty congratulations for each of the participants who helped make it such a fine success. The delegates met our challenging goal of aggressively marketing the competitive advantages the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway system offers. We tirelessly delivered that upbeat message to shippers, carriers, marine agents, ports and terminal operators and government officials.

In this issue readers have an opportunity to examine in greater detail some of the exciting work performed at the several ports and terminals on our schedule (see page 11). We intensively prepared for this trade mission, purposely selecting these two countries because of their historical high rankings (first and third, respectively, in 2002) as Seaway import tonnage leaders and for their proven success in the white-hot field of short sea shipping.

Our delegation listened intently to experts in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Rotterdam who detailed challenges that had to be addressed to make cabotage trade a success for them in relieving road and rail congestion, improving air quality and reducing expensive infrastructure outlays. Our ports are eager to increase intralake trade—both passenger and freight. It is far too soon to know if we can replicate European successes here in our binational system, but our stakeholders understand that for this to happen we must transplant 'best lessons learned' and work closely to ensure existing national policies assist instead of hinder any implementation efforts.

Our latest trade mission delivered forcefully the message of what access to our System means to customers: a market of one-quarter of America's population and almost half of Canada's. In effect, it is entrée to the continent's industrial and agricultural heartland, a shortcut to markets saving shippers time and money. Seaway staff, who

have earned coveted ISO 9001:2000 certification for marine services, make customer focus their core commitment. Safe, efficient, and reliable service have long been Seaway hallmarks. So too is embracing technology, as evidenced by early implementation of the Automatic Identification System — the first inland waterway in

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North America to do so — and development of a full-service, binational website offering a panoply of IT services from e-business software applications to operational notices.

Today's Seaway vision is to grow business. For too long we focused almost exclusively on customers of necessity and convenience. Waterborne shipment of iron ore and coal to factories making steel or similar movements of coal to power plants has never been in doubt. Statistics show that this business, as well as grain exports across the Atlantic is stagnating or declining at a time when oceanborne and short sea shipping of container shipments has experienced rapid growth. We need to reach out to customers of choice, those who have not considered the Seaway because, frankly, we have not marketed it correctly.

First, we must sell the System. That means selling it as an integrated one, both economically and as a marine transportation route. They must see it as a gateway to the continent not a hindrance to avoid because of a host of fees and taxes to pay for the privilege of entry. Marine transportation is 'green' transportation: it emits less air pollutants, uses less energy to move

a ton of cargo, and data prove it is far safer than surface (rail or highway) or air transport. We must use every opportunity to promote the System and the important role we play in it.

Secondly, we must remove the impediments that clog the perception that the system is a single entity. Currently, there are a host of fees and services that customers must pay for. These include Seaway tolls, pilotage fees, Canadian Coast Guard marine service, dredging and icebreaking fees, and U.S. harbor maintenance fees.

Is it possible to integrate services or develop new ones? To simplify, rationalize and reduce System costs? We need to review existing government policy and regulations that impede improvement of the System and determine if exemptions, temporary or permanent, are needed.

Finally, we must ensure that a commercial attitude is not merely tolerated but embraced, albeit with appropriate environmental safeguards. Market-driven decisions are essential.

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway system may be on the cusp of renewal. System renaissance cannot occur, however, without every industry and government stakeholder vigorously supporting compromises on critical issues imperiling the System's long term health while continuing to champion parochial interests. ■

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