

CAPITOL CURRENTS



December 20, 2023



20 YEARS, BUT JUST BEGINNING

Tracy Zea, WCI President/CEO

Waterways Council, Inc. (WCI) celebrates its 20th year as an organization in 2023. "By Washington, DC, standards," this makes WCI a very young association. To put it in perspective, American Waterways Operators will celebrate its 80th anniversary year next year, the National Association of Manufacturers has been around for more than 125 years, and the American Chemistry Council just celebrated its 150th.

Even though we are a young organization, WCI has accomplished a lot that the membership should be extremely proud of.

In 2007, the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) returned after a seven-year hiatus. The size of the bill required a Congressional veto override and included authorization of, among other things, the Navigation & Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP).

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided \$430 million for inland navigation infrastructure, which jump-started lock construction projects such as Chickamauga, Kentucky, and Lower Mon.

In 2010, the first Capital Investment Strategy (CIS) was completed. This has been the guiding document that has allowed industry to approach Congress with solutions, and successfully lobby with one voice on Capitol Hill.

In 2012, historic low water conditions caught global media attention. Aside from being a voice for the industries affected, WCI was successful in urging the expedited removal of rock pinnacles by the Corps of Engineers to allow navigation to continue transiting.

In 2014, the Water Resources Reform Development Act (WRRDA) authorized the 85%/15% cost-share change

to complete construction of the Olmsted lock. This accelerated the then-projected completion date by four years. WCI also successfully urged passage of the diesel fuel tax increase by nine cents in 2014.

In 2016, WRDA authorized the Upper Ohio Navigation Project (three of the 19 projects were authorized for construction).

In 2018, WCI celebrated the ribbon cutting, as Olmsted lock and dam became operational.

In 2020, WRDA adjusted the construction cost-share for all lock projects from 50%/50% to 65%/35%. The Brazos River Floodgates and Colorado Locks on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) were also authorized (two of the 19 projects that were authorized for construction).

In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and



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20 YEARS, BUT JUST BEGINNING

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Jobs Act Infrastructure package provided \$2.5 billion for inland waterways construction.

While there is much to be proud of over our 20 years, the real work is just beginning. Results over the next five years will dictate the future of the construction program for inland navigation. Congress, industry, and the Corps of Engineers will all need to do their part to ensure America's vital natural resource, the inland waterways

transportation system, is modernized at a rate that keeps our Nation competitive.

WCI is thankful for the support of all its members over the last two decades, and we look forward to working with all of you in the future. Waterways Council has achieved success because of its members, and we remain ready to move forward in 2024 and beyond to accomplish the challenges that lie ahead of us. ❖

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: LABORDE PRODUCTS



Waterways Council, Inc. member Laborde Products was founded in 1998 by Tracy Laborde and has established itself as a respected supplier of marine propulsion engines, generators, and barge power units throughout the inland rivers and coastal regions. Over the last 25 years, Laborde's growing sales, service, and support have helped them become the largest distributor for Mitsubishi Marine Engines in North America. With strategically located offices in Louisiana and Texas, Laborde Products serves the inland waterways and coastal markets with dedication and distinction.

Laborde Products plays a pivotal role in the work boat sector, by partnering with marine operators to deliver comprehensive power solutions that drive the success of the maritime industry. Specializing in marine propulsion and power generation engines, Laborde Products offers a diverse range of options tailored to the specific needs of the maritime industry. As a Distributor for Mitsubishi,

“ Laborde Products believes in understanding operators' needs and working together towards common goals. "Laborde Products remains committed to innovation, adaptation, and delivering on our promises, as we strive for excellence throughout the commercial marine industry.”

- Brian Laborde, President

Scania, and Steyr engines, Laborde focused on application-based engine selection to optimize vessel performance and operational success. These engines are available in various power outputs, allowing customization for a wide array of marine applications, from inland tugs and barges to pilot boats and wind farm crew

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT ON: LABORDE PRODUCTS

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transfer vessels.

With an extensive network of dealers, vessel operators across North America can access superior service and parts with ease. Laborde's commitment to customer satisfaction and technical proficiency has earned them the reputation for delivering high-quality products and dependable service and support after the sale.

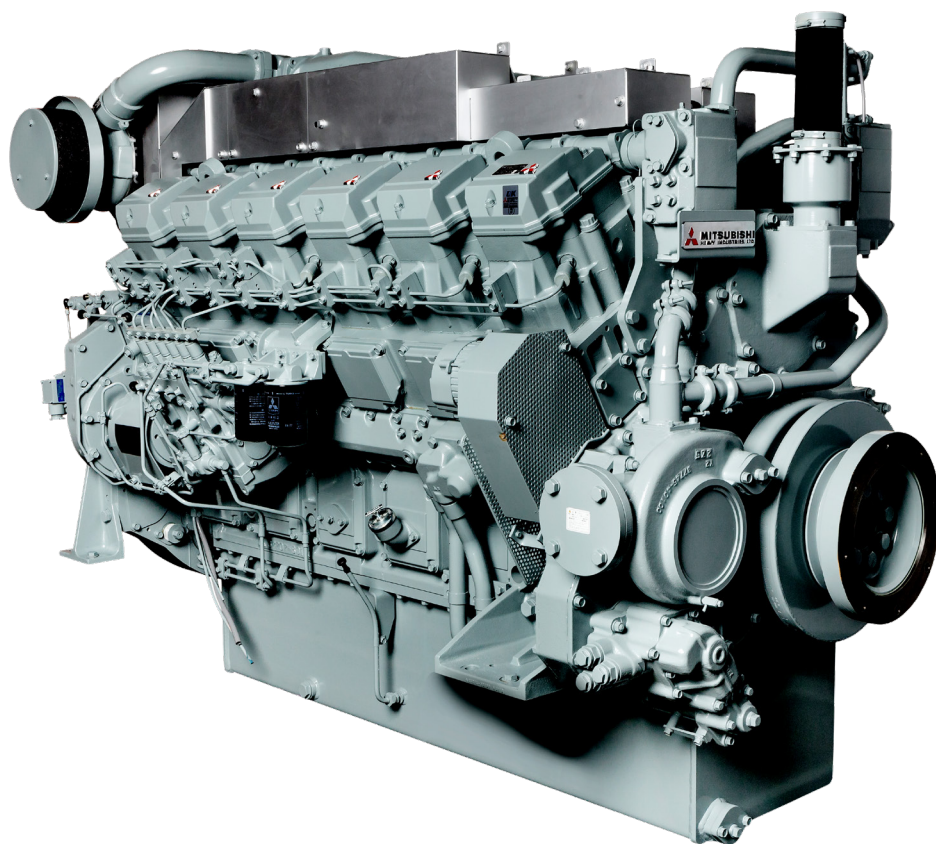
Laborde Products' commitment to parts support is central to their success throughout the years. Our business is driven by minimizing downtime for our customers and having the parts available to support our engines in the market is key to a successful partnership. The operators who run our engines depend on us to have the parts and people available to keep them running 24/74.

"Our growth story is deeply intertwined with our mission, emphasizing a positive partnership mindset, while providing

engine solutions that optimize value for our customers, team members and vendors. At Laborde Products, we go beyond providing equipment; we offer solutions that fuel the success of our valued customers," said Brian Laborde, President. "Our growth is a testament to our team members unwavering dedication to these partnerships and our relentless pursuit of excellence for vessel operators."

Laborde Products is a supplier of top-quality marine engines and power solutions. With a customer-centric approach and an array of products, the company has earned a reputation as a reliable and trusted partner in the maritime industry. Laborde Products continues to lead the way in delivering simple, innovative, and sustainable solutions for marine applications throughout the maritime industry.

The company is a proud new member of WCI and appreciates the work it does for the inland waterways system. ❖



Among the products Laborde supplies is this Mitsubishi S12R-Y3MPTAW-6 engine.

INLAND WATERWAYS USERS BOARD MEETS, FOCUSES ON CAPABILITY NEEDS AND COST OVER-RUNS

By Jennifer Armstrong, WCI Director of Government Relations



The Inland Waterways Users Board (IWUB) held its 101st meeting on October 19 just outside of Washington, DC, in Springfield, VA. The third and final meeting of 2023 focused on revenues and balances of the Inland Waterways Trust Fund (IWTF) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, project updates, and status of identifying and

managing significant cost overruns that have been a theme throughout Board meetings this year.

The Board accomplished two key priorities it set out to achieve this year: obtaining a financial report of the IWTF including available balances and obtaining updated FY24 capabilities for ongoing inland waterways studies and construction projects. The Corps acknowledged some of the capabilities provided may need to be updated after ongoing cost certifications are completed. Understanding that capabilities can change, having an updated and accurate IWTF balance allows Congress the ability to maximize full use of IWTF revenues each year and ensures the IWUB and other stakeholders are relaying an accurate estimate of program needs when advocating for sufficient funding to Congress. Updated capabilities are necessary to prioritize funding and understand the out-year funding needs.

In FY23, commercial fuel tax revenues were down \$20 million from last year, with \$105 million brought into the IWTF. The reduction is mostly a result of low-water conditions on the Mississippi River and global competition from Brazil's agriculture sector, a result of significant agricultural and waterway infrastructure investments Brazil has made in recent years. Based on information provided by the Corps, \$179.5 million is available for appropriations in FY24. The FY24 capabilities provided by the Corps include \$456 million for ongoing construction projects, \$240 million to start the Brazos River Floodgates project, and \$800,000

to resume the Bayou Sorrel project in the Investigations account. The available balance in the IWTF is sufficient to fund all ongoing construction funding capabilities for FY24.

Like the previous two IWUB meetings in 2023, much of the focus of the last meeting of the year remained on the impacts of cost overruns and finding alternative solutions to keep projects on schedule. One solution reiterated again by the Board was the need to reallocate infrastructure bill funding to the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (MKARNS) Three Rivers project. The Three Rivers project was intended to be completed with funds from the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) funds, but like many other IIJA funded projects, costs have since escalated. It was determined the project would need additional funding and reallocation of \$80 million from the deepening project could be a solution which would allow the Corps to continue progress on the second phase of the Three Rivers project. The IWUB repeated the need to make progress and seize an opportunity to complete one of these projects and continue to urge the Administration to reallocate this funding quickly to meet time-sensitive project milestones.

The Board expressed its support for finding solutions and opportunities to have projects return benefits most efficiently. It unanimously passed a motion in support of the Corps pursuing continuing contract authority for Lock and Dam 25 and Montgomery Lock. Continuing contract authority allows the Corps to award multi-year contracts without having received appropriations to cover the full contract. Incorporating this into a project's construction contract is critical to finishing on time and within budget. Other opportunities such as segmenting projects into components that allow for benefits to be achieved in phases were also discussed at the October meeting. The Corps presented to the Board a scenario on how the Brazos River Floodgates could be constructed in phases to allow a portion of the project to provide more immediate benefits without the need for full funding of the entire project.

The 2024 IWUB meeting dates have not yet been announced.



CONSERVATION COLUMN: RECYCLING GETS A PALATABLE LIFT

In the conservation world, many are familiar with WCI partner organization Living Lands & Waters (LL&W) and its founder Chad Pregracke, who was named CNN's 2013 "Hero of the Year" for his impressive river cleanup work with LL&W. Since LL&W's founding in 1998, the group has collected 13.1 million pounds of trash and plastic from the nation's rivers.

The work of LL&W is an impressive feat and big win for our environment, but Chad, and his wife, Tammy Becker, were discouraged that after the last 19 years of doing their river cleanups there is still nowhere to recycle heavy plastics other than in landfills. Tammy had worked for LL&W for more than 19 years and saw firsthand the plastic waste removed from the Mississippi River and other bodies of water.

So, the couple founded Green Current Solutions (GCS), and in August 2023, began manufacturing heavy duty plastic shipping pallets out of 100% recycled high-density polyurethane, a fully sustainable replacement to current wooden shipping pallets.

GCS is a culmination of Chad and Tammy's passion for the



natural environment and their drive to make change.

GCS's moniker is "palletgonia," and the company's CEO is Ms. Becker, with Mr. Pregracke serving as GCS President. It is based in East Moline, IL, in a 71,000 square foot factory space with 32,000 square feet of warehouse space on 16 acres. It is a WBENC certified-woman-owned, operated business.

The company is unique, because most competitor companies making plastic shipping pallets use virgin or a mix of virgin and recycled plastic. GCS is one of a few that uses 100% recycled plastics and the only one that can offer ocean-bound plastics collected from U.S. rivers.

The company also sources plastics and scrap materials from its customers to benefit their corporate waste reduction goals and sustainability programs.

Why are GCS plastic pallets better than wooden pallets?:

- They are 100% recycled, resulting in a 71% reduction in Greenhouse Gas emissions and 88% savings in energy costs.
- They do not require cutting down trees (43% of pallets are from slow-growing hardwood/oak trees), after which they are thrown away or ground for mulch. Companies switching from wood to 100% recycled plastic pallets are not only saving millions of pounds of plastics from our oceans, rivers, landfills, and incinerators, but they are also saving millions of trees from being felled.

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GCS staff stand in front of a Christmas tree made of recycled pallets.

CONSERVATION COLUMN: RECYCLING GETS A PALATABLE LIFT

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- Wooden pallets are messy, they break easily, their nails and sharp edges damage the products being shipped and can injure employees.
- Wood pallets are porous and can collect bacteria and pathogens.
- Plastic pallets can be used 60-100 times, but wooden pallets have only 3-4 uses, which is a great return on investment for shippers.
- GCS will buy back the pallets after their 60-100-time usage and then grind them up and recycle them to be used again (their equipment can shred 3,000 pounds per hour to restart the process).
- GCS' plastic pallets are stronger and can hold 15,600 pounds, or 22,250 with galvanized steel support beams for heavier loads. There is also a glass-nylon filled option that can hold 16,950 pounds.
- They can be customized with custom logos and asset tracking devices.
- They are a consistent size which is necessary for automated warehouse equipment.
- Customers of GCS can join Living Lands & Waters at a cleanup to collect materials that go into their pallets.

Plastic pallets are ideal for the automotive, consumer, food and beverage, and agriculture industries, but truly for any company shipping products with an eye toward carbon footprint reduction.

GCS utilizes two 3,000-ton high pressure injection molding machines, parts of which were delayed by more than a year due to supply chain and COVID-19 challenges. The company can make over 200,000 pallets per year with this current equipment.

"The concept of GCS was the solution to the problem of where to recycle some of the plastic LL&W was cleaning up from the rivers. Rather than dumping it into a landfill, which was certainly counter-productive to LL&W's work, utilizing some of that plastic waste to create shipping pallets and then recycling them at the end of their lifecycle is incredibly fulfilling," said CEO Becker.

President Pregracke agrees. "GCS recycles the heavy plastics we pull from the rivers, but also saves our forests to create wooden shipping pallets that are only used a few times before they are tossed into a dumpster. To date, LL&W has planted or donated two million trees, so GCS's work is a full cycle complement to LL&W's work," he said.

WCI applauds Green Current Solutions' innovation in conservation, and the continuing work of Living Lands & Waters to improve the health of our nation's waterways. ❖



Tammy Becker and Chad Pregracke really stack up in the Green Current Solutions factory, where fully sustainable, recycled/recyclable heavy duty plastic shipping pallets are being manufactured.

WCI CELEBRATES THE BIG 20 IN THE BIG EASY

Time flies when you are having fun — and being effective — and WCI celebrated the passage of two decades with its anniversary meeting November 13-15 in New Orleans.

The events began with WCI's Annual Membership and Board of Directors Meetings, which opened with a congratulatory message from WCI's first Chair of the Board Berdon Lawrence.

At the Board meeting, WCI Chair Cherrie Felder said, "WCI has not only been about the projects we have seen funded and completed or soon-to-be-completed, but it's also been about the people. It's been about all of you who have committed to our shared goal of a modern, well-maintained inland waterways system. And it's been about our WCI staff as well, who have united us to speak with one voice, as a coalition, and to develop a clear pathway forward that is free of regionality."

During the Board meeting, WCI staff reviewed with its members the legislative, stakeholder, and communications activities that occurred since its last meeting in February in Washington, DC. They also walked down memory lane with remembrances from WCI's early beginnings in 2003. Day one was capped off with an opening reception at Vue Orleans, an interactive experience with unique exhibits that celebrate New Orleans' history, music, culture, and of course, the mighty Mississippi River.

WCI's Annual Waterways Symposium, co-sponsored with Waterways Journal, was kicked off with opening

remarks by WCI Chair Felder, who introduced New Orleans Port President & CEO Brandy Christian, who welcomed attendees to the city at the mouth of the Mississippi River, "which works in concert with the entire inland system for the delivery of agriculture, chemical, and gas products so important to the nation," she said.

Peter Ricchiuti, Senior Professor of Practice with the Freeman School of Business at Tulane University, offered a national economic outlook, while Kenneth Simonson, Chief Economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, addressed a positive U.S. construction outlook.

With great humor in his delivery, Professor Ricchiuti said there is much good news in the U.S. economy, where inflation has gone down to 3.7% in September 2023 from a high of 9.1% in June 2022, with rising wages, and the S&P 500 growing despite negative events like the Great Depression in 1926 and COVID-19 in 2021.

Mr. Simonson is also optimistic on the economy but sees risks due to another potential pandemic, a cybersecurity attack on the homeland, and the dysfunction in Congress.

Steve Golding, Chair, Golding Barge Line, was presented the 2023 National Rivers Hall of Fame National Achievement Award, for his commitment and service to the inland waterways, which began when he was a teenager. At 23 he was running his father's barge company. Today, Steve's son, Austin, is President of Golding Barge.



Photo A: The WCI staff team (left to right) of Dustin Davidson, Deb Calhoun, Tracy Zea, Jen Armstrong. Paul Rohde and Amber McClay stand with WCI Chair Cherrie Felder (third from left) at the celebration of WCI's 20th anniversary in New Orleans. Photo credit: Frank McCormack, Waterways Journal



Photo B: WCI Chair Felder (right), stands with Ms. Calhoun and WCI's first Chairman of the Board Berdon Lawrence during the filming of a special message to welcome the Board of Directors for the start of the organization's 20th anniversary meeting.



Photo C: WCI President/CEO Tracy Zea is all smiles as he delivers his President's report to the Board.

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Luncheon keynote speaker was the Honorable Michael Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), who said that of the record-setting Corps FY24 budget of \$7.4 billion, \$3.4 billion is for navigation. Of Corps civil works budgets from FY2018-2023, \$104.4 billion has gone toward civil works appropriations. “People recognize the value of these investments,” he said. He also said, “I have become obsessed with completing projects,” to wild applause from the audience.

Next, Sean Duffy, Executive Director of the Big River Coalition, discussed the deepening of the Mississippi River to 50 feet that is underway, and the beneficial use of dredged materials which, since BRC began this program in 2009, has restored more than 2,000 acres. “We are all on Team Mississippi in this room,” Mr. Duffy said.

He shared the podium with Col. Cullen Jones, Commander of the Corps’ New Orleans District, who discussed the low-water saltwater intrusion into New Orleans, the creation of 1,750 acres for new wildlife habitats from the dredged material

from the Mississippi River deepening project, and the makeup of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and its locks that include the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock, a priority for his district and the nation.

The last speaker of the day was Michael Hecht, President/CEO, Greater New Orleans, Inc., who discussed New Orleans economic development,” offered that one out of every five jobs in New Orleans is related in some way to the river. He said that New Orleans offers “the four Cs,”—Cost (lower than other major cities), Cash (incentives to locate business there are competitive), Culture (highlighting its maritime assets), and “Cleadership,” since “we couldn’t think of another “C,” which drew laughter from attendees.

WCI’s 20th anniversary dinner was held at Southern Yacht Club and included a slide show chock full of memories of the organization’s two decades advocating for the betterment of the inland waterways and ports industry and the bottom line of its members. ❖



Photo D: Brandy Christian, New Orleans Port President & CEO, welcomes attendees to WCI’s Annual Waterways Symposium November 14.

Photo E: Luncheon Keynote Speaker Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Michael Connor. Photo credit: Frank McCormack, Waterways Journal

Photo F: The Corps’ New Orleans District Commander Col. Cullen Jones discusses the status of locks on the GIWW that include Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock and Bayou Sorrel Lock, among other key points.

Photo G: Kenneth Simonson, Chief Economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, is bullish on the construction industry in America, despite developer costs higher due to current interest rates. **Continued on page 9**

WCI CELEBRATES THE BIG 20 IN THE BIG EASY

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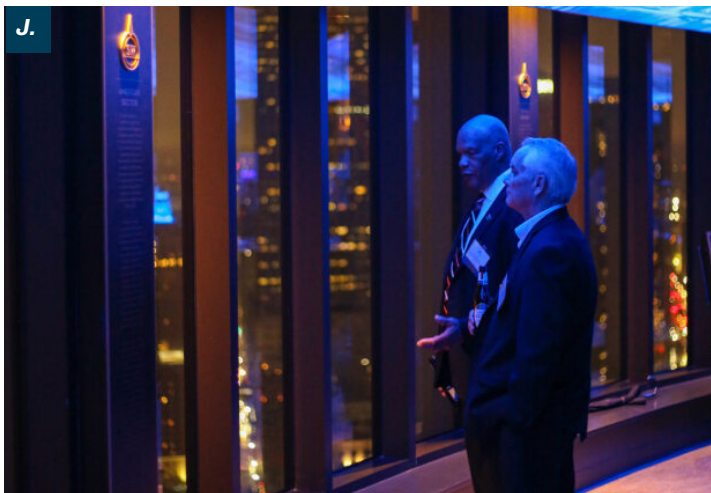


Photo H: Michael Hecht, President/CEO, Greater New Orleans, Inc., (left) speaks to WCI member Merritt Lane, President and Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board of Canal Barge Company, Inc., before addressing WCI Symposium attendees.

Photo I: WCI Director of Government Relations Dustin Davidson (right) enjoys the reception at the Vue with WCI Member Gary Aucoin, General Manager, Schottel Inc.

Photo J: Karl Jefferson (right), Laborers' International Union of North America, enjoys the view as he chats with Scott Ramshaw, Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 562, at WCI's opening reception at the Vue overlooking New Orleans.

Photo K: John Danesi, Kentucky Corn Growers Association, catches up with Robin Harmon, Hancock Whitney.

Photo L: WCI Office Manager/Special Events Coordinator Amber McClay left no detail unattended at WCI's very successful 20th anniversary meetings and events, as she cheerfully greets attendees.

Photo M: Left to right: Bryan Dierlam (ADM), Paul Rohde (WCI), and Jim Tarmann and Mark Bunselmeyer (Illinois Corn Growers Association) gather together at WCI.

Photo N: Chair Felder stands with former WCI Chairmen in attendance at the WCI closing dinner at the Southern Yacht Club (left to right) Merritt Lane (2014–2016), Peter Stephaich (2018–2020), Dan Mecklenborg (2007–2009) and Matt Woodruff (2011–2014). Photo credit: Frank McCormack, Waterways Journal

THANK YOU, WCI SPONSORS

WCI thanks its generous sponsors of the 20th anniversary celebration as follows:

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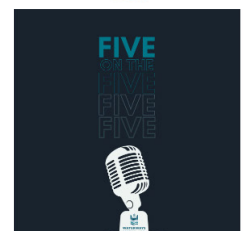
Propeller Club Port of New Orleans' Maritime Person of the Year Cherrie Felder stands with (left to right) Channel Shipyard Companies' executives Dustin Steger, Dennis Steger and Jess Steger.

The Propeller Club Port of New Orleans honored WCI Chair Cherrie Felder with its Maritime Person of the Year at the organization's 89th gala on October 25 at the Metairie Country Club. Ms. Felder is Vice President, Channel Shipyard Companies, but began her maritime career 41 years ago as Marine Division Traffic Manager with Torco Oil Company, followed by two years as Canal Traffic Manager at Riverside Ventures, then as manager of governmental affairs, sales and risk for Marine Inland Transportation Company Inc., and as a marketing representative for Blessey Marine Services Inc. ❖

'FIVE ON THE FIVE' WITH REP. ERIC SORENSEN

Exclusively for WCI members, this month we featured an interview with freshman Rep. Eric Sorensen (D, IL-17). Rep. Sorensen resides in Moline. Illinois' 17th district includes portions of both the Upper Mississippi and Illinois River, including UMR Locks and Dams 13, 14, 15, and 16 and the dam portion of Peoria L/D. He was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2022 after serving Illinois communities as a meteorologist for over two decades. Rep. Sorensen sits on both the House Agriculture Committee and House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

If you missed the interview, watch it [here](#). ❖

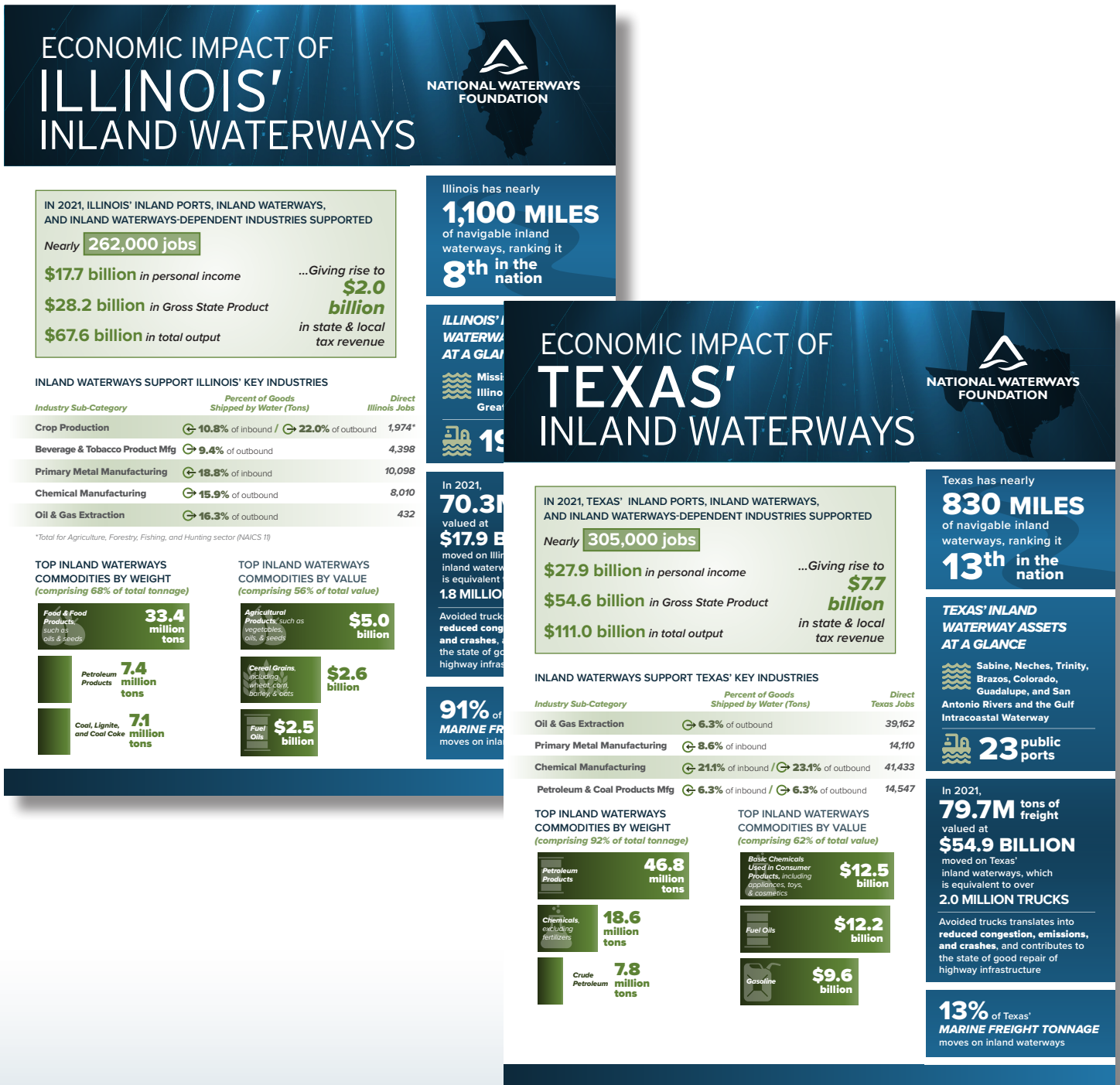


Five on the Five - December 5, 2023
Five questions.
Each month on the 5th

WCI Vice President-Midwest Paul Rohde interviews Rep. Eric Sorensen for WCI's Five on the Five.

NWF PROVIDES ECONOMIC UPDATES FOR INLAND WATERWAYS STATE PROFILES

With the support of the Illinois Soybean Association, among others, the National Waterways Foundation (NWF) has commissioned the update of a series of inland state waterways profiles based on the latest 2021 economic data. The work was performed by Cambridge Systematics and included in each profile are total inland waterways-related jobs, tax revenue generated, top commodities moving through the state, tonnage and value, and more. Profiles will be posted on WCI's website at the beginning of the year. ❖



CONGRATULATIONS, 2023 RIVER BELL AWARDEES

WCI congratulates this year's Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) River Bell Award honoree, Darin Adrian, President of the River Division of Marquette Transportation Company, LLC; River Legend Award winner Gerald E. "Jerry"

Clower, President, Harbor Towing and Fleeting, LLC; and Distinguished Service Awardee Rear Admiral Richard Timme, U.S. Coast Guard (Ret.)

The SCI Lifesaving Award was presented to The Crew of the M/V Mike Sanders, American Commercial Barge Line, the Crew of the M/V Mary Ellen Jones, Amherst Madison, Inc., and the Crew of the M/V San D, Parker Towing. ❖

A.**B.**

Photo A: (Left to right): Harbor Towing and Fleeting, LLC's Todd Clower stands with his father, 2023 River Legend Award recipient Gerry Clower, and Michael Nation at the SCI River Bell Awards..

Photo B: 2023 River Bell Awardee Darin Adrian (left) stands with John Eckstein, Executive Chairman of Marquette Transportation Company, LLC, at the River Bell Awards held December 7 in Paducah, KY.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM WCI



(Left to right) WCI's staff of Amber McClay, Office Manager/Events Coordinator; Paul Rohde, Vice President-Midwest Region; Tracy Zea, President & CEO; Deb Calhoun, Senior Vice President; Jennifer Armstrong and Dustin Davidson, Directors of Government Relations, wishes our members and supporters the happiest of holidays and the best in the new year. Thanks for your support over the last 20 years, and we look forward to what's to come in the future.

2024 INDUSTRY CALENDAR

SAVE THE DATE:

February 6-8: WCI Board of Directors meeting and Capitol Hill Fly-In
(Intercontinental Hotel, The Wharf, Washington, DC)



Join WCI February 6-8 for our Board of Directors meeting and Capitol Hill fly-in to advocate for our 2024 priorities. Meetings will be held at the Intercontinental Hotel at the Wharf in Washington, DC.

February 21-23: American Waterways Operators' Combined Regions Annual and Safety Meeting (New Orleans, LA)

April 24-26: Greater New Orleans Barge Fleeting Association 40th River & Marine Industry Seminar (New Orleans, LA)

May 14-15: American Waterways Operators Board of Directors Meeting, Spring Convention & Barge-In (The Westin, Washington, DC)

May 29-31: Inland Marine Expo (IMX2024)
(Music City Center, Nashville)

June 13: Seamen's Church Institute Silver Bell Awards (Chelsea Piers, New York)

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