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- CAPT. ED MONTGOMERY, SEA SERVICE OWNER

# A SEAWORTHY CREW

SEA SERVICE LLC HAS EARNED A REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE REGION'S BEST MARITIME SERVICE OPERATIONS

**S**ince the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, ocean-going vessels regularly arrive at the Twin Ports, bringing imported products from around the world and usually departing with agricultural commodities.

As required by federal regulations, these vessels are required to have a pilot on board to assist captains in navigating their ships within the system. Pilots get on and off the vessels via what is known as a pilot boat – a specialized kind of water taxi. In the Twin Ports area, Sea Service LLC of Superior, operated by Capt. Ed Montgomery and Vice President of Administration Jeanne Montgomery, provides this crucial service for the Western Great Lakes Pilots Association. The association provides pilotage services in what's known as District 3, comprising the three largest of the five Great Lakes.

## "AYE, LAD – 'TIS IN YOUR BLOOD"

As with any business, not getting in over your head is a good philosophy to steer by – on the water (literally, for Sea Service) and in the office operations. This simple, steadfast approach has served Ed and Jeanne Montgomery well as they've navigated the ups and downs of operating their business, which is based in Superior's North End area.

As a small business, Sea Service provides a variety of maritime-related services within the harbor area. In addition to the pilot boat service, it performs marine vessel and cargo surveying, provides support services on select marine construction and environmental cleanup, and is involved in the safe processing and disposal of refuse from foreign vessels and aircraft in the Twin Ports.

As the Montgomerys often say, you have to wear a lot of hats. Jeanne Montgomery handles everything from invoicing, contracts, payroll and vessel dispatching to keeping up with stringent Coast Guard rule compliance and documentation. "We call her 'The Glue,' because she holds us all together," Ed Montgomery said of his wife. As an animal lover, she's also played a major role in naming the vessels and barges in Sea Service's fleet, contributing the Eagle, Sparrow, Ox, Bear and Colt monikers.

Montgomery himself never intended to have a maritime career, unlike members of his mother's side of the family, which boasts

three generations of men wedded to the sea. An early foray into a career in radio found him driving from Phoenix to Duluth in the middle of February. But it didn't take him long to realize that once you take your ego out of the picture, the job didn't pay the bills.

So Montgomery consulted his uncle, Edward Ellis – a tanker chief engineer for Citgo out of New York City in the 1950s. Ellis suggested that he talk to his grandfather, who, in his Gaelic/New Englander brogue, deadpanned what Montgomery probably already knew: "Aye, lad – 'tis in your blood." And he was right, admitted Montgomery,

who decided to enroll in the Yacht and Small Craft Surveying program at the Chapman School of Seamanship in South Florida.

After graduation, Montgomery's new career didn't really take off until he returned to Duluth, working as a vessel broker for Owen's Yacht Sales. An affable, hard-working young man, Montgomery became a familiar face on the waterfront. More than once, he recalls, some of the larger engineering outfits were turning down small jobs because of the high cost to turn the key on their tugs and barges, and Montgomery quickly saw that as an opportunity.



MARITIME PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY SEA SERVICE

**"WE HAD SHIP UPON SHIP COMING IN WITH WIND TURBINE PARTS THAT THEY UNLOADED AT THE PORT TERMINAL, AND ED [MONTGOMERY] WAS ONE OF THE SURVEYORS ON THEM."**

— VICE PRESIDENT OF ADMINISTRATION JEANNE MONTGOMERY, SEA SERVICE

"I bought a little workboat – the Fred Beatty – along with a small barge and picked up small jobs around the harbor, like helping the local sailing club set buoys for racing or doing backyard fills on Park Point," said Montgomery. "As I did more, my phone rang more."

### MARINE SURVEYING

Full-time jobs on the waterfront are rare, so making a living requires an ability to wear many hats – to diversify your portfolio, so to speak. Montgomery began to pick up work as a line handler, a job he loves to this day. This type of work introduced him to a new cast of characters in the industrial marine world of the Great Lakes, and it soon paid dividends.

"People were saying 'We need a cargo surveyor here in Duluth,' and so that was a different discipline," Montgomery explained. "I had the training in it, so I picked up the cargo work – inspecting damaged cargo, full-size vessels, collisions, allisions [the running of one ship upon another ship that is stationary] and who knows what."

Marine surveying is the oldest portion of Sea Services' business. Surveying entails a detailed inspection of a vessel or its cargo regarding its safety, seaworthiness, value and any damage. Inspections are conducted



in accordance with the major marine safety, vessel construction and proper cargo handling protocols and fire safety agencies and associations, as well as the current market for vessel monetary values.

"Last year, it was crazy with the wind-mills parts," said Jeanne Montgomery in providing examples of marine surveying provided by Sea Services. "We had ship upon ship coming in with wind turbine parts that they unloaded at the Port Terminal, and Ed was one of the surveyors on them, so that was very busy. There was one day he just went from one ship to the next ship."

Montgomery descends into the holds and checks to ensure that the equipment or parts are stationary. He also notes whether cargo items have shifted or dropped and whether there's any water intrusion, she explained. Sea Service then provides comprehensive reports to its clients, complete with photos or drawings detailing its findings.

### PILOT WORK

Pilots are designated master mariners working at the top of their profession. And they are the keepers of "local knowledge" for navigating vessels within the confines of specific waterways such as rivers, bays and harbors. On the Great Lakes, the Western Great Lakes Pilots Association (WGLPA) provides pilotage in the area known as District 3, one of the largest pilotage districts in the world.

"District 3 is comprised of the three largest of the five Great Lakes," explained Capt. Jon Olney, a pilot who is also president of the WGLPA. "Our area consists of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron as well as the St. Mary's River and the Soo Locks. We pilot ships into nearly 60 different ports."

Currently, pilotage duties are shared by four Canadian pilots and 17 from the United



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— CAPT. JON OLNEY, WESTERN GREAT LAKES PILOTS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT  
(PICTURED PILOTING A VESSEL INTO THE SOO LOCKS)



**"WHAT I LIKE TO DO, BEFORE I GET TO THE BOAT [THE LARGE VESSEL], IS TO PUT IT IN REVERSE, BRING IT TO A FULL STOP AND LET IT SIT A LITTLE BIT TO GET THE ATTITUDE OUT OF IT AND THEN APPROACH THE VESSEL."**

– CAPT. DANN EDHOLM, SEA SERVICE

States, and they are regulated by both the U.S. Coast Guard and the Government of Ontario. Ensuring expert, reliable pilot boat service is essential for the smooth transit of foreign-flagged vessels. Equally important is the safety of pilots during their transfer on and off the vessel, which is undertaken in all weather conditions during the shipping season.

"You have to have confidence in that pilot boat crew – that they know what they're doing," Olney said, "because essentially, they're bringing a small boat up against a very large ship. Both of them are moving all the time." And even a ship at anchor is still reacting to its environment in the water. "The pilot boat crews have to be pretty adept at handling their boat, because they're bringing it up against the ship and can have drastic negative effects if they do it wrong," Olney added. "More than once, I've been

The Sea Eagle is a former Coast Guard search and rescue vessel. "Shortly after 9/11, they had an influx of money and bought all new equipment and were selling the old stuff," Montgomery noted. "I caught wind of that, and I had my eye on one of those 40-footers, thinking they'd be a perfect pilot boat. They're rugged, fast and very capable." In fact, he added, the boat they bought was used by Rear Adm. Richard Bennis to lead the boat evacuation of lower Manhattan on 9/11. When he died in 2003, The New York Times headline over his obituary called him "a hero of 9/11."

#### AN EXPERIENCED, SEAWORTHY CREW

In a business that doesn't have set hours or even full-time work, Montgomery says he is fortunate to have two experienced, longtime crew members to run the pilot boats. The term "six degrees of separation" could be halved when it comes to the Twin



McEneaney in Riverside," he said. That job rekindled his childhood passion for boats. "I took on a personal challenge to get my master's license," recalled Edholm, who took a course to earn his 50-ton Inland Waters/Great Lakes Master's License. And by the late 1990s, Edholm was helping Ed Montgomery on the pilot boat Arvid Morken.

Bringing a small boat alongside a much larger vessel takes a lot of experience and skill, and it also requires a heightened situational awareness. "What I like to do, before I get to the boat [the large vessel], is to put it in reverse, bring it to a full stop and let it sit a little bit to get the attitude

**"THE WAVES WOULD GO CRASHING OVER THE DECK, CRASHING INTO THE PILOT HOUSE ... I NEVER WORRIED ABOUT THE BOAT GOING DOWN. IT WASN'T GOING TO SINK, BUT IT WAS A LITTLE UNNERVING."**

– CHIEF MATE PETE CLURE, SEA SERVICE

climbing down the pilot ladder, and the deckhand on the pilot boat is holding me on the ladder [that is] swinging away from the ship. As he's helping me down, the ladder goes up, the boat goes down. More than once, that guy has held my life in his hands."

Sea Service operates two pilot boats – the Sea Eagle and the Sea Bear, each painted a distinctively bright yellow. The primary boat, the 50-foot Sea Bear, was built in 1960 for the Sandy Hook Pilots Association in New York City. The Montgomerys acquired the boat in 2002, making a 27-day trip from the East Coast to Duluth.

Ports maritime community, where everyone seems to know everyone. It's a networker's paradise, and that is how Capt. Dann Edholm and First Mate Pete Clure each became associated with Sea Service LLC.

"I had a passion for boats and was always bringing home derelict boats," said Edholm, who had his first boat when he was just 11 years old. "It was a 12-foot boat with a 10-horse Evinrude." Prior to working for Sea Service, he had an established livelihood as an accomplished carpenter. "I started woodworking when I was 17 and landed a short stint of boat building with Doug





## THE U.S. ARMY AND U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY CHOSE SEA SERVICES TO ASSIST IN PLOTTING THE LOCATIONS OF THE MYSTERY BARRELS.

out of it and then approach the vessel," Edholm said. "When you come up to a boat and you put it in reverse, you'd like to think it's like a car putting the brakes on. But any little reaction from the lake itself, and shutting it off from reverse, is going to cause the boat to bob up and down. And if you bump the ship – I mean, it could bump away from anywhere from 16 inches to 24 inches. So I like to take the attitude out of it."

Clearly, safety is always the No. 1 priority for these pilots – no matter the weather or sea conditions. They must also put aside thinking about their lives on shore and any other potential distractions. "Once you step on the boat there, you have to forget about all that and focus on getting that pilot off that boat," said Chief Mate Pete Clure. "That's the top priority, and making sure that nothing goes wrong."

Clure has a unique and extensive maritime background. The Clure Public Marine Terminal is named after his grandfather, attorney Arthur M. Clure, a leading proponent of the Seaway. And his father, Thomas Clure, was an admiralty lawyer in the port. So a young Pete Clure learned about the industry vicariously. "My dad would take me down to his law office when I was little," Clure recalled, "and he was always having to go on board these foreign vessels when he interviewed crew members about incidents that happened."

His professional experience, Clure said, "has taught me that no two runs are ever really the same. Working daylight versus night is a lot easier; obviously, we would always rather do it in the day, if possible. But there's always some mitigating factor that changes the dynamics of how the run goes. If Dann

can't get the boat in where it needs to be, for instance, if there's wind – I mean, there are any number of factors that figure into trying to make it go as smooth as possible."

Both Clure and Edholm have memories of Montgomery's first pilot boat – the former grocery launch Arvid Morken. In retrospect, they noted, it was not an ideal pilot boat, but it ended up serving them well in Sea Service LLC's nascent years. Clure recalls it as a "very seaworthy craft" with a Gray marine engine: "We had two giant portholes looking forward, and then portholes on either side with the doors – I think one or two portholes in the back. It kind of felt like you were in a little submarine, in a way."

"The waves would go crashing over the deck, crashing into the pilot house. I mean, literally, we had green water coming in through the portholes, splashing into the





pilot house," he laughed. "I never worried about the boat going down. It wasn't going to sink, but it was a little unnerving."

### ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION

Sea Service's pilot work garners the most attention, and it can be rather dramatic from a public perspective. But as with all businesses, the bread-and-butter work that keeps the lights on is often more mundane. This is the best way to describe the behind-the-scenes sterilization via "steam processing" of foreign waste materials removed from the foreign vessels in the harbor, or from overseas flights landing at the Duluth International Airport.

"Foreign ships are required by law not to dispose any garbage in the U.S., at least untreated," Ed Montgomery explained. "The reason for that is they don't want some foreign bug or pathogen to come off someplace that originated in another country to be let loose in the fields out here. That goes for galley waste, garbage, paper goods – pretty much anything comes off the ship. The USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] requires that it be either steam sterilized or incinerated before it goes into landfill."

The refuse arrives at Sea Services' FAVOR (Foreign Aircraft & Vessel On-shore Refuse) facility, where it is placed

in self-contained dumpster-vaults that are connected by piping to a steam system. Depending on the volume of the waste and the temperature of the steam, it takes anywhere from an hour or two for the material to be ready for the landfill. Montgomery pointed out that refuse is rarely incinerated anymore because of strict state and federal regulations limiting airborne particulates.

As a marine service company, some unique projects land on Sea Services' doorstep that break the routine for the staff. Here's a prime example: Over a period of several decades, many local marine subcontractors, including Sea Service, were



employed in the recovery and examination of the contents of Department of Defense waste barrels from the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant. The "mystery barrels," as media reports dubbed them, were dumped into Lake Superior, just a few miles northeast of Duluth, from 1958 to 1962.

The U.S. Army and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency chose Sea Services to assist in plotting the locations of the mystery barrels. In 1993, Sea Services' Sea Colt tug and barge served as a platform for a side-scan sonar search and ROV (remotely operated vehicle) investigation of the barrels conducted by Oceaneering Technologies, a Houston, Texas-based firm that has regional offices in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe and

the Middle East. "Ultimately, the barrels' contents consisted of metal screws, springs and other classified parts from a new grenade design that didn't pan out. The random sampled barrels were unbreached, still solid with no materials breaking down or leaching any residue," Montgomery said. "They even tested them for radiation emissions and there was none. Best of all, this was the first of several Twin Ports federal contract jobs we've done over the years."

#### SUPPORTING THE MARITIME COMMUNITY

Giving back to the maritime community is an important part of the Sea Service story. The Montgomerys are always eager

to help the local Navy Sea Cadets with man overboard training (pictured above). And if they have a sense of adventure, a lucky family, or any group of two to six people, can participate in its charitable "Deck Hand For A Day" program. It includes a "Shore School" class to learn safety procedures, deck duties and rope work, followed by boarding a Sea Services vessel with staff to gain a firsthand commercial vessel experience.

#### PROUD OF ITS TRACK RECORD

Capt. Ed Montgomery is proud of his expert crew and the services they provide. And he's proud of the fact that the huge vessels served by his business's tugs and barges can rely upon them. "If we're late, it snowballs



– the tugs are late, the pilot's time is extended and the ship is now late and dock workers are standing by," he said. "It starts with us. It's just a progressive waterfall of extra cost. Being on time means a great deal to us. We have a 98.9 rating of being on time, every time. Our safety record and on-time arrival at Sea Service is second to none in the industry."

After nearly 30 years, he added, "It's a great location for a marine-related business, and we're looking at retirement and starting to downsize the company – or sell, should anyone be interested." 📧

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.

