

From the bridge

Capt. Jim Leaney shares his experience aboard Baie St. Paul

With a radio in one hand and a keen eye scanning the length of the ship, Capt. Jim Leaney watches from the port side wing of the pilothouse as his crew winches the vessel into position for the second run of iron ore. It is a procedure he's witnessed many times before, but every dock is different and this one has an unloading hopper that means the deckhands will need to move the cables to another bollard.

It is a brisk, clear morning in Duluth, Minnesota and the dock is strewn with the marble sized taconite pellets that are filling the ship's cargo holds. The men are layered in coveralls, jackets, life vests and safety helmets, their breath forming clouds of vapor in the near 0°F air.

Since leaving Chengxi Shipyard in Jiangyin, China on October 5, 2012, the *Baie St. Paul* spent 56 days at sea before arriving at the Panama Canal. Waiting at the western end of the Canal were Capt. Leaney, Chief Engineer Jean-Louis Girard and the 16 members of the crew assigned by CSL for the final leg of its maiden voyage to Montreal.

The crew, a mix of veteran and younger mariners, enjoyed what was for many of them a new experience—a 10-hour ride through the famous canal that transects Panama, connecting the east to the west. A late-season spell of mild weather followed the vessel up the east coast of North America.

"As soon as we got into the Gulf of St. Lawrence and got into Canada, boom, we get 65-70 mile an hour winds, a 30-foot sea and it's like: 'Welcome home!'" the Captain said.

Capt. Leaney began his maritime career working on the Lakes during the summer to earn money for college. It was not by any means his first exposure to ships.

"Sailing is sort of a family tradition," said the native of Owen Sound, Ontario. His grandfather worked for CSL in the 1920s



SOURCE: PATRICK LAPINSKI

Capt. Leaney's favorite new feature is the ship's digital positioning (DP) system. It is a technology adopted from offshore supply vessels that can lock the vessel onto a coordinate and, using the vessel's bow and stern thrusters, hold the ship in place within three feet.

and '30s, followed in the trade by Capt. Leaney's father, who sailed with the Misener family affiliates before becoming one of the first pilots in the Welland Canal during the early days of St. Lawrence Seaway system.

After graduating from college, Capt.

Leaney decided to follow the family tradition when he stepped aboard the steamer *Victorious* to begin his merchant career. He sailed with Upper Lakes Shipping for a number of years until he obtained his masters license in 1978. He had worked hard and achieved his rating at a relatively young age, but so had a number of other skippers and mates in the fleet. It was going to be a long wait before he would command a ship of his own.

By pure chance, Capt. Leaney heard of an opportunity with Canada Steamship Lines, the company with which his grandfather had sailed. He recalled how he looked into the tip he'd received in 1986 while on vacation in St. Catharines. He was disappointed to learn that CSL wasn't looking for crew, but at least he still had a job to return to. He was surprised when CSL suddenly called him back.

"You didn't tell us you had a captain's license," they told him. "We have a ship in the Welland. Can you be there in an hour?"

Capt. Leaney had only a few minutes to make a decision and an hour to pack his bags and get to Locks 7 and 8 at Port Colborne to begin his career with Canada Steamship Lines aboard the graceful steamer *Baie St. Paul*.

"Now I have got to make the new *Baie St. Paul* a great ship."

A quarter of a century later, Capt. Leaney stands at the other side of his career. He is an accomplished vessel master, his hair has grayed and his humor has a sense of self-deprecation, but his eyes still have a lively keenness for the job at hand.

"I'm the commodore of the fleet. I'm the senior captain. For a lot of the companies, the senior captains usually took out the new ships. I would assume that is why I'm here," he said.

Delivering a new ship. "Here" is the newly-built *M/V Baie St. Paul*, fresh from the shipyard.



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"It's an honor really, to take a new ship out," Capt. Leaney said. "It's like somebody saying, 'Here, take my Ferrari.' It's a great feeling. It's something that not everybody is going to do."

Once the vessel arrived in Montreal, there was still a lot of work to do. For the ride across the ocean the vessel was made as rigid as possible by leaving the entire length of the deck as one solid piece of steel, even beneath the hatch covers and by welding steel stiffeners to the deck between the hatches. All of that steel had to be cut out and removed before the vessel would be ready to take its first load.

While the work of readying the ship for service was going on, Capt. Leaney played host to a large number of guests during the two-week stay in Montreal, home base for Canada Steamship Lines, a Canadian shipping firm with over 150 years of tradition on the Great Lakes.

"It was the first chance for a lot of people from the office to get a look at the fleet's next generation of ships," explained Capt. Leaney about the tour groups he led through the ship. "No one has ever seen anything like this."

Getting to this point was a long and detailed process that began many years ago while Capt. Leaney was still master of the *CSL Niagara*. It took a lot of forward thinking and faith in the future of the industry.

"They're stepping into a new era," he said about CSL. "They put their foot forward before anybody else. They've got a vision. Their vision is to have the best, safest and most ecologically sound vessels on the Great Lakes, and not only on the Great Lakes, but we have an outside fleet doing the same thing."

Power and performance are two aspects of the ship's design that are expected to exceed the previous generation of vessels.

"She's got lots of get up and go and she's still got more in the basement. I'm not at all sure what's down there yet, but she's done quite well so far."

Bringing the vessel up the coast and across the Great Lakes gave Capt. Leaney a chance to get a feel for how she responds. He referred to the experience as being a little like removing training wheels.

"We're getting an exceptional speed with very little push on the engine. She has been designed to go faster than the other box-shaped ships. We've only been running 70 percent load on the engines and we were up to 14 knots. So we're automatically



SOURCE: PATRICK LAPINSKI

The self-unloading arm is extended as the Baie St. Paul attends to business in the system.

The passing of knowledge from veteran mariners to the next generation is a time honored tradition, no matter how sophisticated the technology.

two-plus knots faster than any of the other typical design ships like these.”

The ship's 12,000 HP (8,750 KW) engine is built to burn a low-sulfur fuel that creates fewer exhaust emissions. To further reduce emissions, a special scrubber system is in place for flue gasses. Generating power for the vessel is based on shaft demand, which means that extra power from auxiliary generators is primarily needed only for discharging cargo, requiring less fuel.

The vessel is built to comply with not only the current environmental regulations but those expected in the future as well, which at some point will include ballast water treatment. The ship, and those to come, are built with the tanks, piping and space required for the coming equipment.

Capt. Leaney said ship handling can either be a learned skill or something that comes naturally.

Although people come into the industry for different reasons, Capt. Leaney has always loved ships, even when a kid. As a navigator, he is always trying to perfect his game and the *Baie St. Paul* will give him a new set of challenges, and hopefully, no surprises.

“It is almost to a point where you’ve done it before, you try to do it with a little more finesse the next time. You are playing yourself against yourself. So there is always this little edge that you put yourself under and say ‘I can make this dock a little better than I did the last time,’” he explains. “You are trying to put yourself on another level.”

Vessel innovations. The pilothouse of the *Baie St. Paul* is set up a little differently than most traditional lakers. Capt. Leaney refers to it as an integration of deep-sea methods with operating practices followed on the Great Lakes. He stands alongside the large console of radars and monitors and electronic instruments, all part of the IBS, an Integrated Bridge System. One noticeable feature is the removal of the ship controls from the front window. This configuration, gleaned from the input of pilots, allows the vessel master to have an unobstructed view of the deck from any location on the bridge.

The Integrated Bridge System is designed by the Sperry Marine division of Northrup Grumman, a company noted for its expertise in the aviation industry. In addition to the radars and electronic chart display and information system (ECDIS), the vessel also has a closed-circuit camera system all over the ship.

“We have cameras everywhere you walk, ‘so we can find everybody,’” kids Capt. Leaney. All kidding aside, it’s an important new feature. Areas of the vessel are designed to be a “one-man” operation and the cameras provide a vital aspect of safety for the crew. “Anytime we’re in a close-course situation or limited water, you have to have somebody in the engine room and you have to have a bridge watch up here. So at times, going across the lake we can eliminate watchmen walking around and a secondary man down in the engine room. So, we have a camera monitoring system everywhere on deck, through the engine room and through the tunnel system.”

Capt. Leaney attended IBS training at Northrup Grumman in Charlottesville, Virginia. Its capabilities are impressive and the *Baie St. Paul* is currently the only ship in the fleet that has it until its sister ships arrive from overseas.



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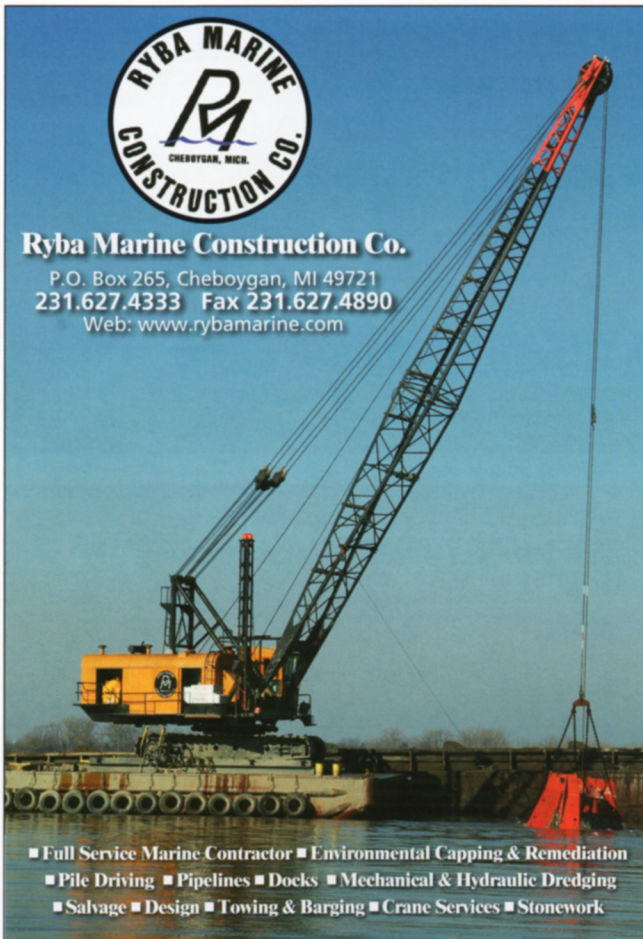
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"I can actually flip from a radar, say from the ECDIS in front of me right now, I can flip to another radar," said Capt. Leaney, "on the same screen—to any radar, (the vessel has three radars). It doesn't matter which one. I don't move."

Capt. Leaney's favorite new feature is the ship's digital positioning (DP) system. It is a technology adopted from offshore supply vessels that can lock the vessel onto a coordinate and, using the vessel's bow and stern thrusters, hold the ship in place within three feet.

"I can actually take control over at the wings when I'm making the walls and hold her along the wall without putting men down. I don't really have to tie up," said Capt. Leaney, noting the ship's many advanced attributes. "We're quite proud of her."

Meet the crew. Improvements in technology aside, Capt. Leaney knows that perhaps the most important aspect of operating a ship is the crew. "They actually make this ship go and they make me look good most of the time," said the Captain.

Because it's a new ship, the *Baie St. Paul's* crew was selected by the company and came from vessels throughout the fleet.

"We've got some new people—we've got some old people. They're trying to mix and mingle some of the older guys with the young people and some of the top of the line guys that can handle new and exciting things."

As a vessel master, accountability and responsibility are a part of the values Capt. Leaney makes part of his job. Each year he takes cadets aboard his ship and works with them to impart his experience.

"Even the knowledge about weather patterns and depths of waters, docks and how the currents run, needs to be passed on. That doesn't come out of a book. It comes out of a guy sitting in a chair like this," he said, pointing to the captain's chair.

The passing of knowledge from veteran mariners to the next generation is a time honored tradition, no matter how sophisticated the technology. Capt. Leaney believes that training at a maritime academy is only the beginning of a long process. In other words, books and simulators can only teach so much. He is passionate about selflessly sharing his knowledge and expects his crew to do the same.

"It has to be a never-ending process. Otherwise we get into trouble. If we don't pass all our knowledge on to somebody, that one little tidbit that you didn't give the mate could become a big issue in their lives and we certainly don't want to see anybody have a problem. We have enough variables here with mother nature."

As the taconite pellets resume falling into the cargo hold, Capt. Leaney looks about. There are new alarms sounds to learn that are emitted from the IBS, but he's becoming attuned to their meaning and he's already ordered a new barometer to replace the one in Chinese. In spite of some changes that Capt. Leaney feels are "encroachments" from the deep-sea world into the insular world of the Great Lakes, there is one thing in his opinion that has not changed.

"The industry on the Great Lakes is exceptional and we do it better than anywhere in the world. It doesn't matter who you talk to, you have better ship handlers, you have better navigation fellows," he said. "We're in that system where you have to be right on top of game all the time. We're meeting ships where you might only have 30 feet in between you. If those guys outside ever got that close to another ship, they'd be ringing bells, but we do that well and we've always done that well. People on the Great Lakes right now are the best ship handlers and the best sailors going."

This year Canada Steamship Lines will commemorate its 100th anniversary. This significant milestone will include many honors and celebrations and the *Baie St. Paul* will have the distinction of being the first vessel through the Montreal section of the St. Lawrence Seaway to kick-off the shipping season.

Patrick Lapinski ■

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