

Mv. Burns Harbor: A Tale of Two Captains

By Patrick Lapinski

On a balmy October of 2003 evening the 1000-ft ore carrier *Burns Harbor* arrives at the Superior entry, making its way through the autumn darkness to the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe dock for another load of taconite pellets. The *Burns Harbor* is one of two 1000-foot vessels making the steady run from Superior to Burns Harbor, IN, on Lake Michigan, for new owner ISG (International Steel Group).

Operating a vessel 24 hours a day, seven days a week, can be very demanding work. All large commercial vessels sailing the Great Lakes operate with two captains, one permanently assigned to the vessel, and one relief captain who usually rotates among several vessels throughout the year. The *Burns Harbor* is commanded by two experienced captains who have a combined total of seventy-nine years of sailing on the Great Lakes!

At the helm of the *Burns Harbor* on this trip is Captain Al Tielke, of Avon, OH. Captain Tielke is ISG's designated relief captain for the *Burns Harbor* and the *Stewart J. Cort*. Captain Tielke began his career in 1969 with the Interlake Steamship Co. Captain Tielke worked his way up the ranks from his first job as a deckhand on the *Str. Harry Coulby* to the rank of master in 1988, when he took his first command on the *Elton Hoyt 2nd*.

The permanent captain on the *Burns Harbor* is Dave Lindmark. Captain Lindmark began his career on the Great Lakes in 1957 for the Wilson Marine Transit Co. aboard the steamer *James Laughlin*. Dave stayed with Wilson until the early 1970s before joining Cleveland-Cliffs when Wilson went out of business. When Cleveland-Cliffs sold the last of its ships in the mid-1980s Dave signed on with Bethlehem Steel, now owned and operated by the International Steel Group (ISG). In 2001 Captain Lindmark was appointed as permanent master aboard the *Burns Harbor*.

When the *Burns Harbor* was built in 1979 for the Great Lakes Steamship Division of Bethlehem Steel, the steel industry had been in a long cycle of prosperity. Bethlehem had planned to build six of the 1000-foot class of vessels. The *Burns Harbor* was the third to be completed but became the last for

Bethlehem when the steel industry faced severe economic challenges in the early 1980s. In fact, it would be almost a year from its launching in October 1979 before the *Burns Harbor* would make its first trip in September of the following year.

In 1997 the *Burns Harbor* set the record for the largest iron ore cargo ever moved off Lake Superior with a load of 72,300 net tons from this same Superior dock. The *Lewis Wilson Foy**, sister ship of the *Burns Harbor*, holds the overall record with a cargo of over 81,000 net tons. Records are meant to be broken, but on this October 2003 trip the *Burns Harbor* would depart Superior with about 57,000 tons of ore, down considerably from its record cargo of five years ago. Low water levels across all of the Great Lakes in recent years are having a dramatic impact on lakes shipping.

* The *Lewis Wilson Foy* was renamed the *Oglebay Norton* in 1990.

ISG



Capt. Dave Lindmark



Capt. Al Tielke



A view across the deck of the *Burns Harbor*



Mv. Burns Harbor

www.inlandmariners.com