



73 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Capt. Paul Franks and Chief Engineer Dave Guay reflect on their experiences with Interlake Steamship Company

It's a clear morning in Duluth, Minnesota as the 1,000-foot iron ore carrier *Mesabi Miner* fills with taconite pellets destined for ArcelorMittal's steel mill at Indiana Harbor on Lake Michigan. At five in the morning, the air is still. The lights from the dock and the vessel are mirrored in the water surrounding the ship.

Onboard the vessel, light from the galley pours into a dimly lit dining room where Captain Paul Franks and Chief Engineer Dave Guay take an hour out of their morning to share insights into their respective careers with Interlake Steamship Company. Franks and Guay hold an accumulative 73 years of experience on the Lakes, but have reached the pinnacles of their industry following different paths.

dominated by steamships was unlikely, until the union called him back.

"They said they were building a brand new ship up on the Great Lakes and needed a new Third. It happened to be the *James R. Barker*," Guay said. "So I came up here in '76 and I've been up here ever since."

It was an intimidating experience at first. At 22, he was "the youngest kid in the company" and he was from the East Coast, a rarity on the Lakes at the time. Additionally, the fact that Guay was sailing on a license at such a young age was almost unheard of. His knowledge of marine diesels put him in the right place at the right time.

"The company only had steamships. They looked at me like I was the expert," Guay said, "and I'm walking around thinking 'Oh my god, don't ask me anything because I don't have any answers.'"

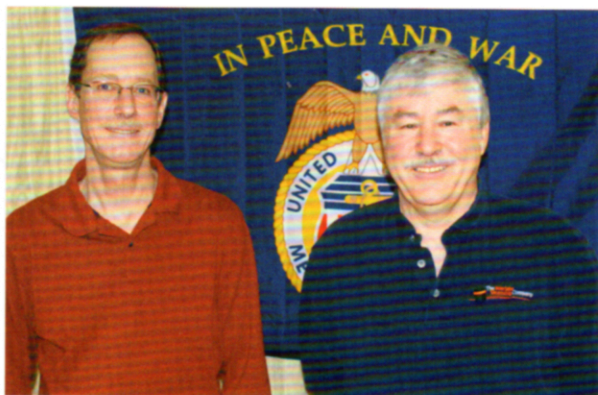
Captain. Paul Franks began his career on the Lakes the following summer, in 1977. A self-described troublemaker, options for the 18-year-old had narrowed to

joining the service or getting a job on the boats. He had no real knowledge of the Great Lakes but wasn't keen on joining the Navy, so he followed his father's "friend of a friend" connection to the *Samuel Mather* docked on the south side of Chicago.

Unlike the new *Barker*, the *Samuel Mather* was an older, World War II-era steamer. The previous summer the vessel was selected to carry on a company tradition when it became the sixth hull to honor Mather, one of the founders of Pickands Mather & Co. Franks first caught the boat on the Calumet, likely at the old Federal Furnace mill.

Geographically speaking, the gritty steel mills and docks along the Calumet River weren't far away from the neighborhood where Franks was raised, but it was a world of which he had no knowledge or intention of discovering. It was an eye opening introduction to a tough, hard-working lifestyle.

The reality of the unlicensed world for Franks in those early years were older steamers, shared living quarters, no air conditioning and the razzing that comes from being an 18-year-old, like getting sent back aft to get a bucket of prop wash or being



Mesabi Miner Captain, Paul Franks, (left) and Chief Engineer, Dave Guay (right). (Below) The *Mesabi Miner* has been home to both Franks and Guay. The ship could be the first in the Lakes to be converted to LNG fuel use.

Chief engineer. Dave Guay graduated from high school with his eyes set on attending the Maine Maritime Academy to study marine engineering. Two years into his program, Guay got his first glimpse of the Great Lakes when he was placed on the *Walter J. Sterling* for sea time. He found the area similar to his native Maine.

After graduating from the Academy in 1976, Guay put in applications with a number of fleets on the Great Lakes before finding work through the union on a supply ship in the Gulf. With his training primarily on diesel engines, Guay thought his chances of finding work in a Great Lakes industry



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Guay thought his chances of finding work in a Great Lakes industry dominated by steamships was unlikely, until the union called him back.

told to ask for the keys to the Soo Locks. But the money was good and Franks found it wasn't such a bad deal when comparing his world to his friends back on shore.

It took Franks 11 years, working his way up the seniority list, before reaching the point in his career to either move ahead or remain an unlicensed mariner. Franks' no-nonsense approach to life was a driving factor to getting his license.

"I just wanted to get a Third Mates license because I got tired of wheeling for mates I thought were incompetent," he said. After writing for his license over the winter break, Franks made the leap in 1989, leaving the wheelstand for a place in the front window.

Chief engineer. After his first season on the Lakes, Guay returned to Maine and got married. With his career on track, he began his second season on the *Mesabi Miner*, another new ship in the Interlake fleet. All went well until a mining strike in 1977 brought shipping to a standstill, giving Guay an extended honeymoon from July into November. In December, he was sent to Ashland, Wisconsin to finalize the winter lay-up on the *Miner*. Halfway through the process, the strike was settled and the engine crew readied the vessel to sail. Instead of returning home for Christmas, Guay would spend the next two bone-chilling months keeping warm in the pulsing world of the engine room. It was the end of February before he was able to return home.

If anyone had seen the miner's strike in 1977 as a harbinger of things to come they were astute because not many foresaw the economic collapse in the early eighties. Guay's career, while starting fast out of the gate, had slowed, largely due to the national economy.

"They were only running four or five ships, so I stayed at Second Assistant for a long time and you needed so much time as a Second Assistant to get your First, and you needed so much First time to get your Chief's license. So those were the lean years."

It would be almost a decade before Guay would move into a Chief's position, working as a relief for three years before getting his first permanent Chief's job in 1993 on the *Herbert C. Jackson*.

"The last Stanley Steamer," said Franks.

"Yeah," Guay added. "The last Stanley Steamer."

At the time, Guay had made diesel chief and was told his first chief's job would be on a steamer. So, he took an AMO cross-over course to get the required endorsement. "The next spring, they threw me into my first Chief's job on the *Jackson*, in '93."

Guay was reassigned to the *James R. Barker* in 1994 as Chief. After three to four years, he went back to the *Jackson*, staying until 2001 when he came to the *Mesabi Miner* where he has been permanent Chief for the past 12 seasons.

"What keeps me going? That's a good question after 37 years. I guess it would be the challenge. The challenge of the machinery, the challenge of the equipment, the challenge of maintaining it, making sure it's fine-tuned, you know, and everything is running perfectly," said Guay. "These engines run good the older they get. They're like a fine wine."

After sailing for 13 years on his master's license, Franks continues to credit the support he got from Captain Briggs.

Captain. For his part, Franks had no aspirations of being a captain, even when encouraged by Scott Briggs, one of Interlake's veteran skippers.

"He must have seen something that I didn't see and he pushed me to get my First Mate time in." Even then Franks was hesitant. "I was like, 'If I don't do it next year, I'll be Third Mate with him and he'll be mad at me that I didn't do it.'"

After getting his master's license, Franks still wasn't sold on taking it to the next level. Captain Briggs continued to encourage him.

"I never wanted to sail a boat and I'll be honest, I thought, 'I do not have the patience, the intelligence, the common sense or the knowledge.'" Briggs began asking Franks to join him in the pilothouse. Just when he was going to throw in the towel, Briggs told him he was going to be his relief in June.

"I'm like 'Oh no, no, I'm not ready for that.'" Briggs said: "No, you're not ready today, but you will be."

In 2001, Franks began relieving of the *Charles M. Beeghly*, his first captain's job. Seven years later he was given the permanent job on the *Lee A. Tregurtha* and, in 2010, was appointed skipper on the *Mesabi Miner*. After sailing for 13 years on his master's license, Franks continues to credit the support he got from Captain Briggs.

"He did for me what I would not have done for myself," said Franks. "I'll be forever grateful that he did that."

Even with his experience Franks said he never stops learning and enjoys the ship-handling aspect of his job. He talked about some of what goes through his mind when making a dock.

"I think it's the finesse," he said. "The amount of finesse and using the least amount of everything. Least amount of thruster, least amount of engines, least amount of rudder in creating the effect that you want. I guess it's an art. It's a challenge."

Franks has come to accept his role as captain and is now a mentor to younger guys coming up. There were aspects of the job he learned the hard way as a deckhand and has vowed to never hand down to anyone. There are also skills he's learned as a vessel master he is equally willing to share. The passing of knowledge from one generation to the next is a maritime tradition.

"We all do that," Franks said.

Guay, while more soft spoken than Franks, is also quick to give credit where it is due. He points home, to his wife who carried the load at home while he was away on the boats.

"As I'm getting to the waning years of my career out here, I'm really looking forward to spending quality time with my grandkids that I couldn't spend with my children and spending time with my wife and family as I go off into the sunset," said Guay.

As they've aged, both men can now look back with a good laugh, knowing they're still plugging away, closer to the final years.

"Thirty-six years later, here I am," said Franks with candor. "I have my rough days out here, but I really don't regret it. It's a lifetime commitment, it really is."

Patrick Lapinski ■



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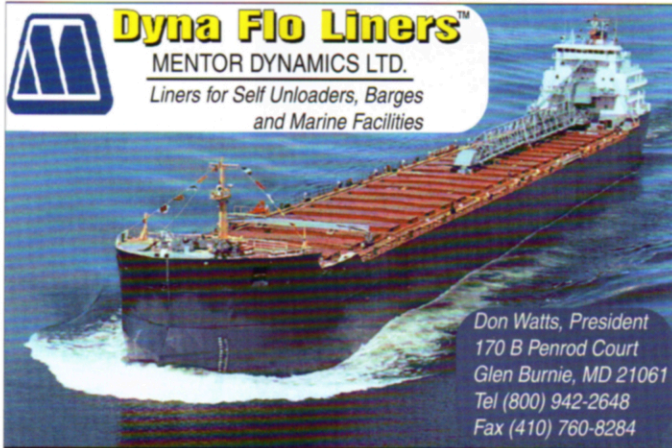
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