

## Mv. Stewart J. Cort

by, Patrick Lapinski

In the pilothouse of the mv. *Stewart J. Cort*, Captain Dave Mathie and First Mate Charlie Boles stare in disbelief at the high reading on the ship's barometer. Not totally trusting his eyes, Captain Mathie quickly double-checks the reading against the *Cort's* digital barometer. The digital reading matches the barometer attached to the port side wall of the pilot house. Simply put, high barometric pressure means fair weather, a good sign for the first week in November in the iron ore port of Superior, WI.

Captain Mathie is one of a new generation of captains on the lakes, a generation of sailors trained at the Great Lakes Maritime Academy at Traverse City, MI.

Dave, a 1985 graduate of the Academy began his career aboard the storied laker *Henry Ford II*, one of the earlier diesel powered ships on the Great Lakes. Captain Mathie is in his second season as captain aboard the *Cort*.

The *Stewart J. Cort* is one of the more unique vessels on the Great Lakes. In the estimation of many who have sailed on the *Cort*, there is no other vessel equal to it.

What is it that makes the *Cort* so special? To begin with, the *Cort* is the first of the thousand-foot class of ships built on the Great Lakes. As a result, it was built extra strong, just in case. The *Cort* is one of only a few vessels that utilize a transverse unloading system, a factor that today limits the number of docks at which the *Cort* can discharge cargo. The *Cort* remains the only vessel in its class to retain the fore and aft cabin design

that dominated Great Lakes ship design for nearly a hundred years. From a purely visual context, the vessel's trim lines belie its enormous size but make it a favorite of many ship aficionados.

The *Cort* was built in 1972 and operated for Bethlehem Steel for its first 30 years until 2002, when Bethlehem declared bankruptcy. The 2003 shipping season is the *Cort's* first year of operation under the leadership of International Steel Group (ISG). The *Cort's* main trade route continues to be Superior to Burns Harbor, IN, on lower Lake Michigan. An average trip for the *Cort* has it loaded with about 53,000 to 55,000 gross tons of Hibbing Taconite pellets. The average loading time for the *Cort* is about eight hours. **SMR**

Photos on Facing Page.

Clockwise from top left:

Mv. *Stewart J. Cort* Captain, Dave Mathie in pilot house; First Mate, Charlie Boles; the *Cort* moving cargo (notice its fore and aft cabins); the *Cort* loading iron ore.

Photos by Patrick Lapinski of Great Lakes Maritime Photography & Video: [www.inlandmariners.com](http://www.inlandmariners.com).

