

Doug Mims interview conducted by Anthony G. Potoczniak
2012-09-13

[00:00] Introducing Doug Mims, captain of the M/V Sam Houston

[00:14] Born in Vicenza Italy, Doug Mims {DM} travelled a lot as a child: spent one year in Italy, five years in Germany; father served in army including Vietnam; family moved to Hitchcock Texas, where DM attended junior and high schools, graduated in 1978.

[1:17] DM describes early interest in the maritime activities. Father owned a shrimp boat called the Green Plague. Often DM went shrimping with his older brother, where they would go shrimping in Moses Lake near Texas City. Shares stories about the shrimp boat experience and concluding it was a lot of work. Recollects being inspired by his sea travels between American and European continents on a navy ship. Describes his experiences in Hitchcock Texas and attributes his love of the water to these early experiences; his mother also had a float stand in Galveston.

[4:33] Outlines his professional work in the maritime industry: shortly out of high schools, DM worked on crew boats, and jack-up rigs, later acquired a Coast Guard license; subsequently received licenses to pilot larger boats; worked for a launch service in Galveston, which carried supplies.

[7:56] Shares his experience working at the Port of Houston (POH). After the economic downturn in 1982-83, DM was laid-off; later worked in the tourism industry and subsequently joined the Houston Port Authority in 1987, first as a marine firefighter deckhand on the Farnsworth fireboat; he really liked the benefits and stability of working for the POH. Recalls some fires he fought, while working there.

[11:05] Discusses how he transferred to the Sam Houston 1 ½ years later in 1988; from 1988 - 1997 worked his way up from pilot to captain. Describes the job as closest to having an office job [at the Port of Houston] as it gets, while still being on the water.

[13:00] DM gives a brief history of Sam Houston tour; the boat was built in 1958 for the Port Authority. Its main mission is to educate the public about the Port of Houston; a free boat tour, it is the best opportunity for the public to see the channel up close and observe the day-to-day operations of the docks. Talks about the upgrades made to the boat after 50 years of serving the public.

[15:45] About the tour: normally the tour lasts 90 minutes -- 7 ½ miles each way for a total of 15 miles. Sometimes the tour changes its course due to traffic in the ship channel. DM talks about navigating the ship channel during a busy time and canceling a tour due to bad weather conditions.

[19:53] Describes the types of groups that take the tour and how busy it can get throughout the year; outlines how the new security measures introduced after 9/11 has affected the tour; information about the TWIC card (Transportation Worker Identification Credential); since DM was born in Italy on an army base, had to prove his citizenship.

[22:53] Discusses how specific events, such as hurricanes, affect the Port of Houston, and how he and chief engineer rode out Hurricane Ike and had to monitor the lines after securing the boat.

[25:46] Describes the typical work around upkeeping an older boat; one-month out of the year, the tour is shut down for the boat maintenance and repairs;

[27:11] Shares a story about the summer of the great drought (2011), during which a school of black drum fish came up the port/bayou to the turning basin, where truckers were fishing off the docks.

[29:04] Typical work day at the Sam Houston: scrub, mop the decks, and prep the boat for each of the two daily tours (10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.)

[30:48] Describes how the ship channel has changed over the years, recounts how new facilities have been added to the channel; significance of the tour starting at the Turning Basin; one of the more industrial area of the Ship Channel: this is the place to be...

[33:41] Describes how the tragic events of 9/11 affected the tour. The M/V Sam Houston can carry 100 passengers. Recalls turning away people when the boat had too many passengers. Before 9/11, we used to take stand-bys. Now the tour utilizes an online scheduling system.

[36:59] Outlines the staff duties and their main function to ensure that the guests are safe.

[39:14] Describes how the new dock has changed and how it affects the way the approach of the boat into the new dock: You're only as good as your last landing -- you always want to be careful

[42:13] DM says his brother, Joe Mims, was an important influence in his life and encourage his appreciation of the maritime industry.

[43:45] Conclusion of interview.