

## NIELS AALUND

**SUMMARY:** Niels Aalund talks to Pat Jasper about the changes he has seen during his career at the waterfront. He describes how challenging it is to find well trained personnel and the efforts the West Gulf Maritime Assoc. is taking to create awareness about the port and start education programs in local schools and colleges. He also talks about setting up a newsletter which not only informs but brings people together on the same page.

March 19 2012

West Gulf Maritime Assoc.

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Native Houstonian, March 25th 1955. Moved to Ireland, at age 6. Father ran american factory there. Lived near Belfast and would go to docks to look at ships. Wanted to do something in the international field. Came back to Houston at 13. Had an opportunity to work or finish education and then work. Chose to work on international shipping. Got a job and finished school at night. Worked in Houston, DC> Baltimore, philadelphia. Love this industry and proud of the city the port has been names the most ethnically diverse city in the US. Port is a great melting pot. Think and feel to be successful don't have to be born in the US. Need the right work ethic and right attitude. Challenge to keep up a good workforce. COmmunity colleges and TExas Southern Univ. good maritime programs. Programs are coming up in a lot of educational institutions. Port is a sleeping giant, employ more people than the medical industry or NASA.

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First job was at the West gulf Maritime Agency in the ordering office. Set up to dispatch labor at the port of Houston. Back then had segregated unions. It was a black union, caucasian and latino union. Would keep track of how many man hours were worked by each union. Containerization was starting, had ships that had hatches and would divide them up. A federal judge came in and said no matter what, need to integrate the unions. Thought it was a good milestone in career. Was involved in work seven days a week. Orders would be placed a day ahead.

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Had very positive labor relations. Labor and management worked well together. Lot more break bulk and loose pieces. More handling. ships were at the dock longer. Less security. Could go on a ship with permission. COuld meet the crew and hang out with them.

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There was resistance to integrate because of tradition and maybe also because there was a fear of one group having more power than the other. There was the issue of seniority, there was anxiety of how it was going to work.

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WGMA opened door of opportunities. Got a lot of good contact. They lined up interviews for him. Fastest way to learn the business was to go into sales so started working for a steam ship agent. Worked in Houston during that time. Represented shipping lines and would go to potential shippers and try to get them to use services.

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A daily industry update report. Was hired as a consultant at WGMA before joining on full time. First job was to develop info about what members wanted from trade assoc. Needed to gather info of value and be able to bring it to members. So came up with newsletter that summarize events. Had three main areas regional, national and international briefs on pieces that would impact the industry. Done Monday-Friday every day. Keeps him on top of issues, keeps him informed, sense of pride on it. Title of senior VP but still don't shy away from the newsletter.

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Have worked for ship agents, vessel operators, lobbyist in DC for trade assoc., freight forwarding company, and then came back to trade assoc. business. Have learnt a lot from working in different areas. Been able to understand how different pieces of the puzzle fit together. Beauty is able to maintain relations in all the areas.

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WGMA - having been an agent and having worked at the stevedoring agency, had an idea of what was needed, There was a desire from the government agency to have a conduit to pass info to the right people, keep contact updated.

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WGMA was formed in the 60s. Prior to that each port had its own assoc. or group. Each individual port group would work with pilots, labor, to work with fee increases and so forth. There was a domino effect. One group would raise its price and it would travel up and down the coast. Group of companies got together and created the WGMA. They agreed to merge and come together and work on a regional basis on issues. It would also have a centralized payroll system. With a central Payroll and a central dispatching office, it cleaned things up and made it more efficient. In those early days role of agents was different. Very few ship owners had offices, so they appointed agents. In the liner trade, companies have agents but do the commercial aspects themselves whereas earlier it was done by agents.

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Three membership categories. Stevedores and terminal operators, Ship owners and ship agents. Maritime stakeholders - associate members involved in maritime commerce. WGMA is different because do the labor for the stevedores and terminal operators and also represent ship owners and agents. Very stringent on who is allowed in as a stakeholder. Companies willing to join have to write a letter of application which states that how they are involved in day to day Maritime commerce. It is then presented to the board with a recommendation.

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Only represent management and union labor. In Texas there are ILA employers and non ILA employers. Have collective bargaining and need people that are impacted by those decisions.

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There is a fee assess per man hour for stevedores and terminal operator member companies. For the ship owners and agents, solicit a lump sum fee for every ship that comes in. Third category will pay a lump sum amount. Can come for meeting but cannot be on board, Can be on committee and can't vote. Important to separate status.

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Enjoy public speaking. Daily newsletter goes out to 4000 email addresses. Have very key people who get the newsletter daily. Houston port does not have the problem of families and cliques that run certain parts of the industry. Here, the labor works with the management. 85% of the cargo goes to non port authority terminals. Just like the city, the cargo is diverse. "This is the big leagues". Lots of companies relocating to Houston.

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The ability to move products gives Houston a definite advantage. Gateway to Central America and Texas is the second most populous state. Impressed by how quickly we can start back up after a storm. Advocate speaks for someone else and has their best interest. If there is a consensus in the board, will use that to the best possible ability and advocate for members. Other trade assoc. might be a meet and greet, info exchange but don't take a position on things. That's what sets WGMA apart. Pilot rate hearings- most of the time sit down with pilot groups. Come to a consensus after a meeting of the minds. Couple of times when request was so high, so out of line, went to public hearing and asked why they shouldn't get that kind of increase. Members really appreciate that. Pilots are not part of membership but have very good relations with them.

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Will go to Washington to get additional funds for dredging. WGMA has been involved in the dredging advocacy. Sister groups that are part of National Assoc. of Maritime Organizations and other trade assoc. are all trying to get more dredging funds. Some are

more in dire need of others. Gulf of Mexico fills in real quickly and need constant maintenance efforts.

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Not interested in only Houston but also Galveston, Port Arthur, Beaumont, Bay-port etc. Very proud of policies, facilities. Good meeting rooms, don't charge for it. Lot of people come and go out of these meeting rooms, helps the industry in a way, Very open minded. Do what is best for the members but at the same time do not hinder progress. There need to be a good working relationship with a good level of compromise. Have been helpful with the education programs in the area, with a program in the local community college. Also proud of what the staff does outside of the office in terms of creating awareness.

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Automation and technology have played a big role. American merchant marine has dwindled. In a right to work state have a great relationship with the ILA. But still a lot of non union competition has come in. See a need for education and finding qualified personnel for the job. That is a real challenge. Very fortunate to be close to a balanced trade. Insulated from world economies and less impacted than other ports have been. Potential trade with Cuba will be very helpful for this port.

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9/11 has impacted access to the port but it has not stopped access from the port. Those that need to do business at the port can do it. More scrutiny and it is justified. There has not been a big problem. Used to be literally able to park next to a ship, but not anymore now.

Have never been to sea but worked at shoreside jobs. Have had the opportunity to travel overseas and learn about other ports. Learn about door to door shipping. Can't be all things to everyone. Shoreside operations - have to do it in a safe manner, so that product does not get damaged, is environmentally safe, gets delivered on time and will never lose sight of the human factor.

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The outlook for the ports of Texas is very positive. Anyone looking for a career at the port is lucky. Lot of opportunity, lot of good things coming this way. Very optimistic of the future. No family in the Maritime industry. Three daughters.