

Ports team up to drum up breakbulk business

St. Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes officials teamed up at a recent breakbulk transportation conference to seek out potential new business opportunities for the waterway. The Seaway's Highway H₂O booth made its first big international splash at the annual Journal of Commerce Breakbulk Transportation Conference and Exhibition, held in Houston.

In addition to the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC), Canadian Highway H₂O member ports attending the conference were the Hamilton Port Authority and long-term port tenant LP Services, the Toronto Port Authority, and the Port of Valleyfield along with terminal operator Valport.

U.S. Highway H₂O members at the event were the Port of Indiana and the Port of Cleveland. Midwest Terminals of Toledo International, one of the Seaway's largest clients, was also present. Midwest Terminals is a full-service port, foreign trade zone and warehouse facility located at the mouth of the Maumee River at the west end of Lake Erie.

International consultant Alan Taylor of Walsingham Logistics Ltd. in Kent, England, also worked the Highway H₂O booth.

Seaway management said it was very pleased with the response to the new booth, and that the H₂O branding, combined with compelling visuals, led to numerous inquiries from trade show attendees.

Aldert van Nieuwkoop, SLSMC director of business development, said the delegation made many valuable contacts.

"We met a logistics provider from South Africa and learned they work in very tight timelines, often providing quotes in just one day," Mr. van Nieuwkoop said. "This convinces us that to truly provide one-stop shopping, we need to give a price from A to B that includes truck, rail and marine.

"We will look at our on-line calculator to improve usability and data output to allow 3PL people to get a price instantly."

Project cargo is a growing sector for the Port of Hamilton, with the majority of it being moved through the terminal and stevedoring operations of port partners Federal Marine Terminals and Great Lakes Stevedoring.

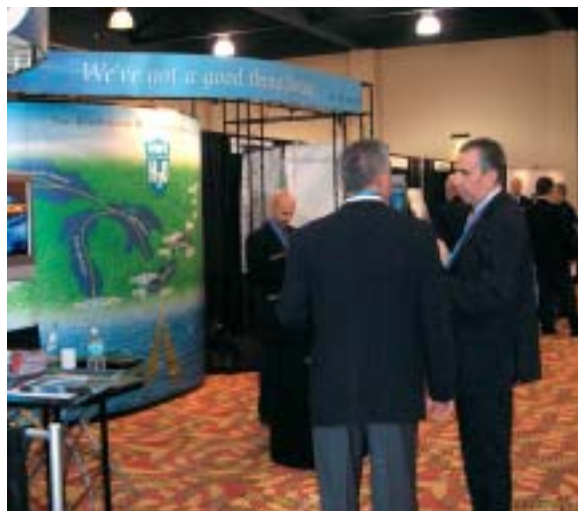
"Project cargoes fit the business model for the Port of Hamilton and demonstrate that an increasing number of multipurpose vessels are calling on the port," said Brent Kinnaird, manager of communications and public relations for the Hamilton Port Authority.

Janet Knight, the port authority's controller, said the conference provided a "great opportunity to meet the various players involved in the Highway H₂O project and to understand their perspectives, to make contact with Alan Taylor from the U.K., who outlined European experiences surrounding short-sea shipping, and to see the new trade show booth and the attention it generated."

In Cleveland, area manufacturers rely on the port to help deliver their locally made products to U.S. and foreign markets and to obtain low-cost delivery of raw materials. Eight international cargo docks consist of 110 acres of land alongside Lake Erie on the east side of the Cuyahoga River, while the Cleveland Bulk Terminal transshipment facility occupies 44 acres just west of the river. The port averages 12.5 million tons of cargo per year, including more than 700,000 tons of international cargo. Typical annual tonnages include breakbulk-packaged materials (500,000 tons) and loose



Aldert van Nieuwkoop (left) of the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation and Stephen Mosher of the Port of Indiana.



International consultant Alan Taylor (right).



St. Lawrence Seaway/Great Lakes delegation at breakbulk exhibition.



Matt Duty (left) of Midwest Terminals of Toledo International.

dry bulk materials such as limestone and grain (12 million tons).

"We are different from the competing coastal ports in that we are a destination port and, as such, we don't compete (with them)," said Stephen Pfeiffer, vice-president of maritime services for the Port of Cleveland. "Being able to sell a multi-port system is an asset."

He said the port recently handled 10,000 tons of steel billet arriving by barge from Sorel, Quebec, which formerly would have come in by rail. "We would not have even seen it," Mr. Pfeiffer said. "This is exciting as word gets around.

"We talked to the barge operator, who made money. The barge was unloaded in 20 hours, so the client is happy, and this is providing great prospects for 2006."

More than half of Indiana's border is water, which includes 400 miles of direct access to two major freight transportation arteries: the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway via Lake Michigan and the Inland Waterway System via the Ohio River. The Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor is located in Portage, on the south shore of Lake Michigan just 30 land miles and 18 nautical miles from Chicago. The port has year-round barge access to Midwest markets and the Gulf of Mexico through the Inland Waterway System plus direct access to the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence Seaway. It operates on 560 acres and is home to more than 30 tenants.

"What's good for one of us will be good for all of us in the long run," said Stephen Mosher, port director, Port of Indiana.

Matt Duty, director of marketing for Midwest Terminals of Toledo International, added: "Similar to New Orleans, we see one key as breaking down the deep-sea shipments into smaller shipments on more frequent ships and barges. We're eager to participate in this. Another key to customer service is to get the vessel in and out of the port fast."

Mr. Taylor has been in the shipping industry since the age of 19 and has spent the past 34 years working for Seacom in England. He facilitated a leg of the Seaway's European Trade Mission last year. Further discussions are underway that could see him as a European representative for Highway H₂O.

"I'm a great believer in Highway H₂O due to my past experience attracting business onto the rivers of Europe," Mr. Taylor said. "Highway H₂O is very similar but larger in size due to the scale of the waterways."

Photos: Ron Samson