



M.E.B.A.'s Pioneering Spirit Helps Union Blaze New Trails

In the last six years as your President, one of the most difficult things I have discovered about this job is convincing people to challenge the status quo. Many of us are all too willing to ignore opportunities if too many obstacles are thrown in our way. But time and time again, those who are willing to ignore the obstacles and ignore the pessimists have managed to change the world.

Each May, we remember the first voyage of the *SS Savannah* – a ship and a voyage that was considered unlikely just a decade before it succeeded. When told about steam power for the first time, Napoleon, the French Emperor who managed to conquer most of Europe in the early 19th century, was quoted as saying to Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steamship, “*You would make a ship sail against the winds and currents by lighting a bonfire under her deck? Excuse me, I have no time to listen to such nonsense.*” Yet on May 22nd, 1819, Fulton’s ideas proved the little Emperor wrong, and ushered in the era of steam power – a propulsion system that still propels ships plying the seas today.

On May 22nd we celebrated National Maritime Day and two days later I had the pleasure of speaking at the Maritime Day observance at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School. Maritime Day is a day set aside to honor our history, remember our fallen comrades and reconnect with our profession and the critical role it has played in our nation’s history. It is a testament to what can happen when you ignore the status quo and the cynics and push forward with a new idea.

During my tenure as M.E.B.A. President, I have striven to follow in the model of men like Fulton, and accomplish what others had claimed was improbable. Today, the M.E.B.A. is back on the Great Lakes, has returned to the Cruise Industry, and – most recently – has been reestablished in the LNG trade. Our new relationship with Exceleerate Energy and our return to the LNG business is the cover story of this issue of the *Marine Officer*, and it demonstrates what can happen when you rise up from the status quo and reach for the brass ring. I was constantly told that M.E.B.A. returning to the LNG business wasn’t going to happen. Even some within the Union had their doubts. But certain M.E.B.A. officials continued to work towards making the Union’s return to the LNG industry a reality. Once again, we have proven the naysayers wrong and M.E.B.A. is expanding back into a sector of the industry that had been all but abandoned by the American Merchant Marine for almost a decade.

The new relationship with Exceleerate Energy is the first step in what I hope will be a major M.E.B.A. presence in the LNG business. This win was a long time coming, and represented the collective work of our organizing, educational, legal, legislative and political arms. We demonstrated to Exceleerate that M.E.B.A. can provide world class mariners, train them effectively, provide

top-notch continuing education, move legislation on Capitol Hill and work effectively with the Administration while providing political support both at the state and federal level. This effective pairing of every aspect of the Union’s strengths is fundamental to our organizing work, and I feel that the model we developed for the LNG sector – which included all aspects of the Union from rank-and-file, employees and Union officials, as well as the various benefit plans, our School and the American Maritime Congress – is a model that we can use in the future to expand the Union and keep doing what we have been doing for the past six years: rounding up new jobs and new opportunities for our Union.

In the future, I hope that we can continue proving the cynics wrong and continue focusing on areas of the Union and the maritime industry that do not get as much attention as our core group does. We tend to focus on the deep-sea aspects of the Union, but we cannot allow ourselves to forget how fundamental our near shore and shore side workers are to the health of the Union. I hope that in the future we can work to expand our presence in the ferryboat business, particularly as we work with the Maritime Administration on their “Marine Highway” initiative. As maritime increasingly becomes a part of the global logistics industry, providing point-to-point services, rather than port-to-port, we should utilize our expertise and expand our presence in that business. Our Professional Office and Industrial Division (POID) and the City and Borough of Juneau are two areas where M.E.B.A. needs to expand, and I hope to build up those divisions and to continue finding innovative ways to spur our Union growth.

By this time, all M.E.B.A. members should have received information from me regarding an important internal Union issue. I ask that all of you please study that information and contact me with any questions you may have. Your participation in our Union’s democracy is critical.

On Maritime Day we honor our past but look to the future – and our path ahead is brighter as we look forward to a long, mutually beneficial relationship with Exceleerate Energy. We should also renew our commitment to the principles of Union democracy, cooperation and innovation that have been the hallmark of M.E.B.A. for over 135 years. Together, we will continue to blaze a new trail and prove that nothing is impossible.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ron Davis