

# MEBA Banner Raised Over U.S.-Flag Cruise Ships

How many MEBA members have been hesitant to bring their families on a cruise vacation because of the disturbing lack of U.S.-flag cruise ships – as well as the complete absence of MEBA-crewed cruise ships? Many of us have, including me. But that has all changed now!

I recently signed a contract with Norwegian Cruise Lines, covering all deck and engine officer billets on all American flag vessels owned or operated by the Company. It is anticipated that there will be approximately 27 officer billets per vessel.

I can remember the good days, in my early years as a third assistant engineer, when MEBA had contracts with passenger vessel companies such as Delta Lines, Prudential Lines and U.S. Lines. I also can remember the sad times when one by one American flag passenger ships were laid up and then scrapped. Then, tragically, the U.S. Flag passenger companies disappeared so fast it was as if they never even existed. Along with the disappearance of the passenger companies went the MEBA jobs that we all so dearly cherished. That is the way it remained for more than 20 years -- MEBA jobless in the luxury passenger trade with a virtually non-existent American flag cruise ship market and no sign of recovery on the horizon.

Beginning the first quarter of my administration there were rumblings in the industry that Norwegian Cruise Lines was going to make a run at operating cruise ships under the American flag. When I learned of this, I put in motion our organizing department, headed by Robert Martin, to be on the alert for any information regarding this potentially exciting proposition. I instructed your Union officials to be on the lookout for

any Norwegian Cruise Lines officials who happened to appear at various maritime functions. I directed our legal and legislative departments to shadow congressional officials who would have a hand in paving the way for the revitalization of the U.S. flag passenger trade.

When I first met with MEBA Organizing Director Robert Martin on this project, we knew that the chances of us winning this work would be slim. However, we were determined to persevere. I knew that the most recent American flag cruise operator was an AMO contracted company known as American Classic Voyages (AMCV). That company however went into bankruptcy, leaving a passenger trade void that needed to be filled. MEBA's Union officials and organizing, legislative and legal departments did an excellent job gathering the necessary information to put MEBA in a position to take the American flag cruise venture from a mere vision to an actual reality.

In order for MEBA to be successful, due to stiff competition from other maritime unions and even the possibility of a non-union operation, I orchestrated a two-pronged organizing approach as a way to distinguish ourselves from the competition. On the one hand, early last year, I began discussions with NCL's corporate officials. On the other hand, we began salting the vessels with MEBA members. We wanted to prove to NCL that our officers are the best-trained and qualified officers in the U.S. Merchant Marine. I encouraged our members to send resumes to headquarters which were then forwarded to the Company. Some MEBA members were hired, including Chief Engineer Paul Musotto. Brother Musotto along with other MEBA members demonstrated our union's strongest asset – the work ethic of the finest licensed officers in the American merchant marine. The two-pronged approach succeeded.

In early April 2004, I signed a contract with NCL that has an effective date of May 1, 2004. Currently, MEBA members are observers on the NORWEGIAN SKY.

MEBA officers are also working in the shipyard in Germany on the newbuild PRIDE OF AMERICA. In early June, the NORWEGIAN SKY will be re-flagged under the American flag and renamed the PRIDE OF ALOHA. Then, on July 4, 2004, history will be made. Norwegian Cruise Lines will introduce the U.S. flag PRIDE OF ALOHA to the inter-island Hawaiian passenger trade. This will be the critical first step to jump starting our domestic cruise ship industry and will represent an extraordinary pay off for MEBA members. This ship and future U.S.-flag NCL cruise ships will be manned in all licensed positions by MEBA.

The results for the MEBA are monumental. MEBA anticipates 27 billets on the first vessel, the PRIDE OF ALOHA. Second and a third vessels are scheduled to go into service in 2005. Furthermore, NCL is planning for a fleet totaling five U.S.-flag cruise ships. This marks an astonishing breakthrough for America and the MEBA to get back into the U.S.-flag cruise ship business.

Thanks to our determination to capitalize on new opportunities, the MEBA is now growing. This is made possible only by the efforts of your Union officials, the daily dedication and unmatched professionalism of the membership and our organizing department. Together, we are showing employers the real benefits of a MEBA relationship. Let's keep up the great work!

Aloha,

*Ron Davis*

Ron Davis  
MEBA President

