

Speech by MM&P President Don Marcus at the

MITAGS 50th Anniversary Celebration

Linthicum Heights, MD., June 6, 2023

On behalf of the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots and the Masters, Mates & Pilots Benefit Plans, thank you for attending the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies: ***better known as MITAGS.***

Over fifty years ago the premier training facility for ship's masters and licensed deck officers in the United States was established in what were then the farmlands Anne Arundel County.

There are some attributes of MITAGS that are particularly notable. First, MITAGS is the product of ***a collectively bargained, employer – union trust agreement.*** It is a **non-profit** institution, by and for union members to enhance their professional skills, safety, and employment opportunities. The creation of this facility is testament to the priority placed both by our membership and our employers on the essential need for maritime training. Moreso than ever, ***technology at sea is transforming the shipboard workplace.*** The vision of the founders of MITAGS was clear and the mission of MITAGS has not changed: MITAGS exists to provide the members of Masters, Mates & Pilots with state-of-the-art maritime training.

Another attribute that makes this institution special is that ***it is essentially a mentorship program.*** Like Masters, Mates & Pilots itself, MITAGS is not a business or a profit-making engine. It is an institution where the skills and knowledge of one generation are passed on to another all within the fraternal bonds of a trade union. Our active and retired Captains, Pilots and Deck Officers come here to pass on the torch and knowledge they have acquired, often the hard way, over their years at sea to the next generation. It is a beautiful thing, and it is done out of their love and respect for their chosen profession. It is no different now than it was when I first studied here not too many years after the school opened. Distinguished mariners such as Captain John Underhill taught not just about stability or celestial navigation, but also what it means to be a member of our Union and an officer in a venerable and time-honored profession. Captain Underhill gave

generously of himself as our faculty members always have. Today, whether it is **Captain Bob Kimball** coming in on a Thursday night or Saturday to teach a heavy weather course, **Captain Jerry Hasselbach** mentoring a young officer through our industry-leading Navigational Skill Assessment Program or **Captain Clark Sheehan** teaching ship-handling skills, our faculty are second to none in supporting their sisters and brothers in Masters, Mates & Pilots. Further, I am proud to say, that while this industry has not been the fastest to embrace *societal change*, MITAGS is leading the industry in the development of Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention training. Our **Union's Women's Caucus Committee, leadership and rank and file are committed to ensuring that MM&P ships are safe and respectful workplaces for mariners of all stripes**. In this effort, I would particularly like to acknowledge faculty member **Catie Gianelloni** who has been at the forefront of this critical effort.

It must also be said that this fiftieth anniversary was by no means a certainty. As with many non-profits during over two years of a global pandemic, MITAGS might well have become a casualty. The dedicated MITAGS leadership, faculty and staff made great efforts and personal sacrifices to keep this institution afloat. Many long-time staff were laid off and not hired back due to the draconian collapse of the school's conference business lifeline. The exceptional efforts of the remaining staff, faculty and management kept the school afloat and on course. A firm foundation was established by the *outstanding, long-time Executive Director, Glen Paine*. This has been carried forward by his successor, **Eric Friend**, and has been essential to the stability and survival of MITAGS. Special and personal thanks are also due to Captain Bob Becker, a mentor of mine at sea and a rock at MITAGS, Captain Becker was part of the strong MITAGS leadership team that weathered the COVID storm.

At this time, we are happy to say that the MITAGS Fiftieth Anniversary has been realized. The future, while never assured, is bright. Along with MITAGS **Executive Director** Eric Friend we welcome the MITAGS **Director**, Mark Heward, who has a deep knowledge of the **technological** challenges facing our industry and the training necessary for our membership. We are thrilled that Mark brings his expertise from the other side of the pond to help propel us into the future.

To our staff, be it in the kitchen, hotel, MITAGS administration or faculty, thank you for making this celebration possible – and to our employers thank you for having faith in the skills of our membership and your commitment to the United States Merchant Marine. Without our employers and without collective bargaining, we would be reduced to the status of Flag-of-Convenience mariners: fodder on the global labor market. We thank you and we thank the many outstanding plans professionals: actuaries, accountants, attorneys and Plans administrators and staff for keeping us on track.

Particular notes of gratitude are due to **President and CEO Matt Cox and Captain Jack Sullivan of Matson Navigation Company** for their generous contribution to MITAGS and to recently retired Plans Counsel **Barry Slevin and the experts in his firm** for their brilliant work on behalf of our Employer-Union Trust Funds.

Finally, to conclude, I would like to recall and thank those first graduates of original “MATES” - Program School, who will be honored guests at our Union’s next Convention. The predecessor school of MITAGS was in downtown Baltimore at the Emerson Hotel. It provided Coast Guard license training to prospective MM&P members during the Viet Nam War. What started as an emergency wartime program developed into an enduring world class institution for **Maritime Advancement, Training, Education and Safety.**

Thank you all and enjoy the evening.