

EEN "SWEET MEMORY"

Afgelopen Kerstmis had ik van mijn kleindochter een "Kerstcadeautje" mee gekregen naar Texas. Maar pas afgelopen dagen ben ik zo ver gekomen, dat ik het boekje eindelijk eens ging lezen. Tot mijn verbazing zat daar nog een krantenknipsel ("Houston Chronicle") in, wat ik me achteraf toch wel weer herinnerde.

U moet nog weten, dat ik als havenloods ben begonnen in "de Stad"/Merwehaven en in "Tankhoofd", waar tussen de radarpost "Tankhoofd" lag. Voor ons was die post belangrijk wanneer je b.v. een "grote" vertrekkert uit één van de oliehavens en/of "Eemshaven" daar had: de radarwaarnemer waarschuwde dan (onder andere) de (binnen-)vaart op de rivier. En een "bepaalde radarwaarnemer" zei dan tot slot altijd tegen de betreffende loods "Met garantie loods, kom 'r maar uit".

Een bezoekje aan die radarpost lag natuurlijk voor de hand en werd door beide partijen zeer

gewaardeerd. Je hoorde toen óók van elkaar (maritieme) dingen/verhalen, waarvan je niet wist dat ze bestonden ! Erg leuk en leerzaam (zelf heb ik overigens geen kopietjes of iets dergelijks meer). Achteraf bleek, dat de betreffende waarnemer op minder dan 500 meter van mijn (toenmalige) woning in Hoogvliet woonde. Onze echtgenotes gingen zelfs bij elkaar koffie drinken. Maar dit terzijde. En de familie daar is overigens ook al overleden.

Maar die werk-mentaliteit van vroeger kwam ik weer (min of meer) tegen in het bijgesloten krantenknipsel! En het werd zelfs nog versterkt tijdens een "Haven-Rondvaart" door de haven van Houston (een zéér simpele versie van de Rotterdamse SPIDO), waarop ik door mijn (klein-)kinderen werd getrakteerd, tijdens mijn verblijf aldaar.

Met vriendelijke groet,
Henk Kool

BUSINESS

Channel session helps bridge dialect divide

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communication with a diverse group on the waterway to help provide safe navigation. Their duties include alerting mariners about when they'll meet other vessels in the waterway or when a faster vessel will overtake them.

"A lot of these guys on the radio are used to talking to each other on the radio, and so they speak really fast," said Lt. Jessica Fennoy, a VTS watch supervisor.

Felix, a Vessel Traffic Service specialist, eventually came to understand that "top and around" meant the mariner was turning around. And a certain string of syllables meant the mariner was aboard the Caroline Guidry, a particularly tricky boat name to catch over the radio.

"It does not sound like 'Caroline Guidry,'" he said. "You just learn the grunt and know what they're saying."

There's somewhat of a language barrier for those on the water, too. Towboat captains, for instance, can struggle with military jargon, said Jim Guidry, executive vice president of vessel



Leslie Plaza Johnson

Staff members of the Vessel Traffic Service work in 12-hour shifts. "Because of the importance of it, I feel good going home and feeling I did something for the community," one staffer says.

operations for Houston-based Kirby Corp., the country's largest operator of tank barges.

Guidry emphasized this isn't a complication that would cause incidents or accidents. It's just a quirk of the diverse maritime industry. A towboat captain from Louisiana might be speaking to a Russian ship captain and then a Coast Guard member from New York.

"Everybody's speaking a com-

mon English language that no one understands," he said. "Everybody gets used to it."

Brownwater University, sponsored by the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association and the American Waterways Operators, helps bridge the divide. The 2½-day session is held in Houston at least once a year to bring together the towboat industry, Coast Guard and Houston Pilots. It's an opportunity to meet each other in

person and learn about the different workplaces.

"It's been very successful," said Jim Stark, president of the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association, "and I think it goes a long way to building personal relationships."

Petty Officer 3rd Class Joyce White, an operations specialist, checked into the VTS on Oct. 1 and, after more than two months of book work, put the radio head-

set on for the first time Dec. 14. Someone else listened in, too, to provide assistance.

White was nervous at first about putting her book knowledge to use, but she was feeling confident by Day 3. She didn't look to her supervisor as often for assistance, and she felt better asking mariners to repeat themselves or spell out information with the military alphabet — Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc.

For Felix, it took four to six months for the radio conversations to become second nature. He worked for the Vessel Traffic Service for four years as a member of the Coast Guard. He left the Coast Guard but was later hired back as a civilian.

Felix enjoys the work. And he's proud of his role in keeping mariners safe and, ultimately, helping facilitate the economic impact spurred by the Ship Channel.

"It's just a unique job," he said. "Because of the importance of it, I feel good going home and feeling I did something for the community."

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