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—Photo by Jeff L. Yates

The Mary Lucy Lane was acquired by Canal Barge Company in 1999.

Canal Barge Celebrates Anniversary With Christening

BY CAPT. RICHARD EBERHARDT

Canal Barge Company celebrated its 75th year of operations with the christening of the line boat Mary Lucy Lane in ceremonies held at the new Mardi Gras World East along the Mississippi River in New Orleans on February 7.

Under beautiful skies to match the ceremony, Mary Lucy Lane broke the bottle of champagne in a ceremony aboard the boat that was originally named the Frank H. Peavey. Canal acquired it, along with a sister boat, the Killian L. Huger, in 1999.

Mary Lucy was reluctant at first to have the christening event be for the boat named in her honor, telling her husband David Lane she preferred that they honor one of the other family members. David Lane is senior vice president of

marketing and younger brother of Merritt Lane, the company president and chief executive officer. It was Merritt who insisted the boat be christened in Mary Lucy's honor.

Originally built by St. Louis Shipbuilding in 1979, the 3,800 hp. MV. Mary Lucy Lane measures 140 by 38 by 10 feet and was completely gutted and refurbished at Elmwood Shipyard in 2007 with the latest soundproofing to exceed crew endurance management system (CEMS) standards.

David Lane, speaking about his wife, said, "While her namesake is much like the boat—attractive, strong and a workhorse—I am pleased to say that she does not require a personal makeover," eliciting a laugh from the several hundred in attendance.

Inside, the crew of eight or nine has a very quiet boat. Engineers on watch sit in an enclosed, air-conditioned office in the immaculate upper engine room.

Crew

Capt. Gary "Shorty" George was the captain on watch for the ceremony. His father, retired

Capt. Bill George, worked for Canal Barge for 38 years and, after raising their children, mom Lavon George joined Capt. Bill as cook for 14 years. It is a testament to how well Canal Barge treats its employees.

Capt. Shorty George has been with the company for 37 years, while Pilot Thomas "Earl" Newell has 30 years of service. Engineer Kenneth Smith has 17 years, while Engineer Terrill Young has 10 years and worked on the MV. Mary Lucy Lane for four years prior to joining Canal Barge Company.

Other crewmembers are pilot Teddy Carlisle, cook Colleen Walker, mate William "Corbit" Cockrell, tankermen Leland Glasscock and Justin Brummel and deckhands Demetrias Henderson, Darren Middleton and Ben Bourgeois.

Christening Ceremony

Monsignor Christopher Nalty, pastor of the St. Stephens Church in New Orleans, blessed the boat and presented the ship's Bible to Capt. George.

Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) praised the company for its deep history, tradition and solid values. Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Canal Barge temporarily moved operations to Houston and Memphis, only to return in a show of solidarity with the recovering region.

"They don't 'shift with the passing winds,'" Vitter said. People like those of Canal Barge "get us all through difficult times like Hurricane Katrina and today's economy. Please know I stand as a willing, committed partner with the maritime community of greater New Orleans and will continue to work for such high priority items as funding for the Corps of Engineers dredging."

Newly-elected Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao (R-La.) also had praise for the company's "tradition and being able to expand when so many others are laying people off and shutting down." Cao pledged to "support the maritime industry to expand and serve as a catapult to help revitalize the area economy."

Delivering the best one-liner of the presentations, Cao, the first Vietnamese-American elected to Congress, paused and took in the size of the MV. Mary Lucy Lane. "If I had a boat of this size in 1975, I could have evacuated half the country," he joked, making light of the many Vietnamese boat people who crowded onto small



Crew with Mary Lucy and David Lane.

vessels to escape the Communist invasion as Saigon fell. Capt. Lincoln Stroh, commander of Coast Guard Sector New Orleans, also had some light comments, saying that Canal Barge was founded the same year his father was born, an important year in his legacy. The boat was built the year he graduated from high school. He noted that the captain and pilot have a combined 67 years of service with Canal Barge and an engineer has 17 years as well.

Referring to the longevity and experience of the crew, Captain Stroh said, "It is a tribute to safety and security on the waterways." He added, "I am impressed with Merritt Lane's leadership in the towing industry and his strong advocacy as AWO chairman."

Buying The Boats

David Lane explained the circumstances of Canal Barge acquiring the boats. The company learned the boats were available for sale on a Friday and would be sold at auction the following Monday. A six-man team was sent to look at the two boats on Saturday.

They returned and a meeting was held that Sunday morning at the home of his uncle, Merrick Jones, son of company founder Joe Jones,



—Grevy Photography

Mary Lucy Lane christens vessel.

a founding partner of the prominent New Orleans law firm Jones, Walker, et al. For an hour, the group debated the value of the boats.

"Boys, if you really like the boats and think they will last 20 years or more, treat them like a house you plan to live in for a long time, pay the price to get them and I'll foot the bill," Jones said, ending the discussion.

"That's what I love about this company, the ability to

make quick decisions with the long-term view," David Lane said. The boat has worked for the same company, Marathon Petroleum, ever since Canal Barge purchased it, transporting three to six oversized tank barges between New Orleans and the upper Ohio River. "It's very versatile and a real workhorse with an outstanding crew."

Canal

Founded in 1933, Canal Barge Company Inc. is a privately owned, independent marine transportation company headquartered in New Orleans, explained Merritt Lane. The company has 33 towboats and more than 800 barges working inland and a fleet of offshore deck barges working worldwide.

Growing from a one-barge operator to one of the most diverse marine transportation companies in the country, Canal Barge moves bulk petroleum products, as well as coal, pet coke and stone. It has transported some of the largest equipment ever moved on the water, including refinery and power plant components, oil and gas exploration structures, military cargos, containerized freight and components of NASA's space program, he said.

In the Chicago area, Canal Terminal Company owns and operates a state-of-the-art liquid storage and terminal facility, specializing in handling asphalt, black oils and high-end chemicals, Merritt Lane said. The recent acquisition of Illinois Marine Towing makes the company the largest independent towing and fleet service on the Illinois River.

He said the company's mission is to form "long-term, mutually profitable partnerships with our customers by providing consistently high-quality marine transportation, bulk liquid storage, and management services" by developing a "deep understanding of the customers' business requirements."

In 2004, Canal Barge Company was awarded a Silver-level William M. Benkert Award for Marine Environmental Protection from the U.S. Coast Guard, the company's second Benkert Award, Merritt Lane said.

"This national award recognizes excellence in marine environmental protection by vessel and facility operators," he said, adding that the company "regularly receives national recognition for safety and environmental performance, such as the Jones F. Devlin Awards and Environmental Achievement Awards as well as awards from customers for quality and service," he added.

"Canal Barge Company is at the forefront of developing industry policy and best practices," he continued. "We were active in developing the American Waterways Operators' Responsible Carrier Program (RCP) and were one of the first companies to self-certify. RCP is an industry-developed safety management system committed to implementing operational standards to eliminate accidents, injuries and spills."

The company faced its "greatest test during Hurricane Katrina, and our people showed their amazing character and commitment to their company," Merritt Lane said. "We returned to



Cook Colleen Walker.

—Photo by Capt. Richard Eberhardt



—Photo by Capt. Richard Eberhardt
Engineers Terrill Young, Kenneth Smith in engine room.

New Orleans after about 100 days of remote operations with more confidence in ourselves and with a greater sense of identity, retaining most of our people and hiring dozens more. Our people have been very active in the rebuilding of our city while continuing to grow our business.” In 2007, Canal Barge acquired the ConocoPhillips inland marine operation consisting of seven

inland towboats and 14 inland tank barges that operate primarily on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). In 2008, the company acquired Illinois Marine Towing. “Canal Barge understands that our track record of safety and reliability is fundamental to our reputation.” Merritt Lane concluded, “Our future success will be based on our custom-

ers’ confidence in our ongoing commitment to quality management, continuous improvement, environmental responsibility, safety and operational reliability.”

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Canal Barge Celebrates 75 Years



David and Mary Lucy Lane with sons Merrick and Christopher (William not pictured).



Canal Barge Company family and friends.



Merritt and Elly Lane with daughters Caroline, Sarah and Isabel.



Capt. Lincoln Stroh.



Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao.



Frank Golemi, 60 years with Canal Barge Company.



Sen. David Vitter.



Capt. Gary "Shorty" George in pilothouse.



Monsignor Christopher Nalty and Capt. "Shorty" George.



Mary Lucy Lane with christening gift.



From left, Joe Tyson, Pat Riley, Howard Brent, Merritt Lane, Elly Lane, Leo Cattoni, William T. Smith, Douglas Downing, Bill Contos and Glen Dawson.