



# Meet the Crew

## MARK ST. PIERRE

### At home in the engine room

Chief Engineer celebrates life aboard

Charles M. Beeghly

BY PATRICK LIPINSKI

In August, 2003, Mark St. Pierre was appointed Chief Engineer on the steamer *Charles M. Beeghly*. "I'm thrilled," Mark admits, "but sailing is first."

Mark now spends a lot of time in his "office," an adjoining stateroom next to his sleeping berth, ordering supplies, managing inventory and complying with maritime rules and regulations.

The room is dark and quiet, offering a period of respite from the noise and energy two stories beneath him. A quick glance around the room reveals steel cabinets full of prints and plans, glass-doored cabinets lined with manufacturers' catalogs and a metal desk spanning the width of the room littered with pens, pencils, parts, note pads, manuals, desk lamps, computers, printers and various electrical instruments. The only space with any available room is the green naugahyde couch requisite in most Chiefs' offices, which, of everything in the room, is probably the most seldom used. The office walls are lined with calendars from various vendors and dealers, circulating fans and safety notices. The room's pie-shaped dimensions and canted floor are the few reminders of its location on a ship.

Mark, a native of Brunswick, Maine, was the first in his family to choose sailing as a profession when he enrolled in the nearby Maine Maritime Academy in the early 1970s.

"The Maine Maritime Academy had a good reputation for engineering degrees and jobs," Mark says. "A lot of guys would go there, get the degree, sail for a few years, and then use that experience as a stepping stone to get a job onshore. I really wanted to sail."

Four years later, along with 34 others, Mark graduated and entered the world of marine engineering. The demand for engineers was hot and a scant three days after graduating, Mark was heading to the Gulf of Mexico as a cadet aboard a U. S. Lines merchant vessel.

With an eye toward keeping his options open, Mark took a look at the Great Lakes as a better opportunity to rapidly advance his career.

"They were offering some nice packages



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to upgrade quickly," he recalls, so before the year was out, Mark was heading north towards a moving target, a ship that he hoped to catch in the small Ohio town of Ashtabula.

"My first ship on the Lakes was the *J. L. Mauthe*, May 5, 1979," he says. The next three months were an intense time for the young Third Assistant. Under the tutelage of Chief Engineer Bill Jarvis, Mark began learning the nuances of working aboard steam-powered vessels, performing relief work on the *Mauthe* and later, the *Elton Hoyt 2nd*.

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Throughout the 1980s and '90s, Mark steadily worked his way up the seniority list with Interlake, earning his Second and First Assistant certifications along the way. Since his move to the Great Lakes, Mark has only sailed with the Interlake Steamship Company and is appreciative of the loyalty they have shown him.

"I feel like I'm part of the Interlake family," he says. "I've done a good enough job that they've appreciated my work."

In the summer of 2006, the steamer *Charles M. Beeghly* will become the largest steamship on the Great Lakes following the conversion of fleet-mate *Lee A. Tregurtha* to a diesel-powered vessel. There are many things Mark finds to his liking about sailing on the *Beeghly*. In his estimation the engine room is well laid out, the engines and machinery run well and the ship itself makes good runs to many ports on the Lakes rather than being confined to a few dedicated runs. Even with manning reductions in recent years, Mark knows what it takes to keep everything in top order.

"We've put a lot of work into this ship," Mark says. "I have a lot of pride and appreciation for these workers."

The *Charles M. Beeghly* has been home to Mark for more than 10 years, and if Mark has his way, he will stay until he retires.

"I don't care to work anywhere else," he says. "When I'm done here, my career is over."

Mark politely declined a request to have his photo taken on the deck of the *Charles M. Beeghly*. "I don't belong up here," he adamantly states, "besides, no one would believe it. I belong in the engine room." ■