



TAKING THE HELM

Captain Kendall carves out his niche by following in his father's footsteps

Captain George Vaughan Kendall thought he would have to go to anchor when he reached Duluth. The upbound vessel 30 minutes ahead of him was headed to the same elevator. When the winds began picking up and his competition decided to go to anchor, Vaughan kept going, his ship easily handling the medium-sized waves.

"When we got past Keweenaw it calmed right down," he said. "So we got to load without any delay."

On his way up the lake, Vaughan planned how to dock at this particular berth. He would back his ship in rather than go nose in like everyone else.

His ship, the *J. W. Shelley*, handled perfectly. Once Vaughan cleared Connor's Point, he held his heading further up the channel before putting the engines into reverse. With a couple of turns he was well on his way to the berth beneath the shiploading gallery on the Tower Avenue slip at Cenex-Harvest States in Superior, Wisconsin.

As a ship-handling experience it was easy. The longshoremen even commented that it was the first time they had ever seen a 730-foot vessel back into the elevator. It was a maneuver more common to saltwater ships. Vaughan's crew, however, was not impressed.

Located back aft, on top of the poop deck is the ship's television antenna. Towering above it, and the ship, were the 100-foot tall concrete silos of the elevator. For the next two days this wall of concrete and grain would completely block any television signal.

"The crew wasn't very happy," said Vaughan. "I won't be backing in there again."

Where it all began. Vaughan began to pursue his career as a sailor in 1997, when he enrolled at the Marine Institute at St. John's, Newfoundland. He credits growing up on the water in Lewisporte, Newfoundland, where his backyard ran to the ocean, as being influential in his decision to sail, but it wasn't just the location that made him turn to the sea for a livelihood.

George Kendall, Sr. already worked on the Great Lakes, along with two of his brothers. It didn't help that Vaughan, along with his mother and sister, occasionally accompanied his father on his ship for several weeks at a time during the summer, whetting the youth's appetite for a life with the sky above and the sea below.

Vaughan's father was not as keen on the idea, however. The seasoned veteran knew the difficulties of leaving a family at home for months at a time.

"Once he saw that I was serious about it, he supported me all the way," Vaughan said.

In 2001, Vaughan went to work aboard the self-unloader *Algorail* as Third Mate. Over the next four seasons, he wore the uniform of Algoma Central Marine, working as a relief mate throughout the fleet. It was the same company where Vaughan's father worked as a Captain. In an ironic sense, even passing each other on their respective ships gave them more contact than they normally had during the course of the year.

Algoma Central Marine is one of the largest and most longstanding Canadian fleets operating on the Great Lakes. There is stability in numbers and a long-term career could reap many rewards and benefits. For the younger Kendall, it also meant at least five or six more years before becoming even a relief Captain. Vaughan wanted to push himself further, even if it meant taking risks along the way.

Risk and opportunity. In the summer of 2005 that risk came knocking—in the form of an offer. A start-up company was looking for crew to sail two ships it had just acquired. They offered Vaughan a First Mate's position. It was now time to weigh in on the decision: stability vs. uncertainty. In Vaughan's mind, risk brought potential and with only two ships on the roster, it would greatly increase the likelihood to make Captain before his 30th birthday.

From fit-out until May, Vaughan worked on the newly-christened *Maritime Trader*, nicknamed "the big blue boat" because of

its bright blue hull. Aside from a couple of short relief mate's jobs on the *Voyageur Independent* and the *Voyageur Pioneer*, Vaughan spent the next two years as First Mate on the *Trader*.

The *Trader* was the former *Mantadoc*, which handled easily because of its smaller size. As Vaughan soon learned, you could still pack a lot of grain in it, being smart about filling all the nooks and crannies onboard.

Dream come true. In 2007, Vaughan became permanent skipper on the *Maritime Trader*, at the age of 28. It was a momentous time for the young captain, a day he will never forget.

"We were in the Welland," Vaughan recalled. "My father's ship just happened to be upbound after I'd been appointed Captain. When he passed, he gave me a full Master's salute, my first as a Captain. It was really special."

The following year, when the St. Lawrence Seaway celebrated its 50th Anniversary, Vaughan and his crew enjoyed many of the festivities, dovetailing on the 400th anniversary of Quebec City. That fall, however, the mood turned somber as the young fleet was sold. He didn't have long to wait for another opportunity.

The offer came with the reclamation of another old ship. Again, Vaughan had to wrestle with the question—was it worth taking another risk? In the fall of 2008, he climbed aboard the freshly painted *J. W. Shelley* as new permanent skipper.

For two seasons, the *Shelley* has been home for Vaughan. Every 45 days he goes home to his wife. It's a worry-free vacation because, when he's away, he knows the ship is in good hands; those of his father. Captain George Kendall, retired after 30 years with Algoma, is easing into full-time retirement as relief skipper to his son.

"We pass each other at the gangway," Vaughan said. "And it's easy on the crew because there's always Captain Kendall in the pilothouse."

Patrick Lapinski ■