

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
**M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES**  
*The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"*  
Number 13 – March 30, 2023



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## **SANDY GROUND FIRE EMBLEMATIC OF DIMINISHED SAFETY CULTURE SAYS LETTER**

In a scathing letter, the M.E.B.A. accused New York City's Department of Transportation of skimping on safety training and failing to mention a critical change in fuel return procedures that may have sparked a fire in the engine room of a newbuild Staten Island Ferry in December. The letter was sent to the Coast Guard's Captain of the Port in New York and has now been posted on the M.E.B.A. website. It criticizes the City's determination to put the Ollis-class ferries into service amid ongoing staffing shortages and "insufficient and disorganized training" that helped cause a near disaster onboard the SANDY GROUND, one of the newbuilds recently put into service.

The crewmembers on the vessel responded heroically on December 22 after an engine room fire led to a prompt evacuation keeping all 868 passengers safe. As the crew began the systematic and efficient evacuation of passengers, engine officers sealed off the engine room and deployed the Novac system to snuff out the flames. The crew acted quickly, strictly adhered to protocol, and extinguished the fire even before first responders arrived on the scene. All passengers were delivered to safety though there were a few minor cases of smoke inhalation.

The City has been driving away Staten Island Ferry crews by requiring them to work for much less than industry wages. They haven't had a pay increase in 12 years as management continues to offer below-market compensation for fleet mariners who are expected to work high-stress positions with huge responsibilities without adequate support from the City.

The M.E.B.A. letter said that a "quirk" built into the newbuild ferries is dissimilar to standard fuel procedures aboard other boats and do not apply to the Ollis-class vessels. The letter alleges that workers were never warned about this change, and as a result, an engine room crew member closed the fuel return on the SANDY GROUND, leading to fuel filter leaks and the ensuing fire. The lack of training is part of a broader pattern for a ferry system plagued by staffing shortages and frequent service cuts in recent years. The accumulation of errors finally reached a boiling point onboard the SANDY GROUND, and the ferry system appears to have put passengers and workers at risk.

While city officials say that the Coast Guard has given the Ollis-class vessels the green light to keep running, the Union's letter called for a thorough investigation into the “unfortunate deterioration of safety culture” within the ferry system.

The fire is still under investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and Coast Guard officials, but early indications are that it was caused by a fuel leak that reached the engine exhaust manifold.

### **MICHIGAN REPEALS ‘RIGHT-TO-WORK’**

Michigan has repealed the ‘Right-to Work’ laws on its books to once again restore worker freedom in the Wolverine State. This week, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed the ‘Restoring Workers’ Rights’ bill package restoring and protecting workers’ rights in Michigan. House Bills 4004 and 4007 and Senate Bill 34 strengthen labor laws to protect workers’ safety, keep government from getting in the way of negotiations between businesses and workers, and empower workers to advocate for better working conditions and wages. The bills also restore prevailing wage, ensuring the best value on infrastructure for Michigan taxpayers and raising wages for working people, helping them support their families and improve their quality of life. In the interests of corporate greed, so-called right-to-work laws diminish union bargaining power and their ability to represent workers effectively. By allowing workers to benefit from union representation without having to pay for it, Right-to-work laws - currently in force in 26 states and Guam – thin out dues-paying members and weaken union leverage in negotiations with employers. That makes it more difficult to negotiate better wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers.

“Today, we are taking steps to ensure every worker can be respected and protected at work, retire with dignity, access health care that meets their needs, and support their family,” said Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II. “Restoring MI Workers’ Rights will help us grow our middle class, build a thriving economy, and invest in vibrant communities. Governor Whitmer and I are committed to investing in workers and building a Michigan we can be proud to pass on to the next generations.”

House Bill 4004 and Senate Bill 34 restore provisions helping workers collectively bargain, without government interference, for better working conditions, higher wages, and safer workplaces. According to a nonpartisan economic study, workers’ wages in states without strong worker protections are 3.1 percent—on average, \$1,600—lower per year than in states with strong worker protections, after adjusting for differences in cost of living. House Bill 4007 restores prevailing wage on all state projects, creating good-paying jobs and ensuring hard-working people can earn a decent standard of living, take care of their families, and have a secure retirement. Reinstating prevailing wage will put more money in people’s pockets and guarantees Michigan gets the well-trained, skilled workforce to build safe, reliable infrastructure. “After decades of anti-worker attacks, Michigan has restored the balance of power for working people by passing laws to protect their freedom to bargain for the good wages, good benefits, and safe workplaces they deserve,” said Ron Bieber, President of the Michigan AFL-CIO.

### **INTERLAKE FLEET BACK TO WORK AS 2023 GREAT LAKES SHIPPING SEASON BEGINS**

The 826-foot LEE A. TREGURTHA was the first vessel in the Interlake fleet to get back to work as the Army Corps of Engineers reopened the Poe Lock at 12:01 am on March 25 signaling the start of the 2023 Great Lakes shipping season. The Lock closed on January 16 to undergo critical repairs

and maintenance during the 10 week-long winter shutdown. The operating season is fixed by federal regulation and driven in part by the feasibility of vessels operating in typical Great Lakes ice conditions. The Poe is the largest of the Soo Locks. The MacArthur Lock, located south of the Poe, is scheduled to open April 24. The Soo connect Lake Superior to the rest of the Great Lakes.

Brendan O'Connor, Chief Operating Officer of M.E.B.A.-contracted Interlake Steamship Company Noted that the fleet is off to a fast start this year as the Lakes ice cover is dramatically down from previous years (25% cover last year to 4.9% this year). “This is not what I would call a typical fit-out, and operating conditions are more favorable than ordinarily expected at the earliest part of the season,” he said.

A day later, all 11 commercial vessels in the Interlake fleet were underway.

### **CMES ADDS MORE LNG AS A FUEL COURSES**

The Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School announced that it is adding additional Combined Basic & Advanced IGF Code Operations (LNG as a Fuel) Classes to this year’s schedule.

The additional courses will take place on:

- April 24 – 27
- May 8 - 11

Remember these are 4-day courses that run Monday through Thursday. Applications can be sent via the CMES website ([www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org)), faxed to (410) 822-7220, or emailed to [applications@mebaschool.org](mailto:applications@mebaschool.org)

### **JAX HALL HAS MOVED TO A NEW LOCATION**

Our Union hall in Jacksonville has moved to a new space and is back up and running. Dispatcher Liz Pettit is at her post in the new Union hall, which is much larger than the old site with plenty of parking. The new hall is located at 644 Cesery Blvd. (Suite 200) in Jacksonville. It is near the water and a relatively short trip to the airport. Conveniently, the phone and fax numbers, and of course, the email address, will remain the same.

### **PLAN TO ATTEND THE CAA REUNION THIS SUMMER!**

The Calhoun Alumni Association invites members, applicants, retirees, along with their friends and families to join the CAA Reunion this summer. The festivities take place at the Calhoun M.E.B.A. Engineering School from June 16-18.

Information, event forms and fees can be found on the CMES website ([www.mebaschool.org](http://www.mebaschool.org)) by following the link for the CAA. Please pass this information along to former M.E.B.A. shipmates, and CMES classmates that are no longer in the industry as they may not have access to the usual M.E.B.A./CMES distributions of information.

The schedule of events looks like this:

Friday, June 16 - Golf Outing Afternoon

Saturday, June 17 - Party on the Manor House Lawn

Sunday, June 18 - Clean Up and Departure

For those of you who have not yet attended a reunion, here is some of what you can expect: beef and pig on the spit, steamed crabs, burgers and dogs, pizza and subs, live music, swimming pool, beer, wine, soft drinks, ice cream, light breakfast, raffles, a Friday morning golf outing, a softball game, an awards ceremony, a sundown ceremony, sea stories and a great time with old classmates, shipmates and maritime friends. Any questions about the event should be directed to: [caa@mebaschool.org](mailto:caa@mebaschool.org)

### **3rd ANNUAL CALHOON DISC GOLF TOURNAMENT ON APRIL 8**

The M.E.B.A. Merchant Marine Memorial Foundation (4MF) will host its third annual Jesse Calhoon Memorial [Disc \(Frisbee\) Golf](#) Tournament on Saturday, April 8th at the Calhoon M.E.B.A. Engineering School. Everyone is invited. The [tournament](#) benefits the Memorial Park at the CMES.

As you know, the Memorial was created to honor fallen seafarers who have delivered the goods and answered the call of this country since 1775. The Foundation supporting the Memorial is a section 501(c)(3) entity under Internal Revenue Service rules, so all donations are tax deductible.

There is a \$25 entry fee to participate in the tournament which will begin at 1300. For further information, contact 4MF Chairman Bill Van Loo at (443) 676-6248 or [bvanloo@bvlworks.org](mailto:bvanloo@bvlworks.org)

### **WEST COAST HALLS CLOSED TOMORROW FOR CESAR CHAVEZ DAY**

West Coast Union halls will be closed tomorrow, Friday March 31, to observe labor giant Cesar Chavez's birthday. Chavez was an American farm worker, labor leader and civil rights activist. He was known for his use of non-violent tactics and made the farm workers' struggle a moral cause and gained nationwide support. His family lost their farm in Arizona during the Great Depression and he moved to California and became a migrant farm worker facing much adversity during those 14 years. In 1952, he became an organizer and effective voice for the Community Service Organization, a civil rights group. Four years after becoming the CSO Director, he left the organization and along with Dolores Huerta, co-founded the National Farm Workers Association, which later became the United Farm Workers. He led his union on a series of strikes and work actions that led to extraordinary gains and protections for farm workers across the country.

He spent time in the U.S. Navy as a young man. In 2012, the Military Sealift Command dry cargo vessel USNS CESAR CHAVEZ, with M.E.B.A. officers proudly serving in the engine room, went into service. A well-received 1997 documentary, *The Fight in the Fields*, catalogued Chavez's story and the struggles of the Farmworkers. A 2014 movie with Hollywood actors, entitled *Cesar Chavez (An American Hero)*, is also worth checking out.

### **JESSE CALHOON TO BE HONORED ON TUESDAY**

M.E.B.A. Union halls will be closed on Tuesday, April 4 to honor longtime M.E.B.A. President Jesse Calhoon on the occasion of his birthday. The son of a fisherman, Jesse started out as a coal passer in Norfolk, VA at the age of 16. By 1943, he started work as fireman, then oiler and set sail in support of the allied effort to defeat Hitler. Following the war and his membership with the M.E.B.A., Calhoon ascended within the ranks. He started in Norfolk Local 11 as Business Manager (the precursor to Branch Agent), before becoming National M.E.B.A. Secretary-Treasurer in 1959.

In February 1963, when M.E.B.A. President Edwin Altman resigned to join the American Maritime Association, Calhoon was elected to fill the unexpired term. His service as M.E.B.A.'s top executive spanned six U.S. presidencies. Throughout Jesse's presidency, he used his political savvy coupled with shrewd negotiating to win unprecedented gains for members and safeguard American maritime jobs at large. He vigorously fought for legislation to protect thousands of U.S. mariner jobs and helped ensure the continued viability of the U.S. maritime industry.

Among many other achievements under Calhoon's administration, the Union established the training school which bears his name, merged the deep-sea districts, Pacific Coast District and District 1 into a single all coast unit, and transformed M.E.B.A.'s pension plan into the best in the maritime industry. Born on April 4, 1923, Jesse made his final voyage on October 22, 2013 at the age of 90.

**NEXT MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS** *(All times are local)*

Monday, April 3 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.

Tuesday, April 4 – *Jesse Calhoon Day – All Halls Closed*

Wednesday, April 5 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Oakland@1230; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)

Thursday, April 6 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.

Friday, April 7 – *Good Friday – All Halls Closed*

Monday, April 10 - Honolulu@1100.

-----FINISHED WITH ENGINES-----



*M.E.B.A. does not tolerate assault, or harassment of any kind.  
If you see something, say something – The M.E.B.A. Emergency Hotline  
can be reached at 1-888-519-0018.*

*The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and demonstrated track record of readiness, safety, and loyalty in answering America's call to action in times of both peace and war is unrivaled in the world. M.E.B.A. HQ – Phone: (202) 638-5355; [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org). For publication and related inquiries (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org) Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.*