

November 30, 2011

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MICHIGAN SENATE

Concerning

NMC/GLMA Bachelor's Program in Maritime Technology

Good morning! My name is Edward Wiltse and I am a resident of and work in Traverse City.

To quickly introduce you to my background, I am a 1987 graduate of the Great Lakes Maritime Academy and have worked on board ships and on shore in the Great Lakes maritime industry - from then until now - over the past 24 years.

I hold a professional Merchant Marine Officer license from the U.S. Coast Guard as Master and First Class Pilot of Unlimited Tonnage Vessels on the Great Lakes and have spent years as Captain of various sizes and classes of vessels from tugs and tour boats, up to large ferries and freight ships.

In addition to the years spent on board ship, I also worked ashore in various maritime operations management roles up to my present position as Vice President of Operations for Grand River Navigation Company.

Our company operates a fleet of six large U.S. flag dry bulk freight ships that deliver approximately 8-9 million tons of dry bulk cargo annually to customers across the Great Lakes basin. Our ships deliver stone for the construction and cement making industry, coal for the power generation industry, iron ore and coal for the steel making industry, sand for iron foundry industry, and road salt for state road commissions. Our company employs approximately 180 people on board our ships – officers and crew members - and shore side staff. The majority of our employees reside in Michigan and Ohio.

Our company has grown from one vessel in 2000 – to six vessels today – and very likely soon to be seven vessels. Each vessel provides full time employment for 12-14 deck and engine officers. These are very good paying jobs with union medical and retirement benefits. New officers - fresh out of school - can expect to earn

\$60,000 or more per year to start. Our senior Captains and Chief Engineers can earn \$120,000 or more per year.

We continually seek to attract the best qualified officers for our growing fleet. We look for officers who want to spend their careers on the Great Lakes instead of the oceans of the world and who have shown that interest through completing specialized training in the navigation, operation, and maintenance of Great Lakes ships. This specialized training is best offered at Great Lakes Maritime Academy over any of the other coastal maritime academies or schools.

However, in addition to the traditional role and duties of a ship's officer, we recognize that our business has - and is becoming - ever more demanding and complicated with new and more sophisticated navigation electronics and communications equipment on board the ship, and the constantly increasing regulatory licensing, reporting, and recordkeeping requirements from U.S. Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, US EPA, and environmental agencies from the various Great Lakes states. Therefore, we need officers who are not only very sound in the fundamentals of this specialized profession, but also those who can multitask, make sound decisions, and handle responsibility very quickly in their career.

The faculty and staff at the Great Lakes Maritime Academy understand the stringent demands of the shipboard environment and specialized duties of the modern maritime officer on the Great Lakes and, through their own specialized Bachelor Degree program, they can best prepare the graduates of their program to compete for and achieve success in positions within the Great Lakes maritime industry, both on board ship and on shore. For these reasons, we fully support and ask for the support of the Michigan Legislature in granting Northwestern Michigan College the authority to develop the full curriculum and award a four-year bachelor degree for the students of their Great Lakes Maritime Academy division program.

Thank you.