

Waterways

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Dick Lambert retiring after long river career

It was Dick Lambert's older cousin Jack who first got him working on and interested in the river industry in 1957. Lambert was finishing a summer school class at the U of M and wanted something to do for six weeks until fall quarter started, rather than go home to Chicago. His work as a novice deckhand led to a career that will end with his retirement as [Director of Port and Waterways in the Minnesota Department of Transportation](#) next month.

Dick says he learned very quickly what waterways transportation was all about and how big the industry was. Ironically, one of the things he learned about the river was that [Lambert Landing in St. Paul](#) was named for his Grandfather Col. George Lambert who died a year before Dick was born.

Hanging lanterns

"During my last quarter of college in the fall of 1957, I was a night watchman for [Jack's company, Twin City Barge and Towing Company](#)," Lambert remembers. "This involved taking a small boat out in the river at dusk, putting lanterns on the barges

in the fleeting areas in the St Paul harbor, and then returning after dawn and taking the lanterns off."

He next moved into the pilot house for some carefully



Photo courtesy of MNDOT's Newline

supervised steering and continued deckhand work. By then, he says, he realized that the river was getting into his blood.

Dispatching Harbor boats

"In 1960, Twin City Barge bought a harbor towing company in Chicago and Jack asked me to come into the office and learn the art of dispatching the boats around the harbor," he says. "For the next several years I dispatched the harbor boats, working with the terminals and our customers who were the big barge lines who also owned the barges."

The only drawback to that work, Lambert says was being on call 24 hours a day for three to four weeks at a time. The company expanded into ship and barge building and was acquired by investment bankers in 1984 and Lambert stayed with them until 1989.

In the early 90s Lambert was lured out of retirement by Bill Newstrand, who was retiring as MNDOT's Ports and Waterways Director and urged Lambert to apply.

21 years at MNDOT

"I've been working for MNDOT for the past 21 years and keep track of ton-nages for Minnesota's waterways both on the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River and keep two directories up to date of Minnesota's terminals on Lake Superior and on the Mississippi River," Lambert says. "I administer a [Port Development Assistance program](#) where the State sometimes gives us money to improve or rehab Minnesota's public docks on the River and Lake Superior."

Throughout his career(s), Lambert has become a media 'go to' guy for information on the river and has also been

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“...The focus of the latest plan is port facilities and commercial waterways that connect them ...”

From the Executive Director...

MnDOT Touts Waterway Values

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has released a draft copy of a first-ever marine plan to add the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River to Minnesota's stable of multimodal assets.

Based on the premise that existing ports and waterways gives the State a robust and truly multimodal freight network, the [draft Statewide Ports & Waterways Plan](#) of November, 2013 is the latest addition to "Minnesota GO 50-Year Statewide Vision" adopted in 2011 followed by a multimodal plan adopted in 2012. Together, says MnDOT, this family of plans will help to realize the agency's broader goals and objectives.

The draft report states that while state waterways are also used for passenger and recreational purposes, the focus of the latest plan is port facilities and commercial waterways that connect them. The draft also states that future iterations of the waterway plan may include sections pertaining to recreational or passenger/personal use of the system.

This new waterway draft lays out a logical and credible argument for the value of Minnesota's commercial waterways, both on the Great Lakes or the Mississippi River. It takes up MARAD's Marine Highway mantra that waterways are an economic and environmentally friendly way to move people and freight in the ever-expanding coastal areas of the U.S.

Fourth Coastline Acknowledged, Again

Like its federal cousin, MnDOT recognizes that the combination of the Great Lakes and major rivers in mid-America constitute, what has long been heralded as the nation's fourth coastline. Hearing of the concept of a Marine Highways in a region adjacent to an otherwise landlocked area of the nation is a positive and welcomed change from a heretofore pavement-centric state agency.

In late December, UMWA filed com-

ments with MnDOT on their draft ports and waterways plan. In brief, our comments covered four points: (1) the current and future value of unused river capacity; (2) the dollar value of freight transported on the river; (3) MnDOT's need to make dredging and beneficial use of dredge material a statewide policy, and (4) possible legislative efforts to facilitate an even more effective multi-modal initiative.

Port Authority Status Might Benefit Savage Terminals

Although our comments were restricted to the above four issues and the immediacy they represent to the state's four Mississippi River ports (Minneapolis, St. Paul, Red Wing and Winona), future thought must be given to finding ways to include commercial facilities on rivers tributary to the Mississippi River; i.e. Lower Minnesota River terminals in the Savage area. Technically these terminals area are not candidates for the 80% state funding available through MnDOT's Port Development Assistance Program (PDAP) discussed in the draft. Savage terminals, however, are subject to the same economic and environmental forces affecting PDAP members while they contribute the same economic and environmental benefits as PDAP members, but without MnDOT assistance.

The inclusion of Savage terminals into a port authority that qualifies for PDAP funding might also help solve the conundrum that arises between state watershed districts, Corps of Engineers' budget restrictions and non-point sources in dealing with upstream waterborne sediment. It's well known that the volume of the Minnesota River as well as its increased sediment load contributes mightily to the flow and amount of sediments into Pool 2, Lake Pepin and onwards to the Gulf. In fact a 2011 article in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* identified the Minnesota River as the largest source of sediment in Lake Pepin.

Interestingly, the November 2013 draft also discusses the opportunities and challenges of expanding the Minnesota Ports Association.

It states that with the current interest in freight across the public and private sectors, MnDOT could consider developing a new, statewide marine freight forum with a fuller set of objectives and an expanded [Minnesota Ports] association, including broad stakeholder representation from the public and private sectors. Currently Minnesota restricts port development funds to public ports only. In con-

trast, neighboring Wisconsin has a commercial ports program that already provides funding to both public and qualifying private facility.

Strange, but True

As one of our members recently opined, the MnDOT program provides an 80% grant to operators of public landside terminals but seems to forget that the river itself, as with a state highway, is public property. Accordingly, a state highway, regardless of whether the boundary property is public, private, or state owned for that matter, gets paved with general funds, whereas improve-

ments to the river can only be made with public funds when the landside occupants are public entities.

UMWA will continue to monitor the ports and waterways plan and file additional comments with MnDOT as necessary.

“...MnDot could consider developing a new, statewide marine freight forum with a fuller set of objectives and an expanded...association...”

Other river related items:

- Given the very cold temps this winter, it's likely that a lot of ice formed on Lake Pepin ice [measurements by the Corps of Engineers](#) usually start in the second or third week of February.
- The recent 'Polar Vortex' that dropped temperatures in the northeast U.S. to record or near record levels, also caused problems for the waterway industry there. One of the local Pittsburgh television stations sent a reporter out for [a very interesting and cold report](#).
- The Corps of Engineers is inviting the public to an Open House at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mississippi River Visitor Center located at [Locks and Dam 15 on the Rock island Arsenal](#). The Open House will run all day on Friday January 24, 2014 from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm.
- The [World Resources Institute](#) has issued a white paper that is an assessment of the USDA's Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) that USDA says is a promising new approach to reaching cleaner water in agricultural watersheds in the country. This approach concentrates some taxpayer funds in high-priority watersheds such as the Mississippi River basin and the WRI says the results are promising.

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active in UMWA and other river groups.

“UMWA was and is important to this part of the country because you need continuing local and regional support for any industry,” he says. “It was men like Colonel George who saw the need for a modern waterway system into the Midwest and directly lobbied Congress for the locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi. This is the organization that gives voice to the needs of our part of the Country.

“I joined the UMWA about 1970 - Jack had already been very active in UMWA for many years and was President from 1963-65. About this time we remembered that our Grandfather, Colonel Lambert, was one of the founders of UMWA as it was being formed in 1932. Years later, I was also President of UMWA from 1983-85.”

Looking back, Lambert

recalls some critical battles fought and won by UMWA and its members, including a fuel tax added in the waning hours of a legislative session.

“In the 1980’s Minnesota’s Legislature was looking for other sources of revenue and imposed a user tax on all towboats operating in ‘Minnesota’ waters.” he recalls. “About 8 of us from UMWA asked for a got a meeting with the Governor, and explained to him that the navigation system in Minnesota is a part of a Federal Waterway system and the operators pay a user fee directly to the Federal government and the state law was rescinded the following year.”

Ethanol production and drop in coal use have reduced some of the tonnage on the river system, but Lambert says the industry is as important now as it was when it rivers were the primary transportation system into Minnesota and Wisconsin.

“Even with the reduced tonnages on the waterways - because shippers have that mode available, competing land-based modes must be competitive in their pricing. If the waterways were not there, shipping costs would surely rise to the disadvantage of the consumer.”

After retiring, Dick plans a “busman’s holiday” which will be a Caribbean cruise through the Panama Canal in early March.

After his Canal transit, he says he’ll do more traveling and engaging in a typical Minnesota pastime.

“I also want to spend more time at the Lake and to see what it’s like not to worry about business.”

(Editors note: For another perspective on Dick’s retirement, visit <http://sunthisweek.com/2014/01/09/a-life-on-the-river/>)

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