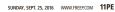
MICHIGAN'S GREAT LAKES | RECREATIONAL FISHING





Life on 'floating islands'

A way of life for generations, shipping is a \$3.8B industry in Michigan

en Gerasimos sailed the Great Lakes on various freighters for more than two decades, starting when he was 18 years old, but his love for the water started years before that. ¶ The 60-year-old would spend the family vacations of his youth visiting his father on Ford Motor Company-owned freighters he worked on. ¶ He was 5 years old when he first got a taste of what life on a freighter entails. ¶ "All officers could bring their family on board," he said. "We would see the same kids every year and the passenger quarters were really nice. We would build kites and fly them off the back end (of the ship), and feed the seagulls, and play shuffle board."

As he got older, the visits included painting the ship, learning how to steer in the wheel-house and learning how to use the compass to

the ship, learning how to steer in the wheel-house and learning how to use the compass to navigate.

Now many years later, Gerasimos has followed in his father's footsteps and worked up the ranks to grab the title of first mate on the last ship he sailed on. He now works on land as the port captain of the Great Lakes Fleet.

As Gerasimos progressed over the years, The Great Lakes shipping industry expands beyond Michigan. It includes Canada, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinios, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. The nearly 1,000-foot freighters transport bulk dry goods such as iron ore, coal and limestone, according to The Lake Cartier's Association. Prior to the 1970s, ships typically spanned just 600 feet.

Typically there are around 25 crew members working on any one of the freighters that raved through the Great Lakes. But the whole Great Lakes shipping industry creates nearly—ber of Marine Commerce spokeswoman. In Michigan, the shipping industry accounts for freat Lakes Ports Association. In the whole Great Lakes Ports Association. In the House of Marine Commerce on the industry generates \$35 billion in revenue each year. In Michigan, it's a \$3.5 billion industry.

Frank Frisk, a retired chief steward and cook for The Interlake Steamship, Company,

ates \$35 billion in revenue each year. In Michigan, it's a \$3 billion industry.
Frank Frisk, a retired chief steward and
cook for The Interlake Steamship Company,
said his salary ranged from \$40,000 to \$60,000
during the first years that he worked parttime on a ship. He said it wasn't unheard of for
others to earn upwards of \$120,000 as they
climbed higher through the ranks.
As technology has progressed, certain jobs
has the standard of the said of the s

everyone."
Ships now have amenities like television, some internet access, and comfortable, recliner chairs. Union agreements came into play around the 1990s, Gerasimos said, which prompted better quality of life for crew members.

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More educational opportunities and safety regulations also have developed since then. The freighters, or "floating islands," as Gerasimos refers to them, are long, narrow ships that can hold around 70,000 tons of product. Around 164 million metric tons of cargo are delivered by Great Lakes vessels each year,





A freighter passes under the Blue Water Bridge near Port Huron.

according to the Chamber of Marine Com-

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The cargo gets pumped onto the ship through cargo foles, the holes get covered, the ships travel to their destination, and then the cargo get unloaded through a vacuum system.

"It's the cheapest way to transport that much bulk cargo," Frisk said.

At times, freighters of the Great Lakes could make their way to the Atlantic Ocean, or even find themselves destined for Europe.
"There is grain that comes out of the Great Lakes that is taken to Europe," Frisk said. "It's a special grain from Thunder Bay that is in de-

By the numbers

27.000 Michigan jobs related to the Great Lakes

shipping industry 227,000

Jobs throughout the entire region

164 million Metric tons of cargo delivered by Great Lakes vessels each year

\$3.8 billion

revenue generated in Michigan by Great Lakes shipping

mand in Ireland. The only absolute option for transporting that is a dry bulk cargo freighter, it's impossible to move it by air." Gerasimos, who is originally from Michigan but now lives in Minnesota, said sailing on freighters has allowed him to see many beautiful sights through his travels.

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"I remember going past Pictured Rocks when we were going from The Soo Locks to Marqueter," he said. "We stayed kind of close to shore and the water was just like glass. The setting sun was beaming off the water, and after you passed Pictured Rocks, you could see it was reflecting in the water. It was an amazing, amazing sjath.

ter you passed Picture divides, Jay Johnson Street, was a mazzing, amazzing sight."

Life on a freighter, which typically includes two months on a ship, followed by one paid month off, on allow Great Lakes crews to see the Northern Lights in Lake Michigan, sun rises and sunsest, eagles and the true brightness of stars.

In winter time, when we were breaking ice through the St. Mary's River we would have through the St. Mary's River we would have through the St. Mary's River we would have meet in the part of the part