

CAPTAIN MICHAEL A. GERASIMOS

(1929-2002)

ISMA Pennant No. 9750

Initiated on January 8, 1957

Member of Detroit Lodge No. 7 for over 45 years

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OBITUARIES

Michael Gerasimos, captain of freighters

By Santiago Esparza
The Detroit News

TRENTON — Michael Gerasimos had the perfect way for his wife and children to spend their vacations: sailing.

But these were no leisurely jaunts to the tropics for tanning in the sun they were trips on the Great Lakes freighters he captained. Mr. Gerasimos' nickname was Captain Mike because he professionally sailed for more than half his life.

"My dad was a captain's captain," said his son Kenneth. "He could be gruff. It wasn't easy sailing with him."

Mr. Gerasimos, formerly of Trenton, died of heart disease Dec. 26, 2002, in his home in Prudenville, Mich. He was 72.

He took command of the Robert S. McNamara at age 34. One year later, he became master of the MV Henry Ford

II, where he remained until 1984.

In 1984, Ford Motor Co. decided to decommission so-called straight-deck vessels in favor of a different style of ship. Mr. Gerasimos then took over the S.S. William Clay Ford, which now is named the Lee A. Tragartha, his son said.

He retired in 1985 and moved to Prudenville.

During the 1980s his sons worked with him before moving on to become officers on other ships. In June 1990, his son David Gerasimos is believed to have fallen overboard in Lake Huron. He was never found, but that did not dampen the sailing spirit of the Gerasimos family.

"My dad had a natural hand at handling a boat," his son said. "He was so good at it."

Mr. Gerasimos was a member of the International ShipMaster's Association.

Other survivors include his wife of 49 years, Joanne; two daughters, Pamela Thomas and Lisa Rorick; a sister, Penny Turner; and six grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 2-4 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. Friday in the Martenson Funeral Home, 3200 West Rd. in Trenton.

A memorial service will be at 11 a.m. Saturday in Mariner's Church, 170 E. Jefferson in Detroit, two blocks north of the Detroit River.

Mr. Gerasimos has been cremated and his ashes will be spread out over Lake Huron.

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 561-3376 or sesparza@detnews.com.

OBITUARIES

LOCAL DEATHS

Michael Gerasimos: Was Great Lakes shipmaster

By JEANNE MAY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Michael R. Gerasimos, who worked his way up from a ship's deckhand to become a licensed master of Great Lakes ships of unlimited tonnage, died of heart disease Dec. 26 at the home of a daughter in Southgate.

He was 72 and had lived in Prudenville, on Houghton Lake, since 1989, when he moved there from Trenton.

"When he took over the Robert S. McNamara in 1966, he was the youngest master on the Great Lakes," his son, Kenneth, said Thursday. "He was 34 years old." His son has followed in his father's footsteps and is an officer for the Great Lakes Fleet.

Capt. Gerasimos started his sailing career when he was 17, working as a deckhand on ocean-going freighters.

He was hired by the Ford Motor Co. Marine Division, and after working his way through the jobs of able-bodied seaman, third mate, second mate and first mate, he became captain of the McNamara.

A year later, he became master of the MV Henry Ford II. He was captain of that ship until 1983, when he took command of the SS Benson Ford.

A year later, he took command of the SS William Clay Ford, from which he retired at the end of the 1985 sailing season.

"He was a tough act to follow," his son said. "He was a really good guy."

"He had a natural knack for math. When I was growing up, he was always on my case about learning math, and he could really do it. He was sharp, he was really sharp."

Capt. Gerasimos was born in Detroit and grew up in the city. He had belonged to the Detroit Lodge of the International Ship Masters' Association for 45 years.

Besides his son, survivors include his wife of 49 years, Joanne; daughters Pamela Thomas and Lisa Rorick; six grandchildren; a stepmother, Fofo Gerasimos, and a sister.

Friends may call from 2 to 4 and 6 to 8 p.m. today at the Martenson Funeral Home, 3200 West Road, Trenton.

The funeral will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at Mariners' Church, 170 E. Jefferson, Detroit.

Contact JEANNE MAY at 586-469-4682 or maj@freepress.com.



Michael
Gerasimos

DAD

The many lives he touched are too numerous to quickly identify and do proper justice. He was well liked and greatly loved. He is already missed.

He had somewhat of a hard way to go during his early years but that nurtured a special place in his heart for children who were less fortunate. One Year - He went so far as to convince the Company to allow "The Henry" to lay-in the Rouge Plant over Christmas Day and made arrangements for a local orphanage children to board the vessel and enjoy a special Christmas Feast. The UnderWriters and Lawyers had nightmares but the Company allowed it. He convinced the second cook to dress up like Santa, and had us all pitch in to helping make that Christmas a special one for local orphans.

His professionalism aboard the vessel wasn't questioned and anyone that sailed with him knows . . . he was never one to believe in "excuses". He ran a tight ship, no question about it. But he did it in a such a way you were always attempting to produce your best. His management brought out our best that many times produced the best and taught that if always performing the best, there's not much anybody could say to criticize, and even less you have to listen to. He taught me that "We are - our own destination." Whatever you do, do it well.

He loved that action that comes with living onboard a ship. The simple thing of just being around the crew and the energy created by that group of sailors. Many of us know the many shipboard stories that can have us holding our bellies in laughter. Stories just too real, that you couldn't write this stuff. He love that part of the job, where you have about 25 to 30 jokers all living on the same

ship and always something new coming up that makes the Hysterical Laughter Hall OF Fame. His sense of humor was enormous - and he carried it off the ship with him. He enjoyed a good laugh. He taught me how to Laugh, and more importantly, how to laugh at myself, being aware of our "Human Side".

He spent almost 40 years on the water. And being the success he is, retired at a relatively early age and was able to enjoy those grandkids. He was finally able to enjoy a "much closer to normal", Family Life. Family was so Important to him. And not just immediate family, families adopted him and he adopted friends as part of the family. He and my mom allowed us kids - when growing up - to have and endless stream of friends over, all the while - being a part of the family. Distant relatives would find out their not so distant after all and he saw all the relatives as immediate family. He taught us how to open our doors and open our hearts.

His perception of death is that it is a small part of life. A simple transition of returning home to God; a graduation day.

He taught me a lot.

Shortly after I started sailing an Officer told me:

"Kid! - If you can handle your carHalf as Good As Your Ole-Man Can Handle This Ship - Going BACKWARDS, Your doing damned good!"

Now I can say, If I experience Half the amount of successes throughout life, at half the success rate, I'm doing very good.

HE WAS WELL LIKED AND GREATLY LOVE AND
ALREADY GREATLY MISSED.

- given at Mariners' Church
January 4, 2003 by
Ken Gerasimos

All shined up to haul iron ore

By JOYCE WALKER-TYSON
Free Press Staff Writer

4-6-78

It's a sign of spring that equals the sighting of the first shivering robin. It's clean-up, paint-up, fix-up time at the Ford Rouge Plant boat dock.

Crews have been on the job for about two weeks getting ready for the season's first sailings on the Great Lakes.

The Henry Ford II, a 612-foot coal carrier, will be the first boat out Thursday when it sails up Lake Huron to pick up a load of limestone at Calcite, Mich., for the Rouge Plant.

The Henry, which carries 12,000 tons at speeds up to 12 miles an hour, has been docked since Jan. 6 because of the national coal strike.

The boat is normally docked only through February.

THE REMAINDER of Ford's five-boat fleet, docked since Christmas, will sail next week.

One of the ships is the 644-foot ore carrier John Dykstra. According to Richard DeWalt, manager of marine operations for Ford, she will leave Tuesday to pick up a 17,000-ton load of iron ore in Duluth, Minn. — a five-day round trip.

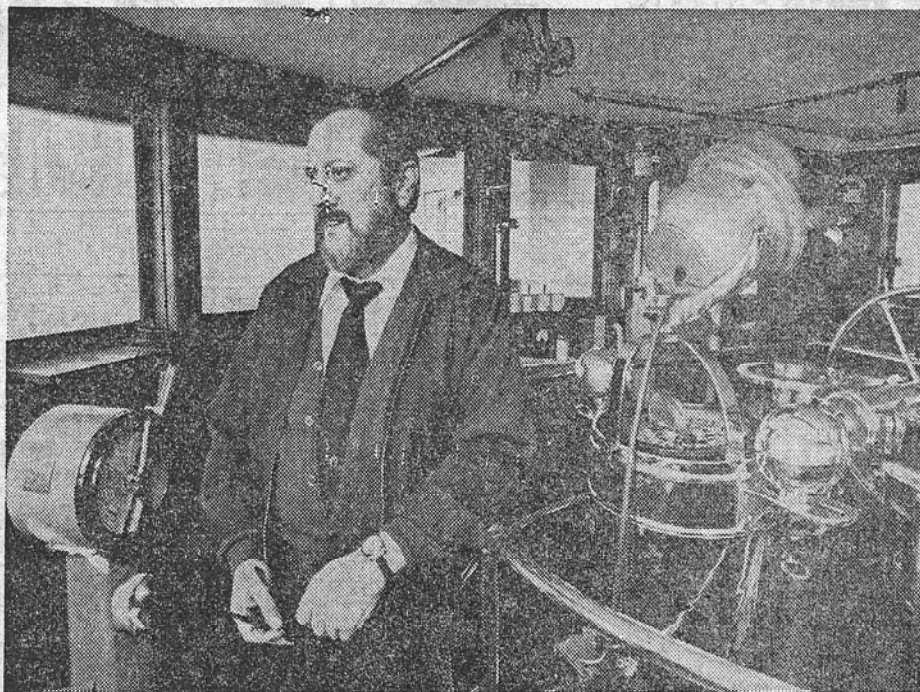
The Ford fleet sailing crews also are the maintenance crews who scrub off winter dirt, apply new coats of paint, inspect lifesaving gear and fine-tune the big engines with 3,000 to 5,000 horsepower. The process is called a "fitout."

The boats must pass a Coast Guard inspection before they are allowed to sail.

Because of the severe winter, the Great Lakes still contain huge chunks of ice. But DeWalt said that shouldn't present any insurmountable problems.

"There will be ice out there for weeks," he said. "But we can't wait until all of it's gone."

"There could be problems depending on the wind conditions, but we're hoping to get through without too much difficulty."



Mike Gerasimos, captain of the Henry Ford II, stands amid the shined-up instruments that run the ship (above). The John Dykstra (below) gets a paint job before it sails.