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COVER STORY

Enjoying the 50-Year Journey on the Sam Houston

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So much can happen in 50 years. And amid all the fast-paced changes, some things seem not to have changed at all. Take the M/V Sam Houston, described on vintage postcards as the “flagship” of the Port of Houston.

In 1958, then-general manager of the Port of Houston Jerry Turner called the new Sam Houston II a “show window to the port.”

It may be on its second set of engines, but the Sam Houston II looks much the same as it did on that historic day in July 1958 when it began its journey as the Port of Houston’s official inspection and tour boat, replacing the Sam Houston I. The vessel has been well-maintained inside and out through the years, a well-preserved beauty who has served as host to about one and one-half million visitors from all over the world.

The narrative on the back of a postcard from the 1960s is still true: “Every year, this luxurious, air-conditioned, diesel-powered, 95-foot steel vessel takes thousands of visitors to inspect the facilities at the Port of Houston — one of the world’s great ports.”

With about 400,000 miles under her hull, the Sam Houston still offers round-trip cruises along the Houston Ship Channel six days a week, year-round, with a month off in early September for maintenance. A veteran crew keeps her in tip-top shape.

The free, 90-minute tour along seven miles of the ship channel gives visitors a view of the port that they would not otherwise see, and the view changes every day as different shipments come in from or go out to all parts of the globe.

Tour-goers also get the opportunity to see international ships bound for such countries as Brazil, China, Germany or Mexico, which are among the more than 7,700 vessels that come through the Port of Houston each year.
During her 50-year tenure, the Sam has counted all her visitors as VIPs, whether they are PHA Commissioners or Port Houston elementary students. She’s seen her share of kings and queens, princes and princesses, politicians, celebrities and dignitaries, but most of the more than 1.5 million visitors have been regular people from Houston and everywhere else.

This year, the Port of Houston Authority is privileged to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this hard-working ship. Here’s to at least another half-century of success!

The tour on the Sam is just one of the many ways the PHA reaches out to the public in a long tradition of commitment to the communities adjacent to the Port of Houston. The focused effort rests on four cornerstones: maritime commerce, economic development, environmental awareness and community outreach.

One big way the PHA is boosting its economic development is through its Small Business Development Program. Since the inception of the program six years ago and through the end of the second quarter of 2008, the program has helped deliver $245.9 million of PHA business to small business contractors and subcontractors.

An important component of the PHA’s community outreach efforts is a strong commitment to education, from grade school through college. We support such efforts as BaySmart, Junior Achievement and the port’s own summer intern program.

We also recognize a very important milestone this year—the unanimous reappointment of PHA Chairman Jim Edmonds, who, in only eight years, has guided the Port of Houston Authority to world-class leadership in all aspects of port management, from environmental and security issues to operational excellence. His vision and dedication to the port have been instrumental in making Houston a model for other ports to follow.

On a personal note, I have worked closely with Jim Edmonds since he became chairman in 2000; in fact, we have traveled the world together to meet with customers and develop new relationships to advance the port. Committed and hard-working with a keen political acumen, Jim has built alliances that have benefited not only the PHA but the entire Houston region. It’s been an inspiration working with him and I look forward to many more years of his leadership.
On July 22, the Port of Houston Authority held a briefing for Tommy Williams, a budget examiner with the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Williams has the responsibility of reviewing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ yearly submission for the president’s budget. He was traveling in Texas on a tour of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects in the area, which includes the Houston Ship Channel.

During the briefing, PHA executive staff gave Williams an overview of the port authority’s federal funding needs, which include much needed money for dredging and maintaining the channel. For Fiscal Year 2009, the Houston Ship Channel needs $84 million to provide regular dredging and build areas for dredge material placement. This critical work is necessary to maintain the safety and navigability of the channel.

The briefing provided Williams with a perspective of the economic activity generated by the Port of Houston to help him in his role crafting the president’s budget.

Juan B. Sosa, the U.S. Panama Business Council USA president, presented the Port of Houston Authority with a Friendship Award, accepted by PHA Chairman Jim Edmonds at the council’s July 14 Panama Day inauguration dinner.

“It was an honor to receive this award,” says Edmonds. “This latest development is a tribute to growing trade and a strengthening relationship between Houston’s port and Panama.”

“Efforts were made many years ago to promote business between the Port of Houston and Panama, and I am very proud of the partnership that has flourished throughout the years,” says Adsinar Cajar Bocek, consul general of Panama.

With the Panama Canal representing a strategic link between the Port of Houston Authority and East Asia — the fastest-growing PHA containerized cargo market — the PHA recently relocated its regional office for trade growth within Central and South America, excluding Brazil, to Panama City, Panama, under the leadership of Arturo Gamez. The PHA has also renewed and extended its Memorandum of Understanding for three years with the Panama Canal Authority.

The U.S. Panama Business Council USA’s Southwest Chapter will include the states of Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, with headquarters in Houston. Ricky Kunz, general manager of the PHA’s Trade Development Division, was appointed to the chapter’s board of directors. In August, the Panama Canal Authority and the PHA announced a continuation of their strategic alliance through a three-year renewal of their Memorandum of Understanding.
COMMISSIONER BURKE HOSTS ANNUAL SAM HOUSTON TOUR

Port Commissioner Jimmy A. Burke hosted his annual tour on the M/V Sam Houston for Harris County Mayors and Councils Association members in June. Commissioner Burke was appointed to the port commission by the organization in 1999. The Harris County Mayors and Councils Association represents 26 cities in Harris County. Commissioner Burke gave a presentation to educate members about the Port of Houston Authority. The number of attendees was so large that boat tours were held on two days, June 26 and 28.

RIPPEY NEW PHA POLICE CHIEF

Greg Rippey has been named chief of police in the Port of Houston Authority’s Port Security & Emergency Operations Department. A native Virginian, Rippey brings a wealth of law enforcement and security experience. After graduating at the top of his class from the Houston Police Academy, Rippey served as a Houston Police officer. He has also served as a detective for the city of Alexandria, Va. Police Department before joining Vance International as an Executive Protective Agent, and then a specialty in White Collar Crimes and Financial Investigations. He then joined Citicorp, where he held the position of security director. Most recently, he has held the position of regional director of security for Compass Bank. He is a graduate of Texas A&M, with a bachelor's degree in education and is a certified 50-ton master in the U.S. Coast Guard.

BIRDWELL NEW PHA RISK MANAGER

Bruce Birdwell joins the Port of Houston Authority as risk manager. He brings more than 27 years of risk management experience with Texas political subdivisions. He previously served as the first executive director of the State Office of Risk Management. In this capacity, he was responsible for administering the State of Texas’ risk management and workers’ compensation programs, including a claim fund of approximately $52 million. Prior to that, Birdwell was risk manager for the city of San Antonio, the Richardson school district and the city of Irving. Birdwell is a graduate of the Governor’s Executive Development Program at the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas. He attended the United States Air Force Academy and the University of Texas. He has a bachelor’s degree in business and has completed most of the coursework toward an MBA.
REMEMBERING FORMER COMMISSIONER JAMES W. “JIM” FONTENO SR.

Former Port of Houston Authority Commissioner James W. “Jim” Fonteno Sr. passed away on June 30, two days before his 82nd birthday. Born in Port Arthur, Texas, on July 2, 1926, Fonteno served four years as a commissioner for the Port of Houston Authority from 1970 to 1974. Later, he was elected as Harris County commissioner of Precinct 2 and served 28 years. Fonteno is well-remembered for giving back to the community and known as the “peacemaker” of the court. In recognition of his deeds, Fonteno’s honors include: the renaming of the Harris County Courthouse No. 26, the Fonteno Courthouse, the Jim and JoAnn Fonteno Family Park, the Jim and JoAnn Senior Education Center and the renaming of the U.S. Post Office in Pasadena, the Jim Fonteno Post Office.

Following in the footsteps of his father, Jim Fonteno Jr. has served as a port commissioner of the Port of Houston Authority Commission since 1999.

PHA HELPS GIVE LOCAL STUDENTS A JUMPSTART TO SUCCESS

The Port of Houston Authority’s new summer interns had the opportunity to meet and express their gratitude to port commissioners at their monthly meeting on July 22. Speaking on behalf of the 2008 participants, public affairs intern Rena Iglehart and market development intern Adam Blair thanked the commissioners for the valuable learning experience the program provides.

Begun 17 years ago, the PHA internship program has grown to attract an increasing number of students, who must be permanent Harris County residents. As a result, the summer program has expanded to accommodate 18 interns within 12 different divisions around the port that range from maintenance to environmental and planning and purchasing to engineering.

Students come from a variety of universities in Houston and around the United States to learn more about the port, professionalism, business and trade, and skills that relate to career advancement. Public affairs intern Lauren Hooks enjoyed the excitement of the unpredictable days within the communications department just as much as Adam Blair enjoyed learning how to negotiate with people in different countries. Interns are able to get hands-on experience by being involved in meetings, events, projects and professional conversation that help advance their knowledge and skills. Supervisors and co-workers give interns advice that helps them develop within and outside their field of interest.

As the internship comes to a close, the interns will take with them a new-found confidence in the workplace, a head start in the job market and an unforgettable experience at the Port of Houston Authority.

THE MANIFEST spotlights news briefs exclusively from PHA, its customers, trading partners, and community stakeholders. Submit information in the form of a letter or press release via e-mail to ehenry@poha.com or via fax 713-670-2425. The Port of Houston Magazine does not guarantee publication and reserves the right to edit submissions for content and style.
PORT PEOPLE DELIVERING THE GOODS

THEY THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE TOUR

My husband and I recently took your free tour of the Houston harbor. We thoroughly enjoyed the entire excursion in spite of an overcast day and some rain. It was informative and interesting and the crew was hospitable, courteous and very knowledgeable.

Offering a free cruise such as this is a wonderful thing for the port authority to do and we thank you. And offering a hot cup of coffee to the attendees was just the icing on the cake.

Sincerely,
Marjorie and Dick Cresap

By popular demand from readers, The Port of Houston Magazine wants to publish a section of reader comments. If you have brief remarks on your experiences or perspectives on the Port of Houston’s operations, services, or personnel, send them to: The Port of Houston Magazine • P.O. Box 2562 • Houston, Texas 77252-2562 or e-mail ehenry@poha.com or send a fax to 713-670-2425.
What’s good for the community is good for the port

Outreach and participation in the communities near the Port of Houston has been an important tradition at the Port of Houston Authority throughout its history. In recent years, that commitment has been stepped up into a focused and highly effective effort that rests on four cornerstones: maritime commerce, economic development, environmental awareness and community outreach.

Improving the water quality of the Houston Ship Channel and Galveston Bay begins with stemming the tide of stormwater trash washing off area streets into the bayous that empty into the ship channel. The port authority developed the Clean and Green Port of Houston Program, which uses both a skimmer boat and also probationers to remove stormwater trash from the water and the banks of the bayous, where it is left once storm waters recede.

In addition, port authority volunteers, known as SupPORTers, routinely devote their time to cleanup of area waterways during environmental events. For the past three years, PHA has served as site sponsor for the Baytown Nature Center during the annual River, Lakes, Bays ‘N’ Bayous Trash Bash. Such events not only provide an immediate benefit to the environment, but also teach Texans about the benefits of preventing pollution and keeping watersheds clean.

Environmental education is the key to long-term change. By its continued support of BaySmart, the flagship program for the Youth Educational Support Services (YESS), the PHA offers youth constructive opportunities for personal growth through adventurous outdoor activities with positive adult mentors. BaySmart takes primarily fifth-graders on waterborne educational field trips along the Houston Ship Channel and into Galveston Bay, where they learn about maintaining these fragile environments.

The PHA supports educational initiatives in a number of ways. Every summer, college students participate in an internship program at the port authority, where they can be found working in all facets of port operations.

By working through the Junior Achievement program in high schools, the PHA provides ten $2,000 scholarships annually to scholars from the Clear Creek, Deer Park, Goose Creek, LaPorte, Pasadena and Houston school districts. PHA employees serve as classroom instructors in the Junior Achievement program at the PHA’s adopted school, Port Houston Elementary.

In partnership with the Houston Chronicle’s Chronicle In Education program, the port authority supports
literacy by providing a three-fold education program that teaches teachers, students and the general public about the Port of Houston. Customized educational materials are provided to 500 elementary and middle school teachers that highlight the port’s history, its economic impact, global trade, environmental stewardship, community responsiveness and the port’s contribution to the community’s way of life. All materials covered use academic skills mandated by the state of Texas. Approximately 3,000 schoolchildren each year tour the Houston Ship Channel, following the classroom study using these educational materials.

For 50 years, the port authority has generously offered the public a way to see the port in a way that no other U.S. port does. More than 28,000 people take advantage of the free tours aboard the M/V Sam Houston each year, and according to the American Association of Port Authorities, no other U.S. port provides such extensive opportunities to see their facilities.

For Houston, the relationship with the public goes back to the port’s origins, when business and civic leaders lobbied Congress ceaselessly for years to gain the advantage of having a deep-water port.

“Citizens have always demonstrated enthusiastic support and interest in the port,” says Grace Moolchan, PHA’s community relations manager. “The boat tour is the best way we can show off the port and allow visitors to see the magnitude of the maritime industry.”

The PHA strives to be a good neighbor to the communities near PHA facilities and take advantage of opportunities to teach the public about the port. Bayfest, the El Jardin Civic Association’s annual fundraiser for maintenance and upkeep of its park, and the LaPorte Health Fair are the kinds of events where you can find the port authority employees manning a booth with information on the port and answering local inquiries regarding the new Bayport Container Terminal.

As a part of the opening events for Bayport, briefings were conducted for groups such as the LaPorte Rotary Club, Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla, SEACAP, Space Center Rotary Club, Houston Yacht Club Executive Board, Pasadena Rotary Club, DPCAC, BAYCAP and the Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce. Port commissioners and staff participated in ongoing public meetings with residents of Bayport-area communities to identify and resolve any issues associated with operations at the...
Bayport Container Terminal. The port is a powerful engine for the local economy. Economic development activities provided by the PHA allow greater participation by businesses and individuals in the opportunities generated by the port.

For the past three years, the Annual Houston Port Region Coffee Symposium has been sponsored by the PHA, the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region, and the Greater Houston Coffee Association.

In 2007, the first Port of Houston-wide Job Fair was held in collaboration with the West Gulf Maritime Association, San Jacinto College, the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region and The WorkSource. More than 2,300 applicants attended and about 1,000 job positions were offered by 50-plus companies and organizations participating in the job fair.

Partnerships and broad-based community alliances support the PHA’s commitment to economic growth. By working in close partnership with local chambers and economic development organizations, the port authority is able to recruit from a large base of small and large businesses for contractual work at the port authority.

These partnerships include such organizations as the Baytown West Chambers Economic Development Foundation, Houston Citizens Chamber of Commerce, Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, North Channel Area Chamber of Commerce, East End Chamber of Commerce, Houston Area Urban League, Bay Area Transportation Partnership, Galveston Bay Foundation, the Economic Alliance-Houston Port Region, Greater Houston Partnership, Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, International Seafarers Center and the Greater Houston Port Bureau.

Every year, the port touches countless lives through the numerous jobs and economic prosperity generated. Through the port authority’s generosity and outreach, many others benefit in countless ways.
The same holds true of any activity of benefit to a community. What one organization can do on its own is magnified with each partner that joins in the effort. The Clean and Green Port of Houston Program depends on a group of organizations which each contribute what it does best to make the overall effort an outstanding success.

Clean and Green builds upon a successful collaboration begun in June 2003 with the launch of the Mighty Tidy skimmer boat. This specially designed vessel captures floatable stormwater trash from area waterways before it pollutes Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The effort has garnered much recognition, including a coveted Gulf Guardian Award from the EPA in 2004.

The purchase and operation of the trash-gathering skimmer boat resulted from a collaboration among the PHA, the Harris County Supplemental Environmental Program, the Harris County Flood Control District and the Buffalo Bayou Partnership.

The port authority contributed $122,000 towards the purchase of the vessel, space at the Turning Basin for maintenance and operations, including space for the trash dumpsters, a maximum of 5,500 gallons of diesel fuel at cost for the skimmer each year and an annual stipend for miscellaneous program-related costs. Harris County provided the balance of the funding, and the Buffalo Bayou Partnership managed the skimmer boat operation.

The skimmer boat remained busy on Buffalo Bayou and at the port’s Turning Basin, but the job was really too much for the lone clean-up vessel.

The problem was that as much, if not more, trash littered the banks of the bayou emptying into the port. The Houston area’s stormwater drainage system is designed to move stormwater quickly off the streets during rainstorms to avoid flooding. Water drains into the area’s street gutters, where it washes into stormwater drains, carrying every bit of trash littering area streets. The trash is carried by the stormwater into area waterways. As the rain subsides and the storm waters recede, the trash is left along the banks of the waterways, where the skimmer boat cannot reach it.

Clean and Green was developed to take the great success of the skimmer boat and magnify it by solving the problem of the trash left along the bayou. That took a new collaboration of organizations, involving public, private and non-profit partners. Funding is provided by Shell Oil Company and the Port of Houston Authority. Probationers working off their sentences through community service are the labor for gathering the trash from the banks of the bayou and preventing it from polluting the waterway.

The probationers are supervised by a full-time deputy constable from Harris County Precinct 6. The relationship with the constable is managed by the Greater East End Management District, which also maintains the records of the hours worked by probationers.

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership provides day-to-day management of this effort and handles details, such as daily work site selection, distribution of tools and materials, safety instructions and tracking the community service hours of the probationers in accordance with Harris County’s guidelines.

Has the effort paid off? Since August 2007, a total of 1,713 cubic yards of trash has been collected, which is enough to fill almost 67 garbage trucks. Each month, Clean and Green collects two and three times as much stormwater trash as the skimmer boat alone did just a year ago. If piled on a basketball court, the mountain of trash collected is nearly 10 feet tall.

No one partner in this effort could do the job alone. Collectively, the job is being done at a level beyond any partner’s expectations, and the environment is the ultimate winner.
Enjoying the 50-year journey on the Sam Houston
For a half-century now, the 90-minute tour of the Houston Ship Channel on the M/V Sam Houston has been eliciting the same happy responses from visitors, whether they’re from Houston or somewhere across the globe.

“Most people say, ‘I enjoyed the ride,’” says Captain Doug Mims. “A few of the locals add that they’ve been here all their lives but didn’t realize we were here.”

While in today’s world, an e-mail may have replaced a hand-written postcard, the sentiment has stayed the same. One 1963 postcard from PHA archives, sent to a Fort Worth address, features a glossy color photo of the Sam Houston and reads: “Dear Marie, Been thinking about you while going down the Ship Channel & remembering how much you enjoyed this trip. Be home by the time this card reaches you. Love, Tina.”

A more recent missive, neatly printed in block letters from Michael Jolicoeur of Spokane, Wash., says: “I have been telling my family and friends about my trip down the ship channel. Thank you for making my trip to Houston, Texas, memorable.”

On a tour in late July, visitors were quick to express their enthusiasm. Laurie Still, traveling with her husband, Robert, and two young sons from Columbia, Mo., said: “It was really cool!” Also on the tour was R.C. Harbor, a Houston gospel singer, who called it “one of the greatest hidden experiences in Houston. I’ve been here all my life and this was my first trip.”

A spring 1958 account in the Port of Houston magazine’s predecessor, the Houston Port Book, says the Sam Houston “will be outfitted in a manner comparable with a fine hotel because it will have the assignment of carrying many thousands of visitors from all parts of the world on cruises down the Houston Ship Channel.”

In the last 50 years, more than one and one-half million visitors have taken the free, seven-mile tour of one of the largest ports in the world aboard the Sam Houston, passing cargo and container ships from all over the world. But three Sundays in April 1967 may hold the record for number of guests. About 6,000 people took abbreviated, 20-minute tours during a Port of Houston open house. This year, at the end of July, 19,372 people on 335 trips had taken the tour.

Named for the legendary military commander who led the fight for Texas independence from Mexico and later statehood, the Sam Houston offers round-trip cruises along the ship channel six days a week, year-round, with a month off in early September for maintenance. All you need to do is reserve in advance online or by phone (see inset).

“The Port of Houston has a dynamic role in the Houston economy, but how it operates and what it looks like is still a mystery to many people.” says Grace Moolchan, PHA community relations manager. “Tours on the Sam Houston help peel away some of those layers of mystery. Those tours personalize the port and – judging by response over the years – are extremely popular.”

Guests have included royalty, celebrities and politicians from around the globe. In 1982, Norway’s King Olav V took the free ride, followed by King Harald V in 2005. Great Britain’s Princess Anne toured in 1984, followed by her brother, Prince Charles, in 1986. Mickey Gilley and James Drury (of television’s “The Virginian”) have taken the tour. The list includes astronauts, diplomats, prime ministers and other elected officials, countless business, civic, school and club groups, local and foreign exchange students. But most are everyday tourists from here or anywhere in the world who want to learn more about the Port of Houston.

The tour gives visitors a unique closeup of the inner workings of the port, which varies day to day and might include workers unloading shipments of steel or machinery or many other products. They also get a glimpse at some of the more than 7,700 vessels from such countries as Brazil, China, Germany or Mexico that come through the Port of Houston each year.
The port’s tour boat has two predecessors. The first inspection boat was purchased in 1928 and named the R.J. Cummins after the longest-serving port commissioner at that time. She carried about 24 passengers at a time. In 1948, the R.J. Cummins was replaced by the Sam Houston I, a converted coast guard cutter that could carry 50 to 60 passengers.

The current boat replaced the Sam Houston after it had been in service for about eight years. The Sam Houston II was christened on July 30, 1958. Former Port Commission Chairman Howard Tellepsen’s 16-year-old daughter Karen wielded the champagne bottle against the Sam Houston’s bitt. In its first two months of operation, the vessel accommodated 3,917 passengers on 77 trips. The first Sam usually carried that many passengers in a year.

In 1958, then-general manager of the Port of Houston Jerry Turner called the Sam Houston II a “show window to the port” and said, “The only way people can really see our port is from the water, so we want to make them comfortable while they are our guests.”

Designed by L. B. Christenson Engineers, Inc., the Sam Houston II is 95 feet overall and it has a 24-foot beam, with a maximum capacity of 100 passengers. As the Houston Port Book, Spring 1958 says: “From the outside it may look like many other boats, but inside is a luxurious lounge featuring large plate glass windows which give an interesting panoramic view of the Houston Ship Channel.”

The article also notes “air-conditioned lounge seating” and tanks that “contain 4,000 gallons of fuel, making possible a 740-mile cruising range at a speed of 14 miles per hour.”

The interior was created by Mrs. Frances Duff, described as “one of Texas’ foremost designers.” She used a color scheme of cocoa brown and emerald green. With mahogany paneling on the walls, the main lounge is furnished with a Y-shaped sofa and 15 overstuffed revolving chairs on brass pedestal bases near the windows. At the forward bulkhead is a serving console with overhead spotlights highlighting a photomural depicting the Port of Houston.

As Bob and Mellie Bratcher of Deer Park attest, the Sam Houston has weathered well and looks much the same as it did when the Bratchers met and fell in love on a tour 42 years ago.

In 1992, the Sam Houston pavilion opened. For the port’s 90th anniversary in 2004, a series of murals depicting the port’s history was added to the exterior walls of the pavilion buildings. The PHA commissioned the Museum of Cultural Arts Houston to create the multi-scene mural to educate the public about the port’s history.

The vessel has been well-maintained through the years. “It’s a steel boat and it’s on its second set of engines,” says Sam Houston mechanic David Norman. “It could last at least another 50 years.”

RESERVE AN UNFORGETTABLE TOUR ON THE SAM HOUSTON

Reservations are required for a tour of the Port of Houston and can be made up to three months in advance online at www.portofhouston.com or by calling 713-670-2416 Mondays through Thursdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The Sam Houston tours Tuesday through Sunday, at 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and 2:30 p.m. only on Thursday and Sunday. The tour boat is closed on holidays and during a month-long maintenance beginning early in September.
The Sam Houston has provided many benefits through the years; however, it may not be as well known for its matchmaking success. But without the Sam, one love story might never have happened.

On a Saturday in early February 1966, 28-year-old Bob Bratcher was the newest member of the Sam Houston crew, offering drinks at the coffee bar. A young woman caught his eye.

“I was employed as a deck hand,” Bratcher, now a retired Houston Pilot, recalls. “Mellie was a third grade teacher at Parks Elementary and was there only because she had to make up for an in-service day she had missed when her mother died in December.”

“I really didn’t want to go, but the school secretary and principal insisted I make the trip,” Mellie Bratcher recalls. “Guys being guys, I got her phone number,” Bob Bratcher says. Later, when a date with someone else fell through, he looked in his wallet for her number and gave her a call.

“We took to each other right away,” Bratcher says. “I’m outgoing. She’s quiet and shy.” Bratcher had been married briefly before and had custody of his seven-year-old son. Shortly after they met, they drove to Dallas so that she could introduce the two to her father.

“I asked her, ‘What shall I call you? My fiancée?’ and she smiled. When we got there, I told my son, ‘Meet your new granddad.’”

Just two months after they met, Bob and Mellie were married on April 7, 1966. Members of the Sam Houston crew attended, including captains Jesse Gilson and Roy Faulkner.

“She adopted my son,” Bratcher says. “When he was 17, we adopted our daughter, Beth, who is now an optometrist. We have two grandchildren.”

Bob Bratcher later worked on the fireboats. After earning a bachelor’s degree from the University of Houston and his pilot’s license, he became a Houston Pilot in 1978, serving as a branch pilot and becoming presiding officer in 1996. He retired in 2005. His father was also a pilot, from 1951 to 1971, and now his nephew is continuing as the third generation of Houston Pilots in the Bratcher family.

Active in many civic organizations, the Bratchers are proud to have been able to give back to their community.

“We probably would never have met if we hadn’t met on the Sam Houston. I highly recommend it,” he smiles. “We’ve had a fabulous marriage ever since. The luckiest day of my life was when I met my wife.”

“Me, too,” says Mellie.
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- In-house permits officer to obtain required permits in timely manner
- Full time quotes department
Standing on the bow of the 50-year-old tour boat, M/V Sam Houston captain Doug Mims and crew members are all dressed in their “salt and pepper” – a crisp uniform of white shirt with epaulets and black pants. With more than 100 years of combined experience, they project a look of confidence and pride.

As well they should; this team of veteran PHA Marine Department employees represents the port to a diverse public that has included royalty, political leaders, celebrities, visitors from around the world and around the block, from schoolchildren to groups of the elderly. And the crew treats everyone who rides the Sam Houston like a VIP.

The regular crew of six interacts with about 160 people on “the Sam,” as it is affectionately called, on an average day during 90-minute tours along the Houston Ship Channel. The Sam Houston tours six days a week, Tuesday through Sunday, at 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and 2:30 p.m. only on Thursday and Sunday. The tour boat is closed on holidays and during a month-long maintenance beginning early in September. Embarking from the port’s Sam Houston Pavilion, visiting sightseers can enjoy passing views of international cargo vessels and operations at the port’s Turning Basin Terminal. The tour is free, but reservations are required in advance.

“It’s the people that make it the best job at the port,” says Mims, who has been on the job for 21 years. Starting work at the port authority in 1987, he joined the Sam Houston a year later and became its captain in 1997.

“We’re always meeting new people, from dignitaries to local residents who are here to tour the ship channel.”

Most visitors have the same reaction: compliments for an enjoyable trip, and a sense of awe when the boat is inbound at the Turning Basin and the Houston skyline is visible.

Mechanic David Norman and pilot Genaro Ambriz both agree the best thing about their job is the people. But what’s the most challenging thing? “The people!”

“You’re dealing with John Q. Public, who may be happy, sad, quiet or rowdy on a given day,” says Gloria “Jeannie”
Johnston, a 28-year veteran, whose father worked on the Sam when she was a teen-ager.

“It can be challenging at times, but we always want to keep our guests happy, interact with them and make sure kids onboard are safe,” Johnston says.

“I started out in maintenance, then worked nine months as a casual temp before starting a six-month tryout—I’m still on it 25 years later,” she jokes.

Norman, who joined the PHA in 1980, previously worked at the PHA’s grain elevator and joined the Sam Houston crew 25 years ago. Deckhand Jim McIntyre has been on the job for 23 years.

Being part of the crew was an unexpected turn of events for Ambriz. With no set goals when he was growing up, he joined the PHA mailroom staff after high school. While there, a deckhand job became available and he applied. That was 13 years ago.

In his second year as an intern on the Sam, Andrew Noles is a student at Long Island University, majoring in jazz studies and marketing. The other intern, Clay Brunson, is studying maritime science at Texas A&M and alternates his time on other PHA boats, including the fireboats. The interns help maintain the tour boat, assist the crew and answer questions on the tours.

But it’s not just a fun ride for the crew on the ship channel’s version of The Love Boat. When they’re not meeting the public in their cleaned and pressed uniforms, captain and crew are in work clothes, busy readying the tour boat for passengers.

“When we’re in our salt and pepper,” says Johnston, “people don’t realize how hard we work,” turning her hands over to reveal the rough, callused palms.

That means mopping the decks and vacuuming after every trip. Once a week, they give it a thorough scrub, polishing the wood, cleaning the windows, as well as maintaining the pavilion area. There’s also periodic painting and varnishing of the boat and facilities.

“The schedule can be demanding, but the port’s been good to all of us and it’s been a real education,” says Johnston. “I always try to teach our guests about the port, and we learn from our visitors.”

One of Johnston’s prized possessions is an autographed poster from astronaut Alan Shepard, who also served on the Port Commission. The crew has played host to many celebrities, but Johnston’s fondest memories are of the everyday people, particularly the children, who have toured the Sam.

The crew has had opportunities to tour other modes of transportation. After his ride on the Sam Houston, the captain of the Goodyear blimp invited them for a ride on his airship. A railroad executive also returned the favor with a train ride.

The Sam has cruised along fairly smoothly over the last 50 years. At the rear deck of the ship are life jackets, which are required but have never been used, says Mims.

“We don’t want anything exciting to happen,” he says.

“We want a routine trip.”

Since 9/11, however, some security measures have been put in place. Reservations are now required, and photographs cannot be taken from the boat.

“Working on the Sam has changed my attitude toward people overall,” says Johnston. “And I hope I’ve made a difference in some people’s lives in my time here.”

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Photo Opposite Page: Jim McIntyre, Genaro Ambriz, Andrew Noles, David Norman, Jeannie Johnston and Doug Mims (Absent from photo: crewmember Pete Garza and intern Clay Brunson.)
While the Port of Houston delivers the world’s goods to the households of millions of Americans, the Port of Houston Authority helps deliver educational resources, information and valuable hands-on experience to several hundred thousand Houston-area students from kindergarten to college. “Arguably, next to jobs, education is the one secular dynamic that positively affects quality of life,” says PHA Community Relations Manager Grace Moolchan. “That is one of the reasons the port authority is so deeply involved in the education process.”

That deep involvement permeates several grade levels and includes studies on interests ranging from maritime commerce to community affairs to the environment.

PHA has been a patron of Port Houston Elementary School for the past five years, giving financial support, helping to augment computer hardware needs and allowing PHA employees to perform volunteer work at the school.

Port authority employees have been very interactive with Port Houston Elementary students through the Junior Achievement (JA) program. Each year, 18–20 PHA employees spend a day each week over a six-week period teaching Port Houston students the economics of staying in school and developing workplace skills. JA’s purpose is to educate and inspire young people to understand business and economics in order to improve the quality of their lives.

Earlier this year, after the call rang out from Port Houston Elementary Principal Reid Whitaker seeking help in tutoring his students for the arduous state-mandated TAKS test, PHA response crossed generational lines.

North Shore Senior High School students Ramon Pickrom, son of public affairs division coordinator Rhenee Lawhorn, and Dennis J. Richard, son of training and development administrative assistant Retha Richard, were among those PHA SupPORterS who answered the call, donating their Saturday mornings to help prepare the elementary school students for the comprehensive four-part exam.

Nurtured and mentored by a dedicated and highly motivated administration and teaching staff, supported by family, its community and a benevolent corporate sponsor, Port Houston’s student body responded the best way it knew how.

The overwhelming majority of the students not only passed the exam, they passed with unprecedented success. Of the students who took the test, 97 percent passed in science; 94 percent passed in reading; 90 percent passed in math and 85 percent passed in writing.

Port Houston Elementary attained the Texas Education Agency’s second-highest rating, “Recognized,” for the first time in eight years, missing the coveted “Exemplary” rating by just two students in the writing category.
Of the more than 300 schools in the Houston Independent School District, Port Houston ranked among the top two percent in the “Most Improved” categories of reading and science. In math, nearly half the students achieved “Commendable” status and the school received “Gold Acknowledged” recognition on the strength of a score of 90 or better being posted by 30 percent of the students taking the test.

There is more than enough praise to go around, and Port Houston Elementary School Principal Reid Whitaker graciously gives a healthy amount of it to the port authority.

“The support we get from the Port of Houston Authority is immeasurable and unparalleled,” Whitaker says. “No other corporate sponsor comes close to giving us the wealth of resources the port authority does. From our Water-wise conservation program, to employee volunteers to funding a field trip for our sixth-graders to visit college campuses across the state of Texas, the port authority generously contributes.

“You (PHA) are really helping to foster and grow the next generation of leaders in math, science and technology,” Whitaker says.

The port authority helps take the classroom, literally, to the waterways through its BaySmart program. Now in its sixth year, BaySmart takes primarily fifth-graders on waterborne educational field trips along the Houston Ship Channel and into Galveston Bay. This unique program introduces students to first-hand exposure about maritime economics, good corporate citizenship and environmental initiatives. It serves more than 1,000 students per year.

Also at the public school level, PHA pairs education with recreation and environmental innovation through its alliance with the SPARK Park program. The program transforms school playgrounds into neighborhood parks, using the combined funding resources of Community Development Block Grants, local school districts, Harris County, the private and corporate sector and neighborhood groups to develop these parks serving the schools during the day and providing green space for the community during the after-school hours and weekends. Last year, the port authority donated $10,000 for park construction at Pasadena ISD’s Parks Elementary School—the school district’s first—and Holland Middle School, located near PHA’s Turning Basin terminals.

Utilizing the vast distribution resources of the nation’s ninth-largest newspaper, PHA continues its partnership with The Houston Chronicle and area educators in the Chronicle In Education (CIE) literacy program. CIE is a three-fold education program, in which teachers, students and the general public learn about the Port of Houston. The newspaper’s education department in partnership with PHA, produces education materials highlighting the port authority, its history, economic impact, global trade, environmental stewardship and the port authority’s contribution to the community’s way of life. All materials meet academic requirements mandated by the state of Texas. Five hundred elementary and middle school teachers participate annually in the program, and about 3,000 school children are taken on tours of the Houston Ship Channel following the classroom study of the teaching curriculum.

PHA, through the Junior Achievement Program in high schools, annually provides a total of ten $2,000 scholarships to students from Houston-area school districts.

Consistent with the belief that education without application is somewhat incomplete, the port authority helps to complete the circle through its annual college internship program, which offers valuable, on-the-job experience to between 12 and 18 college students each year. To date, a total of 107 students have gone through the intern program since it was started in 1991.
The Port of Houston THEN & NOW
Nineteen fifty-eight. In July of that year, the new Sam Houston was christened and Port Commissioner R. Vernon Whiteside’s remarks at the occasion include a reference to “sputniks trying to find their orbits,” giving a flavor of what was going on elsewhere in the world.

Major global events included the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy and the U.S. Supreme Court’s unanimous upholding of the decision to integrate Little Rock, Ark., schools. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established.

What a difference 50 years can make. Oil (west Texas intermediate crude) was at $3.07 a barrel. A gallon of gas was 24 cents. In Houston, snow had fallen in February.

The era of containerized shipping had begun in Houston two years earlier with a shipment of 58 loaded containers on the Ideal X from New York. As Houston was now competing with worldwide ports, Port of Houston Authority officials realized that facilities would need to be enlarged again to accommodate expected growth. In 1958, Congress authorized increasing the channel depth from 25 to 40 feet. It was also to be widened from 100 to 400 feet.

In 1958, the Port of Houston set a record for tonnage, with 55.3 million tons, up from 54.9 million tons in 1957, as reported in an article in the new Port of Houston magazine (formerly the Houston Port Book) in September 1959.

Speaking of the tonnage mark for Houston, Howard T. Tellepsen, then chairman of the Port Commission, said: “I believe this increased tonnage can be attributed in part to the additional facilities allowed by the bonds voted by the citizens and a result of the new management the Port is now operating under.”

“As long as the port continues to grow, we will be still leading the nation in international trade and commerce.”

In 1958, petroleum and petroleum products, heavy machinery, oil field equipment, synthetic resins and synthetic rubber, according to the October 1959 Port of Houston magazine. Also during 1958, the magazine reports that the public elevator at the Port of Houston handled the third largest year of grain on record.

Today, according to the PHA Trade Development Division, petroleum and petroleum products still lead export commodities by tonnage, followed by organic chemicals, cereals and cereal products, plastics and machinery. Top export trading partners by tonnage are Mexico, the Netherlands, Brazil, Spain and Singapore. As a testament to its excellent export service, PHA recently won the 2007 President’s “E Star” award.
Award in recognition of continued growth. The impressive export growth is matched by extraordinary growth in import containerized cargoes when many other ports in the United States are experiencing flat or declining import levels.

In 1958, the Port of Houston also saw “tremendous increases” in importation of automobiles and steel, as well as coffee, machinery and raw products.

Since 1991, the Port of Houston has led U.S. ports in imports. Its top import commodities by tonnage are petroleum and petroleum products, iron and steel, natural stone, organic chemicals and beverages. Top import trading partners by tonnage are Mexico, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and China.

“Over the last 50 years, the port has brought the world to Houston, and made Houston a leading international business center,” says PHA Chairman Jim Edmonds. “As long as the port continues to grow, we will be still leading the nation in international trade and commerce.”

Over the last 50 years, the Port has brought the world to Houston.

Some of the topics covered in the Houston Port Book in 1958 included features on the Propeller Club, foreign trade, the christening of the Sam Houston II, and in the first issue of the Port of Houston magazine in 1959: a synopsis of the year 1958 at the Port of Houston.

“Port Sets Tonnage Record to Lead All Gulf Ports” tells about the port’s “all-time tonnage record in 1958 to become the leading Gulf port.” The 1958 total was 55,258,046 tons, an increase over the record set in 1957 with 54,945,531 tons. The gain was attributed to a number of items: imports of steel, coffee, automobiles, machinery, as well as raw products. Exports of grain, petroleum, oil well supplies and drilling equipment led the way in outbound cargo.

“General Cargo Gains as New Facilities Completed” says the Port of Houston in 1958 was second only to New York in total tonnage, according to records of the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Here’s how the five top ports ranked:
New York, 145.5 tons; Houston, 55.3 tons; New Orleans, 51.7 tons; Philadelphia, 46.7 tons; and Baltimore, 41.7 tons. “Houston’s Propeller Club is Third in Nation” notes that the organization was chartered 18 years earlier on May 22, 1940.

“Houston Area Industries Promised Adequate Water for Next 50 Years” headlines another story. A compromise Trinity River plan, adopted by the Houston City Council and the Trinity River Authority, promises an adequate supply of industrial water for the next 50 years. Under the agreement, a dam was to be built at Livingston and a salt water barrier at Wallisville.

“Sam Houston II New Inspection Boat will be completed soon,” says everything is progressing on schedule and the new tour boat will be ready for use in the summer to carry “many thousands of visitors from all parts of the world on cruises down the Houston Ship Channel.”

Port Commissioners in 1958: In addition to Chairman Tellepsen, were: W. N. Blanton, vice chairman; H. M. Crosswell, Jr.; R. Vernon Whiteside and John G. Turney. Executive officers were Jerry P. Turner, general manager, and Vern Obnailey, director of port operations.
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While Houston has long held the distinction of being home to the leading port in the country in terms of foreign tonnage, it took the leadership of a devoted chairman to make Houston a leader among all ports.

In just eight years, Jim Edmonds has guided the Port of Houston Authority to a level of world-class leadership in all aspects of port management. From environmental and security issues to operational excellence, Houston is the port others turn to as the example to follow.

Edmonds’ recent unanimous reappointment to a fifth term was a resounding vote of confidence by Harris County Commissioners Court and Houston City Council, and it is easy to see why. For every year under his leadership, the port authority has shattered the previous year’s tonnage, performance and revenue records.

The port authority’s success has generated attention from the highest levels. The PHA was recently honored by President Bush and given the 2007 President’s “E Star” Award for export service in recognition of the port’s continuing support of export growth in the U.S. business community for the last five years and more.

“Jim Edmonds’ vision, leadership and tireless efforts on behalf of the Port of Houston make him the perfect fit for the position of PHA chairman,” says Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. “I look forward to another two years of exceptional performance with Jim at the port’s helm.”

The port authority made maritime history in 2002, when it became the first U.S. port facility to implement an Environmental Management System (EMS) that meets the rigorous parameters of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 standards. Innovative programs developed by the port authority that protect the environment have garnered such coveted awards as the EPA’s Gulf Guardian.

Edmonds has long advocated that the environment’s needs and business can co-exist, and has proven it through the port’s operations. The new Bayport Container Terminal is both an asset for expanding the port authority’s cargo-handling capability as well as green facility that imposes neither on the environment nor the surrounding communities.

Houston Mayor Bill White states, “Jim Edmonds has a keen understanding of the Port of Houston’s critical role in the city’s economy. He has also shown his commitment
to ensuring the port’s growth doesn’t compromise the area’s environment. He is a solid choice for chairman of the port authority.”

Security is a top priority for the port and another arena where the port authority’s leadership has set the standard. The PHA became the world’s first port authority to initiate a Security Management System worthy of certification for ISO 28000:2007. The concept of the nation’s first Ship Channel Security District has taken homeland security to a new level through public and private partnerships of cooperation and not competition for limited resources.

Edmonds has expanded the competition for the port’s work by creating more opportunities for small businesses. In 2002, the PHA created and implemented its Small Business Development Program with a 35 percent participation goal, and since its inception, the program has awarded nearly $246 million in PHA-eligible contracts to registered small businesses.

Developing relationships, building new partnerships and broadening the public’s recognition of the port’s many economic benefits are hallmarks of Edmonds’ leadership style. He has traveled the world, met the port’s customers, and listened to their needs.

From launching the port authority’s “The Port Delivers the Goods” marketing campaign to persuading Congress to continue funding the ship channel’s maintenance projects, Edmonds devotes extraordinary amounts of his time, patience and decades of influential contacts to the needs of the port.

Harris County voters are as convinced as he is that the port is an important economic asset that will continue driving the economy throughout the 21st century if it’s allowed to continue to grow. During the last local election, voters approved a $250 million PHA bond proposal to fund further expansion at Bayport as well as additional security and environmental initiatives.

Dedicated to public service and willing to give so much of his time to the port authority, Edmonds is humbled by this opportunity to be a part of the success story the Port of Houston has been since its inception.

“I am deeply honored and grateful for the confidence Harris County commissioners and the Houston City Council have expressed in me with their collective votes,” Edmonds says. “I will work even harder over the next two years to ensure that confidence is well-placed.”

“I am deeply honored and grateful...”
Despite its name, there is nothing small about the Port of Houston Authority’s (PHA) Small Business Development Program. Performance figures over the past seven years reflect a big commitment toward helping entrepreneurs from Houston area communities achieve success.

Since the inception of the program in 2002 and through the end of the second quarter of 2008, the program has helped deliver $245.9 million of PHA business to small business contractors and subcontractors. The program currently has more than 1,100 registered vendors.

The Small Business Development Program is a race-and gender-neutral program dedicated to the economic development of those small businesses in the eight-county (Harris, Montgomery, Liberty, Chambers, Fort Bend, Brazoria, Galveston and Waller) Houston metropolitan area. The ultimate goal of the program is to award at least 35 percent of all eligible (those of $25,000 or more) PHA contracts to small businesses.

PHA's Small Business Development Division representatives remain busy and interactive throughout the year.

Each quarter, small business staff attend more than 25 events, connecting with more than 1,500 business owners. The purpose of the small business program’s outreach efforts is two-fold – to educate registered companies about PHA’s procurement process and inform small business owners about the port authority’s certification process and procurement opportunities.

Twice a year, the Small Business Development Division hosts Port University, a series of workshops designed to educate approved vendors about PHA’s procurement process. Port University is a team effort among the PHA engineering, environmental & planning, legal, operations, purchasing, risk management, small business development and trade development divisions. Port University offers companies instruction on reading a
PHAs proposal; interpreting the contract terms in a proposal; reviewing insurance and bonding requirements; an overview of the rank and evaluation process; and other topics. To date, 227 individuals have graduated from the Port University program.

“Those companies that successfully complete Port University,” says Gilda Ramirez, director of the Small Business Development Division, “we hope will get a better understanding of how the port authority operates and ultimately lead to a contract with PHA.”

PHA conducts many workshops designed to give small business owners step-by-step instructions on how to become certified by a qualifying agency and registered in the PHA Small Business Development Program. Workshop participants also learn about current and upcoming procurement opportunities with the port authority.

The sessions are conducted in partnership with Houston Community College, University of Houston Small Business Development Center and San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center. PHA also teams up with local business groups, governmental entities and area chambers of commerce throughout the greater Houston area.

Throughout the year, PHA also takes part in several expos hosted by business groups, such as the Women’s Business Enterprise Alliance, Houston Minority Business Council and Government Procurement Connections Committee.

Consistent with the ever-changing dynamics associated with the business arena, the development of PHA’s small business program has been part of an ongoing evolution since it was launched.

Part of that evolution involves self-examination through periodic reviews and modifications when deemed necessary. PHA streamlined its vendor registration and procurement processes in order to dispel the perception the port authority was insular in its approach toward new business and to overcome some small business owners’ reluctance to go through the certification and registration processes. Staff reinforces recruitment efforts to attract new vendors through regular information and education meetings with members of the small business community.

“As with any change, the first hurdle is always having buy-in from its members,” Ramirez says. “How did Small Business meet this challenge? We incorporated a more universal talent pool within our division by creating a bridge connecting (other PHA) divisions; developed a written policy and procedures document that aided the various divisions in streamlining their procurement procedures and developed a specific certification process to reduce fraud or misrepresentations by the small business.”

The program also receives direction from a 25-member independent advisory council, comprised of community and business leaders who help shape policy and meeting goals set by port authority commissioners and executive staff.

So, how does a small business owner transition from being interested in doing business with PHA to developing a business relationship with the port authority? It’s literally as simple as one, two, three:

1. The first thing any business should do is to register in PHA’s Vendor Information System (VIS). VIS is the port authority’s e-procurement system and is the database system that notifies businesses of upcoming PHA projects. After registration, any business can download bid packages or submit an online bid quote. VIS offers vendors a wide variety of tools to help start a business relationship with the port authority. It provides a portal, giving businesses a view of all bids and proposals associated with its industry; online bid opportunities for those projects under $25,000; a list of businesses that have downloaded plans and may be interested in partnering.

2. Enroll in the Small Business Development Program to keep the business’ name on the active list of available vendors for second tier partnering with prime vendors.

3. If a company qualifies for the small business program, it should further pursue opportunities presented at PHA’s monthly forums, attend one of the Port University sessions in the fall or spring and present its product to the department directors and their staff through meetings or a PHA lunch-and-learn session.

Certification as a small business is not mandatory for doing business with the port authority, but it is strongly encouraged. Companies can be certified through a number of agencies, including the city of Houston, Houston...
Minority Business Council, Women’s Business Enterprise Alliance, METRO or the Small Business Association.

Once a company or individual establishes a business relationship with PHA, its ability to deliver quality goods and service will be the dominant factor in continuing that relationship.

“Retaining business with the port authority is always a product of the vendor’s reputation, coupled with its ability to give value and good quality product or service,” Ramirez says. “That has never changed. However, if there is a problem which might reflect on those products or services, our program can offer the small business help in the way of arbitration, with payment issues or suggest other avenues the small business may want to pursue. The Purchasing Department will gladly discuss the online bidding process and why the bid may have been lost for projects or services under $25,000 with any bidding vendor.”

PHA’s Small Business Development Program started out as an ambitious project conceived and driven by a group of forward-thinking port commissioners. Its growth and presence, Ramirez says, is a testimony to those commissioners’ vision.

“The division just celebrated its six-year anniversary,” she says. “This, I think stands as a testimony to not only the program but the dedication of the commissioners and the division staff. We are committed to helping the small business vendor traverse the sometimes confusing world of certification, government procurement and the port authority’s own unique way of doing things. The program has transformed what was perceived to be a “good ole boy” network to a transparent system. We are doing good things for the community and that makes us feel great!”

SUCCESS STORIES ABOUND!!!

While success stories abound, three in particular stand out as examples of small businesses whose past performances have recently resulted in substantial contract procurements:

Crouch Environmental—a professional services environmental engineering firm. Crouch has demonstrated exceptional work for PHA, small business staffers say, and in 2007 was awarded $19,000 for environmental related services, which was approximately 20 percent of the expenditures from the port authority Environmental Affairs Department.

Reytec Construction—a full-service general contractor. Reytec was awarded approximately $2.1 million for a key project related to the Bayport Container Terminal entry-access gate system. Reytec aggressively worked the short duration project, and by performance measures, it was cited as the best of the four gate expansion construction contracts managed by PHA.

Forde Construction—a full-service general construction contractor that started out with PHA as a second-tier contractor. Forde has been consistent in quality and cost control, PHA officials say. Through its participation with the small business program and its own initiative and expertise has graduated to become a trusted prime contractor that has received several contracts.
For nearly 80 years, the Greater Houston Port Bureau (GHPB) has been a conduit through which domestic seaports on the Texas Gulf can realize economic growth and development through the sharing of information and data about the local maritime industry.

“We are a member organization of port users representing the private sector” is the way Jim Haggarty sums it up. Haggerty is GHPB account manager. “Think of us as a marine chamber of commerce.”

The Port Bureau is comprised of nearly 500 members. Governed by a 33-member board headed by Chairman Tom Marian, the bureau supports the commercial, technical, operational and legislative concerns of ports throughout Texas.

West Gulf Maritime Association, American Institute for International Steel’s Gulf Region, the Houston Customhouse Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association, Greater Houston Partnership, U.S. Gulf International Commerce Club and Marine Exchange of the West Gulf are among the member organizations working in concert with the bureau along with Houston Pilots and regional port authorities, including the Port of Houston Authority.

GHPB played a significant role in getting Houston’s designation as the nation’s only green coffee port located west of the Mississippi River. The group worked with the Greater Houston Coffee Association, PHA and local state representatives to get an amendment to the state constitution placed on the 1999 ballot calling for the exemption of green coffee from ad valorem taxes.

The Port Bureau performs a myriad of administrative support duties, including the filing and posting of tariffs for nearly a dozen small and medium-sized Texas ports, maintenance of Web sites and contract cash management services.

As a local representative of the Maritime Information Service of North America, the organization also maintains an extensive database of all deep-water vessel movements along the Gulf Coast from Brownsville to Beaumont.

“We provide information 24/7, 365 days a year,” says GHPB President Alton Landry. “We track and record the names and types of vessels, their arrivals and departures, where they dock and how long.”

“It gives people a handle on what goes on at every port,” Landry adds. “Most of the ports in Texas are heavily petroleum- and chemical- based. The Port of Houston is so diversified, however, it handles every type of cargo from petroleum to containerized to bulk and breakbulk.”

Landry is especially proud of his organization’s new product known as Harborlights – an online vessel scheduling and tracking system used by the Houston Pilots and soon to be used by Galveston’s Pilots. The system allows online subscribers to view vessels at anchorage, see when they are boarded, when they pass Morgan’s Point on the Houston Ship Channel and when they dock at their terminal of destination.
In 1962, Lupe Fraga was working as a bookkeeper at a Houston firm and befriended the person who sold office supplies to the company. When Mr. Kendig decided to sell his business, Fraga took him up on the offer.

Forty-six years later, the former Kendig's Office Supply, which was renamed Tejas Office Products, Inc. in 1982, is now the largest independent office products company in Houston. From $10,000 worth of inventory and one employee, Tejas, from the Native American word for friend, has grown into a big business with 49 employees, including Fraga as president and CEO.

“We deal in commodities that you can buy from everyone,” says Stephen Fraga, president. “But we provide personal service, from a live person on the phone to drivers who deliver with a smile. We’ll also track down those hard-to-find items that may not always be in stock.

“It’s our service – everyone says that, but we actually do it. If a client calls at 6 p.m. on Friday or early Saturday morning, we’ll deliver the goods.”

The family-owned business also includes daughters Michele, who manages customer service, and Alisa, who does accounting. Lupe Fraga’s wife, Irene, retired after more than 40 years. Tejas has worked with the port authority for nearly 15 years and has an opportunity to bid on the office products business every two to three years.

“The port does great things,” says Fraga. “Its Small Business Program encourages other primes to do business with small businesses, adding to the economy by providing jobs and making a difference in the community.”

In 2007, Tejas did about $50,000 worth of business with the PHA and is trending to do more this year, possibly double, with $36,000 to date.

“We look forward to doing more business with the port,” Fraga says.
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- Series A Buildings: 247,240 SF divisible to 123,620 SF
  Front Load, Rail-Served Building
- Series B Buildings: 413,000 SF divisible to 105,000 SF
  Cross Dock Building
- Series C Buildings: 108,000 SF divisible to 18,000 SF

Park Amenities:
- 22-track, Union Pacific served rail yard, designed to spot over 740 rail cars
- Direct on/off switching from the Union Pacific main rail line
- Transloading Aisle available to all tenants

For Additional Information:

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