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SIU VP Celona Unexpectedly Passes Away at 65

When it came to his union and his country, lifelong Seafarer Nicholas Celona unfailingly demonstrated a genuine enthusiasm that was impossible to miss.

Perpetually upbeat and motivated, Celona graduated from Paul Hall Center Trainee Class 229 in 1977, and he never left the union. He sailed until the early 1980s and then came ashore to work in various roles, most recently as the vice president of the SIU Government Services Division since 2021.

Celona unexpectedly passed away June 8 at his home in suburban New Orleans, from natural causes. He was 65.

Vice President Kamala Harris sent a condolence letter to Celona's family that was read at his memorial service June 18 in New Orleans. Harris and Celona were long-time colleagues and friends, going back to her days as an elected official first for the city of San Francisco and later for the state of California.

The letter reads in part, "Throughout his life, Mr. Celona was a dedicated community leader. I am grateful for his advocacy and commitment to our Nation's merchant mariners through his work at the Seafarers International Union. As we enter a new era in the American labor movement, we stand on the shoulders of leaders like Mr. Celona – and we will continue to uphold his legacy to ensure that unions are strong and that workers' voices and dignity are always respected."

Vice President Harris added, "I am particularly thankful for Mr. Celona's friendship. His joyous spirit and generosity were gifts to those whose lives he touched, and he will be remembered for the light he brought to this world."

SIU President David Heindel stated, "Back in the early 1980s, Nick and I had the privilege of working together in the



Nicholas Celona

port of New Orleans, a time during which we forged a lifelong friendship. Nick was a rare individual, brimming with a huge heart and an unwavering love for life. His infectious enthusiasm and unadulterated bravado left an indelible mark on everyone he met. As we remember Nick, we celebrate not only a dedicated seafarer but also a beloved father and friend who enriched our lives in countless ways. My deepest sympathies to his wife, Denise, and daughters Jennifer and Danielle."

SIU Executive Vice President Augie Tellez said, "Nick was a true SIU brother – always positive and upbeat. He was a great motivator and organizer wherever he dropped anchor, and he was loyal to the core. He was so proud of his family, and also was proud that he finally became a member of the SIU Executive Board. He will be sorely missed."

SIU Vice President Contracts George Tricker described Celona as "a true patriot. If you ever wanted to assemble an all-star team

for a foxhole, Nick would be a first-rounder. Only his staunch support for the U.S. Merchant Marine and his undying affection for the SIU can rival his devotion to the flag. He was a character in every sense and will be missed and remembered always."

Joe Vincenzo, who succeeded Celona as vice president of the Government Services Division, stated, "We lost a friend and a colleague – what an inspiration he was to us all. Anyone who knew him knew that he loved life and he loved SIU. Nick was all heart, street smart and could read the room and his audience as well or better than anyone. He had a way of making you feel appreciated. He will be missed."

American Maritime Officers President Willie Barrere said, "Many AMO hawsepipers got to know Nick during their years sailing with the SIU, some from the very beginning of their careers. For all of us who have worked shoreside, Nick was a driving force and steadfast presence at many of the events and meetings that brought the U.S. seagoing labor community together to advance the cause of American mariners professionally and politically. He was a leader we had the pleasure of knowing and a man we mourn in his passing."

When he became an SIU vice president in 2021, Celona said, "My goals are to promote, protect and defend the U.S. Merchant Marine and the SIU Government Services Division, which in turn will help ensure our national security. We have to make sure that supplies get through to our troops."

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Celona (who never lost the accent) graduated from Lafayette High School in 1976 and soon thereafter found a home with the SIU. After completing the trainee program, he sailed in the engine department until 1982, upgrading several times along the way (most recently to chief electrician). He sailed on vessels operated by Sea-Land, Maritime Overseas, Delta Line, American Hawaii Cruises, Bay Tankers and others.

Celona worked as a patrolman in New Orleans from 1983-88 and was involved in multiple inland beefs. He spent 1989 serving as the port agent in Piney Point before what turned out to be a long-term move to the West Coast. Celona was the union's San Francisco port agent from 1990-94; he became an assistant vice president in 1994.

Among other activities, he served as a delegate on the San Francisco-Alameda Labor Council, secretary-treasurer of the local port council, and a governor-appointed member of the board of directors of the Cow Palace (a popular, multi-purpose arena in Daly City, California).

Always politically active, Celona organized the union's annual Thanksgiving gatherings in San Francisco and Oakland, which ran for 29 straight years before temporarily being derailed due to the pandemic. Those feasts evolved into a Who's Who of politics, with regular appearances from Kamala Harris, Nancy Pelosi, John Garamendi, Eric Swalwell, Jackie Spier and many others. Based on his extensive work with the military, Celona in 2002 was sworn in as an honorary U.S. Marine, a rarity.



Pictured from left at a change-of-command ceremony in 2023 in Norfolk, Virginia, are then-SIU Representative Sam Spain, USTRANSCOM Commanding Officer Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, Alan Frosch (spouse of Gen. Van Ovost), SIU VP Nicholas Celona and SIU Asst. VP Joe Vincenzo.

President's Column

Ahead of Election Day

Since there is no escaping the media coverage or the ads, none of us can forget for more than a moment that 2024 is an election year. While the runup can be tiresome, the results will have a big effect on our union.

Right off the bat, I encourage our members to be mindful not just of the presidential race, but also your respective congressional, state and local elections. They all matter, and in some cases, the ones closest to home may have the largest impact.

With that said, having a pro-worker administration and a pro-worker U.S. Congress makes an enormous difference in our capacity to provide good jobs and job security for CIVMARS. As a



David Heindel

consequence of all the inevitable noise that comes with politics, people sometimes may become distracted from the crucial need for all of us in the labor movement to support the candidates who support our issues and our lines of work. That may sound like basic common sense, but how many times have you heard about folks voting against their own best interests?

Our union has a long record of bipartisan support, and that'll never change. We support the candidates who support workers and our industry, regardless of political party.

The current administration has been, hands down, the most pro-worker, pro-union administration I've ever seen. These are not just sound bites from the campaign trail; they're the truth. They are also solidly pro-maritime.

President Biden is the first president to ever walk a picket line, and he didn't do so for a photo opp. His record throughout his first term demonstrates that he's the right choice for working people. He has led our economy out of crisis with record-low unemployment; made historic investments in America's infrastructure, manufacturing and good union jobs; strengthened workers' rights; protected our retirements; boosted Buy American rules; lowered prescription costs; and more.

Although the president's pro-labor executive orders and pro-worker National Labor Relations Board rarely make front-page news, they have been massively important for America's working families. They have facilitated higher wages, workplace safety, and a resurgence in union representation elections.

By contrast, as spelled out by the AFL-CIO, the prior office holder "told us in 2016 he would stand with workers. He lied. The difference now is that he has a record he can't hide from. And that record was catastrophic for workers. He spent four years in office weakening unions and working people while pushing tax giveaways to the wealthiest among us. He stacked the courts with judges who want to roll back our rights on the job. He made us less safe at work. He gave big corporations free rein to lower wages and make it harder for workers to stand together in a union."

Like I said, it's not about the capital letter after a candidate's name. It's about where they stand on workers' rights and good jobs here at home. I encourage all of our members to stay informed on the key issues and to support the candidates who'll be best for your livelihood and your community.

Last but not least, we would all do well to take plenty of deep breaths between now and Election Day, and to give people the benefit of the doubt. I've been encouraged by some of the press coverage I've consumed in recent weeks – articles that solidly reflect the large number of Americans who are moderate.

At other times... Well, I'm not saying that the news media routinely sensationalizes its stories, but let's face it: The more jarring the headline, the more likely we probably are to click or tap or stay tuned. It's a modern-day reality of the news business.

Let's keep it civil, get the facts, and get out the vote.

SIU Directory

David Heindel, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

Tom Orzechowski, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Joe Vincenzo,

Vice President Government Services

Sam Spain,

Asst. Vice President Government Services

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USNS Earl Warren Delivered



The John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oiler *USNS Earl Warren* (T-AO 207) was delivered to the Navy on May 7. Delivery follows the successful completion of integrated sea trials. Crewed by members of the SIU Government Services Division, the new ship was built at General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego, a union shipyard. (Photo courtesy U.S. Navy)

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Looking for new ways to save? **Union Plus** makes everyday life more affordable with wireless savings, car rental discounts, discounts at restaurants and on movie tickets and live events, and much more.



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Rental Car Savings



Restaurant Discounts



Movie Tickets & Live Events



Exclusive discounts for union families



See more at
unionplus.org



SIU-ET-12-19-24

How to Become an SIU Member

Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting your workplace rights. The union's website – www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at:

<https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/civmar-news/>

Forms are also available under "SIU Forms" in the ABOUT tab.

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Union's Executive Board Promotes Vincenzo, Spain

The SIU Executive Board has unanimously approved Joe Vincenzo as the union's vice president for the Government Services Division, and Sam Spain as the assistant vice president for that sector. The board convened June 12 in Piney Point, Maryland.

These moves happened in the aftermath of the untimely passing of SIU Vice President Government Services Nicholas Celona.

"Both Joe and Sam have my complete confidence," said SIU President David Heindel. "They have long, solid records of outstanding service to the membership and they are the right people for these jobs."

Vincenzo is a U.S. Army veteran who first sailed with the SIU in 1991 as an engine-department member. He last sailed in 2003 as a QMED aboard the USNS 1st Lt Jack Lummus.

Vincenzo has since served the union in various capacities including patrolman from 2003 to 2007 and Tacoma port agent from 2007 through 2019.

He became the assistant vice president of the Government Services Division in 2019 and had remained in that slot, representing civilian mariners in the federal sector including the Military Sealift Command, NOAA, the Army Corp of Engineers and the National Defense Reserve Fleet.

Additionally, Vincenzo served as the UIW Alaska Region Representative, representing seafood process workers and fisheries observers. He also served as president of the South Puget Sound Port Council for four years.

He said the highlight of his 30-plus years with the SIU was his service to the SS Jeremiah O'Brien in the capacity of oiler during the 50-year commemoration of D-Day, when the historic ship led the



SIU VP Joe Vincenzo (left) and Asst. VP Sam Spain (right) have a combined 77-plus years with the union, first as rank-and-file members and then as officials.

parade of vessels back to the beaches of Normandy in 1994.

In 2007, Vincenzo spearheaded Tacoma's philanthropic outreach partnering first with the United States Marine Corps and Toys for Tots and then with Joint Base Lewis McChord-based Santa's Castle, a 501(c)(3) benefitting lower enlisted military personnel.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Policy from the University of Massachusetts.

Vincenzo stated, "It is an honor and privilege to serve this great union of ours and its members in my new capacity as vice president of Government Ser-

vices. I'm grateful for this opportunity to continue to work with a dedicated team of trade unionists, all of us, towards improved conditions of employment and work-life balance on behalf of our mariners."

He continued, "My time in the government sector began almost as soon as I came ashore in 2003, servicing NOAA, Army Corps of Engineers and MSC equipment and working with then-Vice President Kermet Mangram and his team. Early on, I participated in a number of arbitrations that centered on substandard habitability and I was able to be of service on a number of weighty issues ranging

from health and safety to, again, habitability. I was also assigned to work with then-Fleet Representative Kate Hunt on the NOAA collective bargaining agreement, which needed a major overhaul. Later, as assistant vice president to then-Vice President Kate Hunt, I worked closely with her and representatives from our sister unions on resolving the unprecedented issues that we all faced during the pandemic years, not least of which was the 'Gangways Up' order that restricted mariners to their various ships for the better part of one year."

He concluded, "As vice president, I will continue the work of my predecessors including our late, beloved brother and friend, Nicholas Celona by seeking out every opportunity to partner with various government agencies wherever and whenever possible to advance the interests of our mariners' lives at sea. Mariners and CIVMARS in particular are a special breed, enduring prolonged periods away from home under the harshest conditions imaginable, serving the interests of our national, economic and homeland security. I thank President Heindel and the entire executive board for their vote of confidence and I will work hard every day to show it."

Spain joined the SIU in 1990. He sailed for a dozen years, most recently as a chief steward, before coming ashore to work as a union representative. Spain has always been based in Norfolk, Virginia, and will remain so.

"I took up the challenge of being a union representative because I knew I wanted to make a difference for the SIU and for unlicensed merchant seamen," Spain said. "I've looked to continue giving CIVMARS the same high level of representation as past officials and that is certainly my plan moving forward. We also always want to build on the relationship between the SIU and the Military Sealift Command."

USTRANSCOM Commander Emphasizes Maritime's Vital Importance

The commanding officer of the United States Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) recently reiterated her ardent support of the U.S. Merchant Marine.

Addressing the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) Executive Board via video on April 25, Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost also made it crystal clear that America's national, economic and homeland security depend on maintaining a vibrant maritime industry.

Her remarks, aired at the board's meeting at AFL-CIO headquarters, included a warm tribute to the late MTD/SIU President Michael Sacco, who passed away in late 2023.

SIU President David Heindel also serves as president of the MTD.

Gen. Van Ovost stated, "America's economic prosperity is delivered on the oceans, and America's national security is rooted in it. All of you in the Maritime Trades Department and your organizations and affiliates are key to maintaining our collective prosperity. Your unwavering commitment and unquestionable expertise in maritime trades, anchored by your professionalism and patriotism, are the reasons why we continue to prosper today in a free and open world. It's these qualities that make you such an important part of the TRANSCOM team. We rest assured knowing that when we are called, our partners in the maritime industry will be right there along with us to ensure the defense of our nation."

The general pointed out that recent months have been especially active and high-profile for the maritime industry.

"I hope that you pause to reflect on how important the work you've done this past year has been to our nation's success," Gen. Van Ovost said. "Throughout the year, you continue to play a massive part in our country's commitment to support the people of Ukraine against Russia's unjustified and unprovoked invasion. Your efforts ... have had immeasurable impacts on global peace and security.

"And of course, there's the Red Sea," she continued. "Houthi attacks on merchant vessels following Hamas' horrific attacks on Oct. 7 threaten freedom of navigation, global shipping and economic security. With nearly 12% of global trade transiting the Red Sea, any disruption has major impacts on all countries, affecting millions of people who rely on the food, medicine, fuel and other



Attendees watch the TRANSCOM video at AFL-CIO headquarters.

essential supplies carried through it.... Thank you for your contributions to balance threat mitigation with executing national requirements. It took a team effort. Your commitment to the longstanding partnership between the military and maritime industry is greatly appreciated. And I hope you take great pride knowing that through these events, you have honored your legacy and commitments to our nation, in peace and war."

Gen. Van Ovost pointed out that sealift is often "the most cost-effective and efficient mode of transporting goods and supplies," and with that in mind, "we rely on a strong maritime industrial base ensuring access to modern vessels, shipyards, repair facilities and drydocks and skilled workers.... We must prioritize expanding the fleet of American-owned, American-flagged and American-crewed vessels through reflagging foreign ships and producing our own."

She then reinforced her support of the Jones Act, the Tanker Security Program and other foundational components of American maritime.

Reflecting on President Sacco, who had retired in early 2023, Gen. Van Ovost said his passing "filled us all with immense sadness. Mike embodied what it means to serve, dedicating 65 years to the maritime industry and four years in our great Air Force (he was a veteran).... We remember Mike as being a wonderful partner to TRANSCOM and we will miss him dearly. As we build upon Mike's legacy, the partnership between our organizations has never been stronger."

Gen. Van Ovost concluded, "Our future is on the water. So thank you for your professionalism, dedication and patriotism in service to our nation. And a big thank you to President Heindel for his leadership and partnership. I'm grateful for your abilities to chart a course for the nation and the maritime workforce on which our national prosperity and defense depends. We are a maritime nation. America was at our birth, and we sailed the oceans to global prominence. And it's imperative that we maintain our strength as a maritime nation today. Together, we deliver."

SIU Observes National Maritime Day in D.C., Elsewhere

From coast to coast and in the U.S. territory of Guam, the SIU played a typically active role in this year's National Maritime Day observances. Those respective ceremonies took place in Washington, D.C.; Houston; Port Arthur, Texas; Galveston, Texas; Norfolk, Virginia; and Guam.

The union and its affiliated Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education (PHC) handled particularly noteworthy roles in this year's National Maritime Day ceremony at U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) headquarters in the nation's capital. SIU President David Heindel was a featured speaker at the May 22 gathering; PHC Apprentice **Eliot Randall** carried a ceremonial wreath, while fellow Apprentice **Luis Sanchez** rang the traditional "eight bells."

The union and the PHC had a strong turnout. In addition to the aforementioned individuals, attendees among the crowd of 200 or so included SIU Executive Vice President Augie Tellez, Secretary-Treasurer Tom Orzechowski, Assistant Vice President Pat Vandegrift, Political Director Brian Schoeneman, Trainee Commandant John Romer, and 21 other apprentices.

The theme for this year's event was "Navigating the Future: Safety First!" The featured speakers, in order of appearance, were Deputy Maritime Administrator Tamekia Flack; Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips; DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg (via a recorded video); Heindel; Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, commanding officer of the U.S. Transportation Command; U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro; and U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly (D-Arizona). All of the speakers emphasized the critical importance of the U.S. Merchant Marine to America's national, economic and homeland security.

Near the end of the ceremony, World War II mariner Allen Johnson, who first shipped out at age 17, received several awards and medals for his service. He briefly addressed the crowd and also offered some remarks in a recently recorded video.

During Heindel's remarks, the SIU president thanked the administration, Congress, and military leaders for backing the U.S. maritime industry.

Focusing on the theme, he stated, "Safety is always and must remain 'Job 1,' and for the SIU that starts in Piney Point and at every one of our hiring halls, and continues through to every voyage and every shipboard safety drill, and is reinforced when a Seafarer returns to upgrade his or her rating or license. We also have our sights set on new fuels and new technology that are on the horizon and which promise to bring changes to shipboard life. We are actively working with the United Nations bodies as well as others to help ensure that shipping's response to the climate emergency puts mariners and communities at the heart of the solution, always with an emphasis on safety training, handling and operations."

He later said that "we in the SIU are ever-mindful" of the sacrifices of World War II mariners (including the more than 1,235 SIU members who lost their lives in the war effort), and that he sees a passion in today's rank-and-file membership when it comes to upholding their role as part of America's fourth arm of defense.

"They know that in times of crisis, our troops depend on them to deliver the material needed," Heindel said. "They will not let anything stop them from fulfilling that most-critical mission."

He concluded, "The U.S. Merchant Marine has been a key part of this nation since America's earliest days.



SIU President David Heindel addresses the crowd in the nation's capital.

And in all the years since then, one thing hasn't changed and never will: Give us the ships, give us the cargo, and we'll deliver."

Immediately before the ceremony, attendees watched the PHC's new recruiting video, shown on the in-house monitors.

The event also included salutes to the late SIU President Michael Sacco, who passed away late last year.

Flack saluted the U.S. Merchant Marine's centuries-old record of service to the nation, and expressed confidence in the industry's ongoing reliability.

"If history is any indicator of our future, we can be assured that even when things get tough – and they will get tough – our national leadership, our maritime industry and our U.S. Merchant Mariners will answer the call to duty," she said.

Phillips said the merchant marine "must be maintained, not merely as an instrument for commercial expansion but as a weapon for protection – the protection of American life and property.... Our maritime sector is a cornerstone of America's economy and security,

responsible for the safe transport of billions of tons of cargo annually across our waterways and carrying our DOD and other government and commercial cargos internationally, entrusted to the very capable hands of American mariners."

During his video greeting, Buttigieg said mariners "are at the heart of America's national security, our economic strength and our national character."

Van Ovost stated, "It is the dedication and expertise of our mariners that creates the backbone of our marine transportation system. So, thank you for your professionalism, your dedication and patriotism and service to our nation.... We are a maritime nation. We sailed the oceans to global prominence and it is imperative that we maintain our strength as a maritime nation today and into the future."

Del Toro noted, "Since the very beginning of the American Revolution, our U.S. Merchant Marine has been at the heart of our economic life and indispensable to not just our national security but our economic security in this country.... We must never forget that nearly 10,000 U.S. Merchant Mariners lost their lives in World War II – a higher casualty rate than any other service, including my own beloved Marine Corps."

Kelly, a former mariner whose father sailed in World War II, said, "As many of you know, the U.S. Merchant Marine and our maritime industry are incredibly important to me.... When I graduated from Kings Point in 1986, there were about 400 or so U.S.-flagged oceangoing ships. Today that number has fallen to about 80 ships operating in international commerce flying the U.S. flag. By the way, China has nearly 5,500. The reason for this change can almost entirely be attributed to policy decisions. They were decisions made by prior administrations and prior congresses."

He then explained the comprehensive, bipartisan maritime revitalization legislation he and others are crafting, with industry-wide input (including from the SIU).



Attendees await the start of the Department of Transportation National Maritime Day ceremony at the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C.

A Proclamation on National Maritime Day, 2024

From the White House:

Our Nation's merchant mariners embody the highest aspirations of our democracy, always answering our country's call with commitment and courage. Today, we honor their service and sacrifice. Together, we recommit to meeting our sacred obligation to care for them and their families.

Unbreaking and unbending in their devotion to duty, our merchant mariners have stood for our Nation's freedom and liberty throughout history – from delivering critical goods and troops to the battlefields of World War II to responding to devastating natural disasters around the world and shipping the goods and military cargo that keep our Nation safe and prosperous. Today, our merchant mariners are continuing this legacy of service, delivering humanitarian aid to people in need and transporting military equipment around the world. At the same time, merchant mariners are engines of our economy. They facilitate international trade and strengthen our supply chains by transporting billions of dollars of goods across oceans, seas, and waterways to the hands of American businesses and consumers.

Our merchant mariners have always met the moment – and my Administration will always have their backs. That

is why we are ensuring that ships traveling between United States ports are American-built, American-owned, and American-crewed by enforcing the Jones Act. This will not only support American shipbuilding but will also support good union jobs. Meanwhile, we have made historic investments in our Nation's infrastructure, including rebuilding our ports so that they are safer, cleaner, and easier and more affordable to move through.

We also recognize that our merchant mariners are strongest when they reflect the full diversity of our Nation. My Budget proposes \$191 million for the United States Merchant Marine Academy to educate and train the next generation of seagoing officers and maritime leaders. Additionally, my Administration established Every Mariner Builds A Respectful Culture Standards to prevent sexual assault and harassment and to support survivors.

Today, as we honor all that merchant mariners have done for our Nation, we also recognize the mariners who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation. We owe these fallen heroes a debt of gratitude we can never fully repay. But our Nation will never forget their legacy and that of every mariner who has dared all, risked all, and given all for our Nation.

The Congress, by a joint resolution approved May 20, 1933, has designated May 22 of each year as "National Maritime Day" to commemorate the first transoceanic voyage by a steamship in 1819 by the S.S. Savannah. By this resolution, the Congress has authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation calling for its appropriate observance. I also request that all ships sailing under the American flag dress ship on that day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 22, 2024, as National Maritime Day. I call upon all Americans to observe this day and to celebrate the United States Merchant Marine and maritime industry with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-eighth.

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.

