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To Filipino Mariners

HOUSTON HURLS CHALLENGE

“We want you to be senior officers!”

Thus, exhorts Mideast Shipmanagement President Robert Houston, a direct challenge to Filipinos perceived as lacking confidence to aspire for higher posts.

Mr. Houston hurled the challenge during the open forum of the Centennial Transmarine (CTI) - Mideast Annual Junior Officer’s Conference held December 11-13 at the Hyatt Hotel and Casino, Manila.

“My job is to make sure that in 10, 15, 20 year-time there are sufficient senior officers to man our ships... So all you guys, cadets, junior officers, I’m telling you, you better get in and move on.

I don’t understand why people will sit here and say I’m happy at 4,000 dollars a month for eight in a year. Maybe a good standard of living in the Philippines. Why would you be happy with that when you can get 10,000 dollars a month, every single month, and you only have 6 months in a year... look at what it could do with your family.

Believe me, it’s ambition first, confidence will come. You must have the ambition to go farther,” stresses Houston.

Well-grounded.

His appeal is well-informed given that President Houston had been working

with Filipinos for almost 40 years; as he shares the moments with *Marino World*.

Hired at just over 16, Houston went to sea at 19 as an engineer cadet. He was Chief Engineer for five years, then Superintendent ashore. He was a managing Director of Anglo Eastern in the U.K., before he joined Mideast in 2007.

“I’ve done nothing else. I went to sea when I was 19 then I left the sea when I was 34 as a chief engineer. I loved being at sea, the best job I’ve ever had, absolutely.”

Growing.

“Shipping in general is still the best. For Mideast we’re doing very well,” affirms

“Believe me, it’s ambition first, confidence will come. You must have the ambition to go farther.”

- Mideast Pres. Houston

Houston.

Mideast Shipmanagement is the in-house ship manager of The National Shipping Company of Saudi Arabia (Bahri) which owns a fleet of 23 chemical carriers through its subsidiary the National Chemical Carriers (NCC) established in partnership with SABIC and has become one of the largest companies of the world in this field.

Synergy.

“We have 43 ships; by mid-year about 70 ships; by 2020, over a hundred as Mideast grows.

It is buying Vela, the shipping arm of Saudi Aramco, to merge operations with Mideast shipmanagement taking 20 ships and their management, people and all and bring them all to Mideast.”

In 1984 Vela International Marine was established as a subsidiary of Saudi Aramco to provide marine transportation for Saudi Aramco crude oil. A small Vela team ran the company then from within Saudi Aramco’s Dhahran headquarters. The company acquired four mid-1970s-built large crude oil tankers. As a matter of expediency, the vessels’ technical management was outsourced to independent third-party ship managers.

Vela is now a fully integrated, ship-owning and operating company with the experience, expertise, systems and ships to fully meet the needs of Saudi Aramco and to be a leader within the international tanker industry.

Cadet Program.

“Our eyes have always been to get young cadets, train them to be the next senior officers and that is starting to happen.

I think we grow above 50 this year. And hopefully it will grow, we need more as the company grows,” details the president.

Mideast is sponsoring cadets from University of Cebu, John B Lacson Maritime University and Davao Merchant Marine Academy.

All-Filipino crew.

Mideast has all-Filipino crew in its bulker fleet. The number grows as it has a pool of young, promising crew. The firm has 34 nationalities within, by far, Filipinos are a majority.

“The emphasis on them is they have an opportunity. To be whatever they want to be. There’s no discrimination anymore. It used to be European senior officers, Filipino crew. And the Filipino crew would never progress.

That’s change. Master, Chief Engineer and then ashore as superintendent, there’s nothing to stop them anymore,” Houston tells **Marino World**.

Take heart.

“Don’t be afraid, take the responsibility. If you look back, it is the Filipino junior officers, second officer, and third engineer and that was that. They didn’t want to go any higher, to take the responsibility. They were quite happy with the money they earn.

But today why should a young guy, a young Filipino not become a captain? chief engineer? And earn lots of money? A master and a chief engineer on a VLCC, has 4 months on, 4 months off. He works six months of the year and gets a good wage. That should be the aim, that should be the ambition.

Real, big dollars.

Mideast is investing over a million dollars a year for training.

“It’s a serious investment but it pays off. We still have accidents but touched well. We have no major incidents for six years. We’ve been very lucky but that is because of the people on board. I don’t run the ships from the office. The master and chief engineer run the ship.

We guide them, we help them as much as we can but they’re still the people who make the decisions on board on the ships. And that decision be it right or be it wrong --- we are successful or not, hopefully its always right,” says Houston.

Candor and candid.

At the same open forum, seafarers expressed why it is difficult for them to become senior officers: renewal of STCW certificates to upgrade their licenses.

Number one is the cost of the training fees, transportation, food and accommodation since most of them are from the provinces.

Houston says the management will look into it and consider company financial support for their STCW training requirements.

Bottom line.

“This is a great opportunity for us to speak to them and also for them to speak to us.

We try and tell them what we want to do for the company, where we hope to go. And they got chance to tell what we are doing right, and what may be wrong. We listen to the people.

The most challenging, always the same: It’s people, finding good people. Once you found the good people, you try to create a culture where all people are happy at their work. You try to have an open dialogue with everyone.”

All rolled-up, it is a corporate policy of openness and dialogue; it is an executive mark of Mr. Houston to reach whoever is willing to express sentiments: “My door is always open, anyone can come and speak to me, anything. There’s no rules and regulations on that anybody in the office, anybody at sea can pick up the phone and call me.”



FSI Pres. Brown

CTI-Mideast Junior Officers' Conference FOCUS ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Mideast Shipmanagement recaps the year with Centennial Transmarine (CTI), its manning agent, in a comprehensive course on resource management, so important to reduce accidents onboard ships.

Dubbed “More Emphasis on Maritime Resource Management,” the conference was held on December 11-13 at the Hyatt Hotel and Casino, Manila.

More than 60 junior officers including deck and engine cadets participated.

The course.

On the first day, Flightdeck Safety Initiatives (FSI) Founder and President Patrick Brown tackled the maritime resource management course applying

the Crew Resource Management (CRM) which he developed.

FSI is a global provider of custom-designed safety training and educational systems based on “Lessons from the Flightdeck” for high risk industries to assist in making workplaces safer, more efficient and better places to work.

Brown acknowledges the Mideast effort to balance the technical with human skills by pointing up resource management course.

The training course includes comprehensive case studies and interactive group activities.

“Mr. Brown is one of the best presenters, taking what he learned in aviation and adapting it to maritime. But we have to

follow that up onboard ships; we have to make sure that the messages keep getting sent across the people,” underscores Robert Houston, president of Mideast Shipmanagement.

Safety culture.

Mr. Houston confirms they have been commissioning Mr. Brown for four years; this, his second to handle the course in the Philippines and it will continue.

Why an aviation expert on maritime safety?

“The airline industry has a very high profile, very public – and has cut accidents by 80% since the 1970’s. They’ve obviously done something right.

“Mr. Brown is one of the best presenters, taking what he learned in aviation and adapting it to maritime.”

- Mideast Pres. Houston

(In maritime) I think we've got a long way to go. We still have too many accidents, we still have too many ships going aground, far too many seafarers dying every year. We have to learn from any industry that can teach us. We'll learn from anyone with good ideas. We just have to find them well and adopt them.”

Observations.

“Maritime has too many accidents. Even in the Philippines alone, many ferries sink every year and kill hundreds. That's not international shipping but just coastal shipping where many seafarers die.

The problem in this type of accidents is not being broadcast worldwide.

If an airplane crashes and kills 10, that's worldwide news. If a ship sinks in the Pacific Ocean with 25 people but it's not a European Union, nor an American ship, nobody cares. It's not broadcasted.”

Other topics.

On the Second Day, Maritime Labor Convention 2006 was discussed by Mr. Hilbert Manalo, surveyor of Lloyd's Register of Asia; crew injury and illness by Nr. Richard Webbe, divisional director of Britannia Steamline Ship Insurance Association; and technical familiarizations by Mr. Jorge Maristela, training officer of European Training and Competence Center and Mr. Rick Hartley, President of RJH Consultancy.

On hand.

The conference was capped with an open forum led by President Houston.

Also present to answer and react are Fleet Personnel Manager Mark Buchanan, Marine Manager and CSO Anup Kumar Khan and Training Manager Luka Amizic. From CTI are President Eduardo Jabla and Chief Operating Officer Capt. Jeffrey Solon.

Year 2013 bows out in a very positive bang with this pivotal conference. Corporate policy was clearly stated, all for the staff safety, crew development and higher industry standards.

And there's no crimping dollars nor efforts to hasten and institutionalize these humane and pragmatic goals.



CTI-Mideast Force