
# FREIGHTERS

THE GREAT LAKES SHIPPING INDUSTRY PERIODICAL | EDITION #79—SUMMER 2025

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SHIPWATCHER NEWS | EDITED BY BRENDAN FALKOWSKI | WWW.SHIPWATCHER-NEWS.COM

# LAKER REPORTS

UPDATES FROM THE LAKES


## Farewell to the *Cuyahoga* | July 29, 2025

The venerable self-unloader *Cuyahoga* finally reached retirement after sailing the Great Lakes for over 80 years. She was towed to Port Colborne, ON, for scrapping on July 28, 2025, following the second of two devastating fires that marred the end of her career. Built in 1943 to aid in boosting American tonnage for the war effort, *Cuyahoga* sailed as the *J. Burton Ayers* until 1995 when she was sold to Canadian start-up Lower Lakes Towing and renamed *Cuyahoga*. She suffered an engine room fire while underway on Lake Erie on the night of May 23, 2023. The cause of fire was later linked to missing clamps on fuel injection lines. Vibrations caused a fuel line to disconnect and create a fuel spray, igniting a fire. She was repaired and returned to service in October 2023. She suffered another fire on March 15, 2024, while in winter layup in Ashtabula, OH. Workers conducting winter repair work were attempting to remove paint in the cargo hold using welding torches, igniting a fire. She was declared a loss and sold for scrap in early 2025. ***CUYAHOGA at Detroit, MI, Oct. 28, 2023. Photo: Brendan Falkowski.*** ☐

## Alpena returns to service | Aug. 25, 2025

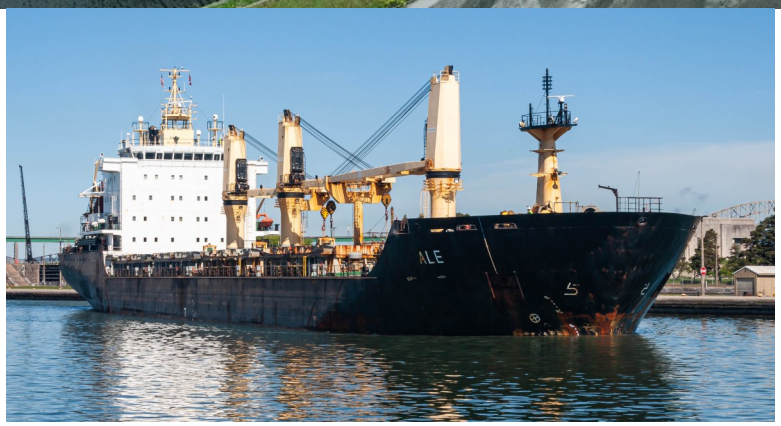
The steamer *Alpena* returned to service in late August after an extended winter layup. The 1942-vintage cement carrier was kept at the wall due to an issue with her steam turbine. Repair parts had to be specially-manufactured and shipped from overseas. The tug/barge *Treasure Coast / Cement Transporter 7700* came to the Lakes to fill the gaps Amrize (formerly Holcim). The unit was mobilized from the U. S. East Coast as a stopgap vessel while *Alpena* was under repair. Since repairs were completed, *Alpena* has returned to trading for Amrize out of their Alpena, MI-based cement plant. ***ALPENA on Lake Michigan, July 29, 2023. Photo: Brendan Falkowski.*** ☐

# THE MODERN CRANE CONVEYOR

A GREAT LAKES INNOVATION FINDS APPLICATIONS TODAY | AUG. 20, 2025

**Written by SAM HANKINSON**

*(MAIN): CSL FLEXVIK at work in Europe, 2025. Photo courtesy of CSL. (INSET): ALE exiting the Soo Locks, June 8, 2022. Photo: Brendan Falkowski*




CSL just announced the addition of a new ship to its fleet this month, the *CSL Flexvik*, and it looks familiar. That's because it is. The *Flexvik* was formerly Polsteam's *Raba*, which visited the Great Lakes many times. It was built in 2012 and sold out of the Polsteam fleet in 2021.

It made at least one trip to the lakes under the name *Ale* but suffered a grounding at Long Pond, Newfoundland in 2022. After being towed to Les Mechins, QC for drydocking, it remained at Halifax until October 2023 when it was acquired by CSL Group, renamed, and sailed to Europe.

CSL took the old Polsteamer to Poland, where it was retrofitted at the Wulkan Shipyard in Szczecin from a conventional bulk carrier to a multipurpose self-unloader. The ship is fitted with two gantry-mounted Sennebogen 970 electric excavators which feed several hoppers that lead to a 45-meter discharge boom. The *Flexvik* can single-point discharge to a stockpile or transload to another vessel. It can handle anything from fine sand and gravel to 1-3 ton armor rock.

The *CSL Flexvik* is also familiar because it resembles an old model on the Great Lakes; the crane-conveyor ships. In brief, they were an innovation built off of the crane ships that sailed on the lakes.

In 1953, legendary captain and salvager John Roen purchased the old steamer *Robert W. E. Bunsen* and installed two 25-ton Clyde Whirley diesel cranes on deck. The result was the crane barge *Marquis Roen*, and it was fitted with a bulk conveying system in 1957.

Captain Roen had first developed the crane conveyor concept when he fitted the former United States Shipping Board hull *Fred W. Green* with two 30-ton derricks and later adding a 100-foot conveyor belt on the vessel in 1929. The *Green* was used to haul different grades of crushed stone for breakwater projects.

Captain Roen reportedly marketed the crane-conveyor system to other companies and in 1958, Columbia Transportation converted its steamer *Charles W. Galloway* to the crane-conveyor vessel *Robert C. Norton*. Of note, the Presque Isle Transportation Company converted the sand dredge *Lakewood {2}* to a crane-conveyor self-unloader in 1956, but was primarily used in the sand trade.

For years, the *Roen* and the *Norton* (later *Buckeye*) would traverse the Great Lakes, linking materials to new markets due to their niche services. They would handle cargo in odd places, transload to and from barges, lighter grounded ships, and assist with marine construction projects.


*(MAIN): Historic crane-conveyor ship MARQUIS ROEN at Ashtabula, OH, date unknown. Photo: Peter Worden, MHSD Collection. (INSET): BUCKEYE {2} at Port Huron, 1978. Photo: Jim Jackson, MHSD Collection*

Both of these boats have important ties to Grand Haven, MI, where I'm from. The *Marquis Roen* was one of the first ships to call on Verplank's when the firm began diversifying from coal, delivering shale that had been transloaded from barges at Chicago. When Lakeside Aggregates began importing product to a small dock north of the coal plant, it was the *Norton* (later the *Buckeye*) that was one of the first callers. This perfectly encapsulates their critical role in our ecosystem- the crane conveyor ships operated in a niche that allowed them to fully explore new markets. They helped unlock new routes.

In no particular order, cargoes these remarkable ships handled included oil fly ash, sulphur, scrap, zinc concentrate, manganese ore, ingots, steel slabs and coils, pig iron, salt stone, silica sand, coal, salt, coke breeze, phosphate, shale, and scrap metal. They handled cargo to and from other ships, smaller barges, and railcars.

Captain Roen had died in 1970 and his enterprise transitioned into the salvage business. The *Marquis Roen* was sold in 1973 to a terminal company on the Mississippi River to be a floating transfer ship. It wound up in Altamira, Mexico and was dismantled in 2012. The *Buckeye* ended its active career in 1990 and briefly functioned as a spare parts garage for the barge *Joseph H. Thompson* until it was towed to Chicago and scrapped in 1994.

It's cool that this idea, which was incubated on the Great Lakes, has been repurposed elsewhere. But why is there no market for crane-conveyor ships today? The *CSL Flexvik's* primary role will be servicing the needs of "infrastructure and offshore energy projects" according to CSL. That's the same market that Captain Roen repurposed the *Fred W. Green* for back in the 1930s. There is demand for a ship like the *Flexvik* in Europe, not on the Great Lakes.

Full disclosure: I'm a huge fan of crane-conveyor boats. I got to see one earlier this year when I encountered the *Algoma Verity* at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The *Verity* is in Algoma's ocean self-unloader pool, marketed as a hybrid self-unloader equipped with four 30-ton deck cranes that feed a deck-mounted conveyor

system that connects to a slewing conveyor boom. Its system represents a lower-cost investment than a self-contained gravity -fed unloading system, and the cargo holds remain unchanged, preserving its cargo capacity. The downside is a more labor intensive, equipment intensive cargo handling process. (Of note, the *Verity* was in drydock after a January 2025 grounding)

On the Great Lakes, you could also argue that although there are no crane-conveyor ships, we have the right type of vessels to serve the niche markets that are on the Great Lakes today. The articulated tug/barge *Undaunted/Pere Marquette 41* is a long-standing example while the innovative *Northern Venture* of McKeil Marine and Interlake's *Mark W. Barker* are more recent examples.

I think that shoreside infrastructure is very important, but on the Great Lakes the innovations in cargo handling have historically happened on ships, not on shore. There are cargoes out there lacking the infrastructure necessary to connect them to the right markets, cargo that just needs the right ship. The crane conveyor ships stood as a testament to versatility and capability. Investment in the right type of infrastructure can help unlock stranded cargo, and the right type of infrastructure may just be a mobile transloading platform- a crane-conveyor ship. ◘

# TAMARACK ARRIVES HOME

NEW CEMENT CARRIER MAKES DEBUT | AUG. 22, 2025


*TAMARACK at Montreal, QC, Aug. 26, 2025. Photo: René Beauchamp*

Eureka Shipping's new cement carrier *Tamarack* arrived in Montreal on her maiden voyage on August 22, 2025. Eureka Shipping is a joint venture between the CSL Group and SMT Shipping of Cyprus. *Tamarack* was specifically designed to serve the Great Lakes cement trade, and will primarily transport cement from the Amrize Bath, ON, plant to terminals across Lake Ontario and Erie.

While *Tamarack* may seem like just another ship built overseas for Great Lakes service, her story is a bit more unique than that. Eureka announced plans to construct a new cement carrier for Great Lakes service back in May 2024.

Shortly after, construction of her hull and deckhouse was started in a shipyard in Nantong, China. Design of the vessel was done by Netherlands-based Groot Ship Design. Hull construction was complete by October, and the unfinished hull of another vessel, in this case the *Scheldevliet*, was picked up and placed on *Tamarack*'s spar deck for the voyage to Europe. It turns out that this is a common method of transport for small coastal and inland waterways vessels bound for service in Europe. A cradle network of lumber and steel is utilized to disperse the load of the vessel on top and secure them for the long journey.

The two hulls were towed to Kaohsiung, Taiwan, by the tug *Salvage Ace* for a short stopover before proceeding to Europe. The tow departed Kaohsiung with the tug *Salvage Champion* on October 19, 2024, for the voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and to the Netherlands. The approximately 98-day voyage was carefully planned with optional stopover ports along the way.

The tow arrived in the Netherlands on January 19, 2025, and the *Schedlevliet* was unloaded by floating cranes in Schiedam, Netherlands. *Tamarack* was taken to Holland Shipyards facility nearby where initial outfitting was begun. She was later moved to Hardinxveld for continued fit out. Her engines, systems, crew spaces, and all other internal and external outfitting had to be installed while at Holland Shipyards. After another shift to Kooiman Marine Group's Hoebee facility in Dordrecht, final outfitting took place and the cargo handling equipment was installed. Once all systems were installed and fit-out complete, she was delivered to Eureka Shipping on July 23, 2025, and set sail to begin the journey to the Great Lakes. No time was wasted upon her arrival in Canada, *Tamarack* soon got to work moving cement for Amrize.


*SUNNANVIK was replaced on the Amrize Great Lakes routes by TAMARACK. She is pictured on the Detroit River, April 28, 2025. Photo: Sam Hankinson*

The *Tamarack* was intended to replace two older vessels. Shortly after the announcement of her construction, Eureka mobilized the cement carrier Sunnanvik into the Great Lakes as a stopgap vessel to maintain Eureka's new Amrize routes which they had secured from Nova-Algoma Cement Carriers.

The *Sunnanvik* itself was making more runs up to Detroit and even Alpena in 2025 as a ripple effect of the steamer *Alpena* being out of commission for a majority of the season.

*Tamarack* is fitted with diesel-electric propulsion, powered by four generator sets and a pair of 360-degree rotating Rudder-Propeller units. Her generator sets are capable of running on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) biofuel as well. Her machinery spaces were fitted with noise insulation and silencers to reduce underwater noise.

She is also equipped with shore power connection equipment, which will allow her to plug in to electric utilities while in port to run auxiliaries. She is 404' long and 75' wide. She has a total cargo capacity of 378,000 cubic feet, or 10,700 cubic meters, in her four cargo holds, and cargo handling equipment consists of mechanical and pneumatic discharge systems. ◻

# THE SHIPBUILDING SITUATION

## THE STATE OF THE US FLEET AND SHIPBUILDING ON THE LAKES


*Conversions of powered vessels to articulated tug-barges, like the PATHFINDER / DOROTHY ANN, will likely become more prevalent in the coming years. She is pictured here at Cleveland, OH, July 8, 2024. Photo: Brendan Falkowski*

**This article is part of a series focusing on the current state of the Great Lakes shipping industry as we look to a future that is sustainable for both commerce and the environment. This installment is continued from the previous issue.**

Work at Great Lakes shipyards is highly cyclical, with loads ramping up on the ships during the winter layup period, but during the summer months yards have to rely on military or off-lakes contracts to keep staff busy. When the ice and snow come in wintertime, operators look at the remaining shipyards to handle several vessels-worth of projects simultaneously, and expect them to complete them in time for fit-out in March. Then when an emergency comes up in the middle of the season the shipyards are expected to turn the ship around in a matter of days. The situation can be compared to having an auto repair shop only open regularly during three months of the year, and on-demand for the remainder of the season. When repairs are necessary during the other nine months, it won't be at the pace of a Formula 1 pit stop. The lack of consistent commercial newbuilds locally has been to the detriment of maintaining that steady workload and skilled labor. As shipbuilding has declined in the US, the skilled workforce of welders, pipefitters, electricians, and other specialists dwindled, and now finding qualified workers is a big concern. Local yards no longer feature full-service machine shops, repair facilities, or fabricating capabilities and contract out several components to a project since they cannot support those workers full-time. Additionally, Great Lakes shipyards have historically been behind the curve when it comes to adoption and implementation of advanced shipbuilding technology and methods, further driving up costs and reducing competitiveness in broader markets.

The demand for new construction for the Jones Act Laker fleet is there, but it is a difficult target for almost every player to hit. Most new shipbuilding on the US side has been tied to long-term cargo commitments in recent years, and not as much to support existing contracts. This will have to give at some point, as the current fleet will not be able to last forever. A partial fleet renewal is likely in store at some point in the near future, with individual vessel replacement being explored for ships nearing the end of the line. Additional ship conversions to articulated tug -barge units are even more likely. The issue of financing these capital investments still remains a challenge. A full fleet renewal – such as the one seen with the Title XI subsidies and tax benefits in the 1970s – is still beyond the horizon without a change of status quo. The right combination of economic conditions may play on the side of the shippers and shipbuilders. If interest rates drop low enough to justify the payment on the debt for new tonnage in relation to the operating costs of the aging fleet, investment will be a much more attractive option for operators. If we are having the broad shipbuilding conversation, the question needs to be asked if new ships are for business expansion or retention. Major Canadian carriers like Algoma and CSL have fully renewed their fleets in recent years, but this is to preserve existing contracts, not expand into new ones. Allister Paterson, President of Canada Steamship Lines, put this into perspective


*The construction of the MARK W. BARKER in 2022, as well as the construction of the ATB MICHIGAN TRADER and rebuild of barge COMMANDER, stand as promising signs of renewed investment in Lakes supply chains. She is pictured on builders trials, July 1, 2022. Photo courtesy of Interlake Steamship.*

in a 2015 press release about CSL's Trillium-Class fleet renewal program.

"Great Lakes shipping is a mature market, it isn't growing. Our Trillium program has always been about renewing our fleet, not growing it."

While the current market is in need of new vessels to support continuing operations, other Canadian carriers such as McKeil Marine have proven that new niches can be carved out while rosters for the remainder of the fleet have turned over. Waterborne routes can be identified for more cargoes currently using land-based transportation on the American side as well.

What about the SHIPS for America Act? Great question. The SHIPS for America Act is not currently set up to have direct impact on the Great Lakes shipping industry, at least not a direct benefit. In fact, it may present further challenges in its current form. The Act does not include provisions allowing Great Lakes operators to take advantage of financing and benefits for investment in fleet renewal and modernization. Rather, it will focus on oceangoing merchant vessels and expanding the shipbuilding industrial base in order to support ramping up defense shipbuilding. This investment in the industrial base to support defense and oceangoing shipbuilding will draw workers away from the Great Lakes region and out to the major coasts, leaving labor to become even more scarce. If provisions in the Act accounted for inland transportation like the Great Lakes and Inland Waterways, the industry may be able to rebuild and set up for a more sustainable future to be able to better reliably support American manufacturing and defense. Broadly, if the SHIPS act is about maintaining what we have and expansion, that conversation needs to involve the Great Lakes, a region responsible for moving the building blocks of America. In theory, if companies were incentivized to renew their fleets and look at new business, that would stimulate the Jones Act fleet into a period of dynamic evolution. But as long as the current fleet continues sailing without real investment in renewal, operating costs and freight rates will only go up, which will trickle down through the industries down to the very cereal, appliances, automobiles, and more used by the average American. It is only a matter of time before vessels start to be sidelined due to their condition, whether it be for repairs, or worse yet, not passing regulatory inspection.

There is a long road of challenges to face to make it possible to revive the shipbuilding industry in the Great Lakes region and renew the Great Lakes fleet for a sustainable future. It will take getting creative to find ways to economically justify building new ships, and efforts from shippers to shipbuilders to the industries they serve to make this possible to rebuild for long-term sustainability. The Great Lakes was once a center for shipbuilding prowess and innovation, and can be once again with renewed investment and strategic planning. ◻

**Special thanks to Travis Martin and Fred Koller from Bay Engineering, Eric Helder from Interlake Maritime Services, Nick Hunter from NETSCo./EBDG, and Chuck Canestraight from Port City Marine Services for contributing their professional insight for this story.**

*VESSEL FEATURE*

# ATB MAUMEE / VICTORY


*MAUMEE / VICTORY on the Detroit River, August 28, 2022. Photo: Sam Hankinson*

In 1952, the Columbia Transportation Division of the Oglebay Norton Co. signed contracts with two shipyards to each construct a vessel similar to Pittsburgh Steamship's AAA Class design, which had established a new design precedent for Great Lakes steamers. The *Reserve* was nearly identical to the Pittsburgh boats, while her sister *Armco* had a more stylized forward end with a pilothouse design similar to their AAA sister *Edward B. Greene*. The keel for the Reserve was laid on May 10, 1952 at Great Lakes Engineering Works' River Rouge, MI, yard, and she was officially christened and launched on November 15, 1952. She entered service on April 22, 1953, departing Detroit bound for Superior, WI, to load iron ore.

She soon settled into her usual trade route, carrying ore from Silver Bay, MN, her namesake port, to Toledo, OH. *Reserve* was named after the Reserve Mining Co., which operated a taconite production facility in Silver Bay. Similar to the other AAA ships, *Reserve* was 647' long, 70' wide, 36' deep, and had a capacity of approximately 21,000 tons. She was originally powered by a single Westinghouse Electric cross-compound steam turbine rated at 7700 SHP, with a pair of Foster-Wheeler oil-fired boilers to provide steam pressure for her power plant and auxiliaries.

The AAA class design was first developed beginning in the late 1940s but put on hold, and was completed in 1951 incorporating design elements from the *Wilfred Sykes* of 1949. The ships in this class featured more refined hull streamlining, as well as a slightly asymmetrical stern to help improve water flow to the propeller, with the rudder slightly offset to one side.

*Reserve* saw many modifications throughout the 1970s to make her a more efficient carrier. A bow thruster was installed in 1970. In 1974, she was lengthened to 767' overall by Fraser Shipyards in Superior, WI. This project was done by placing the vessel in drydock, and cutting the hull in half just aft of midship. The stern section was floated out of drydock to allow for the midbody addition to be sandwiched between the original hull sections, and once they were lined up the drydock was drained and the hull welded back together and reinforced. The project cost nearly $5 Million, and Reserve returned to service in early 1975.


*RESERVE on an icy Maumee River in Toledo, OH, December 29, 1993. Photo: Jim Hoffman, courtesy of MHSD*

Continuing the trend of modernization to remain competitive, Columbia embarked on a program to convert their 1950s-era steamers into self-unloaders in the early 1980s. *Reserve* was the third vessel in the fleet to undergo the conversion, laying up at Bay Shipbuilding in Sturgeon Bay, WI, May 18, 1982. New sloped sections were fitted along the sides of her holds to direct cargo to a single conveyor belt running the length of the vessel. A loop-belt elevator system was installed just forward of the aft deckhouse to elevate cargo to a 260' cargo boom on the spar deck to unload her cargo on the dock or into a shoreside hopper. Her return to service was delayed due to low demand, prompting her to sail again in September 1983.

*Reserve* was involved in several notable incidents during the 1990s, including grounding on the St. Marys River near the Rock Cut on April 16, 1990. She lightered her cargo into fleetmate *William R. Roesch* before heading to Fraser Shipyards for repairs.


*RESERVE on the St. Clair River, 1973. Photo: John Vournakis, MHSD Collection*

On July 21, 1994, *Reserve* lost power while downbound on the St. Clair River, doing a 180-degree swing, stopping just in time to miss the seawall near the mouth of the Black River in Port Huron. After getting power back online, she continued on her voyage without damage.

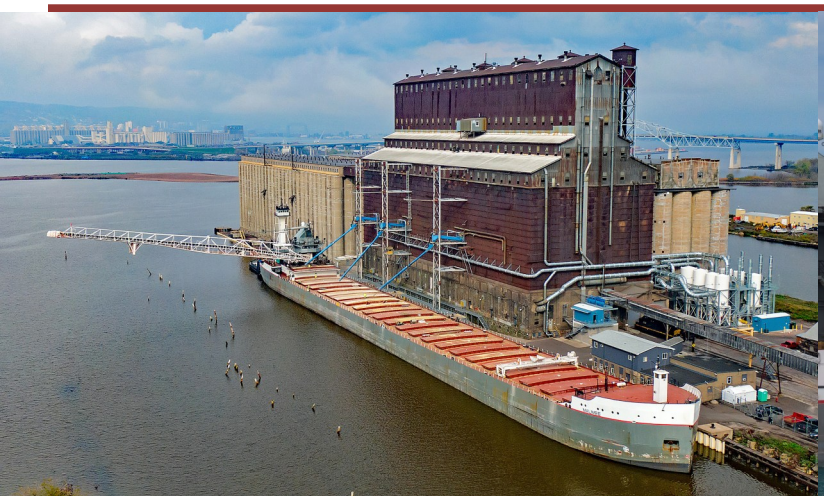
Columbia Transportation Division was dissolved in 1994, and the fleet was absorbed into Oglebay Norton's new marine division. In the early 2000s Oglebay Norton faced rough times, filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on February 23, 2004. Oglebay Norton announced the intent to sell their marine operations in early 2006, and sold the *Reserve* to K&K Warehousing of Menominee, MI, through their affiliate Reserve Holdings. She was operated as a powered vessel for 2006 and part of the 2007 seasons, with her cabins getting a new coat of paint, but was plagued with engine problems. She delivered her last cargo as a powered vessel on July 31, 2007, to Green Bay, WI, before laying up at the K&K Dock at Menominee, MI, for conversion to an articulated tug-barge (ATB).

Throughout the ensuing months *Reserve* underwent a dramatic change in appearance. Her stern was cut down to make way for the construction of a notch for a pusher tugboat. She was towed to Sturgeon Bay, WI, for drydocking and removal of the remainder of her stern on December 17, 2007, with her new notch complete and towed back to Menominee on January 4, 2008. To complete the conversion, her old pilothouse and living quarters were removed and she was given a new paint job. She was rechristened *James L. Kuber* and paired with the newly-rebuilt tugboat *Victory* on March 29, 2008. The pair connect using a Hydraconn connector, consisting of a pair of hydraulic pin arms fitted to the tug that lock into a grooved rack on the inside of the notch of the barge.

*Victory* was constructed in 1981 by McDermott Shipyards at Amelia, LA, as a large push tug for Texaco Marine Services. Her keel was laid on February 21, 1981, and she was launched on April 21, 1981. She is 140' long, 43' wide, 18' deep, and powered by a pair of MaK 6MU551AK diesel engines providing 7880 BHP. She entered service that summer for Texaco, pushing a tank barge between Gulf of Mexico ports. In 1990, the Victory was acquired by Signet Marine of Houston, TX. She was sold yet again in 2001 to Penn Maritime of Stamford, CT. The tug was later acquired by K&K Integrated Logistics of Menominee, MI. She was brought onto the Great Lakes via the St. Lawrence Seaway, arriving in Escanaba, MI, on November 26, 2006.

While in Escanaba, her upper pilothouse was raised, her lower pilothouse converted into cabins, and the Hydraconn connector system was installed. She was used in late 2007 to push the barge *Lewis J. Kuber*. Prior to entering service for the 2008 season, her upper pilothouse was raised yet again, making it the tallest on the Great Lakes. The pair entered service for K&K Integrated Logistics on April 13, 2008.

In February 2011, Rand Logistics announced that they had acquired K&K Integrated Logistics' two ATB units, the *Lewis J. Kuber / Olive L. Moore* and *James L. Kuber / Victory*. The ATBs were placed under ownership of Rand's Grand River Navigation Co. subsidiary. While sailing on Lake Superior in heavy seas on January 4, 2013, the Hydraconn connector on the *Victory* encountered a mechanical failure, prompting the crew to set the barge adrift. The *James L. Kuber* was retrieved by Rand fleetmate *Saginaw* with assistance from the *Victory*. In February 2019, *James L. Kuber* was renamed *Maumee {2}* after the Maumee River in Toledo. The ATB pair *Maumee / Victory* continue to be active carriers serving the ore, coal, stone, and grain trades. ◘




*(L-R): MAUMEE loading grain at Superior, WI, October 10, 2021. Photo: David Schauer; Close-up of VICTORY pushing MAUMEE, July 4, 2016. Photo: Isaac Pennock*

*Scott Bjorklund Photo*

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*Tamarack* arriving at Buffalo, NY, September 4, 2025. Photo: John Witt