



Comité sectoriel  
de main-d'œuvre  
de l'industrie maritime

# PORTRAIT OF A CREW IN THE MARINE INDUSTRY

2015-2016  
PORTRAIT N° 2

## M/V Umiavut



Have you always wanted to get a glimpse of life on board ship? Are you curious about the atmosphere and each person's role?

The Sectorial Committee understands and would like to present the unique, human character of ships' crews! Here is the second in a series of portraits of a crew, that of NEAS 'Umiavut'!

**Make way for seafarers!**

### *The Umiavut family*

November 23, 2015. The wind is blowing off the river in the Port of Montreal and it's cold out. Slowly but surely, winter is coming. But this is nothing compared to the Umiavut's home waters.

Docked near its sister ships after a tough season of navigating the Canadian Arctic, the Umiavut rises above me, ready to tell its story and introduce its crew. One of the four container ships owned by NEAS (Nunavut Eastern Arctic Shipping Inc.) and serving 40 Arctic villages, it is, first and foremost, home-away-from-home for 22 men from June to November every year.

The first crew member I meet is Raphaël Giasson. Busy finishing up on deck for the season, he takes the time to explain his career path and his roles on board ship as 3rd Watchkeeping Mate and, at times during the season, Acting Chief Mate. Raphaël graduated from the Institut maritime du Québec (IMQ) in 2007 and did his sea work phase on Canadian vessels in Arctic waters: "The sea time internships definitely affected my career choice in terms of where I wanted to work. I did my last internship here, with NEAS." A certified Senior Ship's Officer, he is now working towards his Master's certificate.

Despite his tender age, Raphaël has eight years' experience—four as an Officer—and is in charge of occupational health and safety (OHS) on board ship in addition to his navigating duties. In the capacity of Acting Chief Mate, he is responsible for the navigation shift, helmsman duties and the watch. His duties include ensuring anti-collision where other vessels are concerned and overseeing loading and unloading. He also heads OHS meetings. As 3rd Watchkeeping Mate, he is responsible for inspections, extinguishers, lifeboats, firefighting equipment, etc. His work shifts vary from 8 to 12 hours a day, sometimes more if the ship is at sea, loading/unloading or anchored.

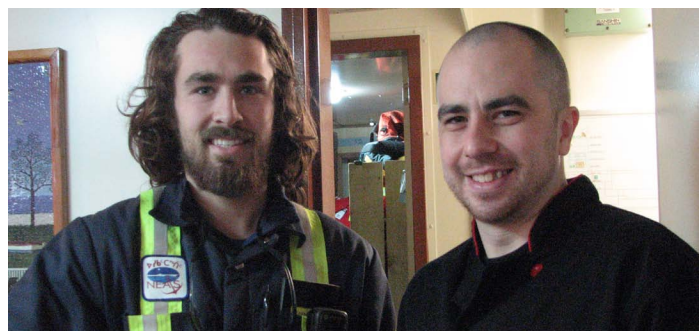


On the picture : Umiavut' crew in the beginning of the season.

***"Working on a ship is an extraordinary career where we touch on many different areas in addition to travelling!"***

For Raphaël, navigating is a family affair. Both his father and uncle are St. Lawrence River pilots. His great-grandfather was a Captain and his cousin works in the marine sector. The lifestyle that comes with the job convinced him to opt for a maritime career. "I love my job! We go to sea for five months and the rest of the year, we enjoy life! It may sound a bit cliché, but it's an adventure, not a 9-to-5 job with 2-3 weeks off every year...it's very different. Now that I've work aboard ship..."

He's not the only one who feels this way. Chief Cook Michel Labrie wouldn't change lifestyles either. "At school, I already knew I wanted to cook at sea. I knew the environment because my grandfather had been a Ship's Cook and my uncles worked



On the picture (from left to right) : Raphaël Giasson and Michel Labrie.

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in ship repair. I've combined two things I love." After completing his DEP in professional cooking, he worked in restaurants for two years before getting a job on board ship. He had to get MED (Marine Emergency Duties) training at the Institut maritime in Saint-Romuald and to take a Marine First Aid course but, seven years later, he's still here because he loves both cooking and travelling. "One of the only pleasures on board ship is eating, so my role is pretty important. I have to prepare a series of menus so that the guys don't get bored. When the food is good, people are in happy and motivated!" A typical day at sea for Michel involves making the soup and devising his two main lunchtime menu choices and accompaniments. The Cook's Helper assists with the desserts and the rest. Same thing for the evening meal. It's quite a challenge since there are many more constraints at sea than on land. "I have to order for at least six weeks, since I don't have access to grocery stores. I also have to be creative and take stormy seas into account. I've had to tie down my pots and pans while cooking in bad weather!"

Seven days a week, five months a year, Michel ensures that the atmosphere is good and that the Umiavut's extended family eats well. He is more than happy to play this role, and the crew is content as it enthusiastically devours the lunchtime menus on the day I visited. In the cafeteria, plates are emptied, stories are told and the end-of-season is celebrated.

Stéphane Dupuis, who has headed the team of deckhands for the past four years, has 24 years' experience. A fisherman from early on, trained at the fisheries school, he has been with NEAS for six years. A certified Master of not more than 60 tons, with stability training, this Gaspé native has eight seamen reporting to him: "I assign them duties throughout the day and teach them different things as the need arises. My team and I do the maintenance, the painting and anything the ship needs to operate effectively. It's a great ambience, we have fun and play tricks on each other! Five months a year, this is my family." Stéphane gets up at 6:00 every morning and follows the same routine: after waking, he looks at the temperature on deck and then goes for breakfast. Around 8:00, with the help of the Chief Mate, he assigns his team their morning duties. At about 11:30, he makes the rounds to check on their work. Then, it's lunchtime and after lunch, it's the same thing as the morning until 5:00. His role requires constant vigilance, excellent organizational skills and the ability to multitask.

It doesn't take me long to realize that each of the 22 crew members plays an important role on board, like links in a chain...all interconnected to form a whole. The Chief Cook feeds the crew, the crew runs the Umiavut, and the ship, itself, is fuelled by... the engine room.

On my way down to the engine room, I meet Hubert Gagnon, who has worked as a Third-Class Engineer for four years.



"In the Arctic, we see new things all the time. Unique landscapes...a different world. There's nothing like it".



On the picture : Stéphane Dupuis, who has headed the team of deckhands.

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A Marine Engineering graduate from the Institut maritime du Québec, Hubert sailed the seas on oil tankers, bulkers and cargo ships before joining NEAS. "I wanted to work in as a mechanic. I looked at the course options and wanted something very manual. Because I'm from Rimouski, I saw that the course was given at the IMQ and I went for it." He doesn't regret his choice because he loves navigating as part of a young, dynamic team. "The atmosphere is good. Our four-man engine room team gets along really well." As a Third-Class Engineer, Hubert works in the engine room with the Chief Engineer, the Second-Class Engineer and the Mechanic Assistant. "We're different from the deck team because we're the only ones, there's no rotation. Each mechanic is assigned certain machines and is the only one who looks after them."

Unlike most of the crew, his day begins at midnight. His first shift is midnight to 4:00 a.m. followed by noon to 4:00 p.m. He makes his rounds, checks to make sure the machines are all running smoothly, and checks if the engine needs to be turned on or off.

Some days are spent mainly on maintenance; others mainly on operations. Hoping to get his Second-Class certification this winter, Hubert loves the challenges of Marine Engineering: "We don't have access to the same resources as on land. We can't just call the store for more parts. We have to make do with what we have. It's a terrific challenge!" In addition to resourcefulness, being a mechanic requires excellent powers of observation, quick reflexes, an ability to take initiatives and a solid sense of responsibility, says Hubert.

While the entire crew is working to get the ship ready for winter, the engineering team will remain dockside for another week to

finalize things. If work is required over the winter, they will have to come back for a few weeks. The father of a 2½-year-old daughter, Hubert admits that leaving home for five months at a time is harder than it used to be. "I know I'm missing things but at least I know that I can make up for it over the winter when I'm there for her. And, we can talk more than before since communications are always improving. The Umiavut is my second home, my cabin has been my haven since June 15. I like it, it's a great adventure!"



On the picture : Umiavut's dining room.

Adventure seems to be the watchword on board ship. Chief Mate/First Mate Jean-Sébastien Daigle says "adventure" is the element he loves most. "Working on a ship is an extraordinary career where we touch on many different areas in addition to travelling!"

Jean-Sébastien, who has been with NEAS since 2008 and has 10 years' experience, completed his DEC in Navigation at the Institut maritime du Québec in 2005 before climbing the ranks to end up as a qualified Master Mariner. When he first discovered Canadian Arctic voyages, he immediately fell in love with the lifestyle and all of the challenges it holds. His role on board ship is crucial, since he oversees the great majority of ship's operations. When the vessel is loading, Jean-Sébastien ensures that volumes on board are maximized, that the ship and cargo are safe and secure, that the loading plan is followed and that the necessary precautions are taken with dangerous goods. When the ship is at sea, he manages its maintenance, performs his administrative and crew management duties and prepares for unloading. He also shares in the watch. In unloading mode in the Arctic, his main task is to supervise all unloading



On the picture : Hubert Gagnon, Third-Class Engineer.

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On the picture : Chief Mate/First Mate Jean-Sébastien Daigle.

job. With his qualifications, many doors are open to him but one thing is certain...he'll be working in the marine sector. "I definitely recommend and encourage this environment. There's nothing like it. We grow, learn and evolve professionally...and personally. The work is extremely gratifying, very concrete." Most people aren't aware that 90% of the goods we use every day are brought to us by ship. "People see highways, but they don't see shipping routes. The sector's careers are not well known. I've been working in the field for 10 years now and I still have to explain to some of my friends and family exactly what I do." He's right.

The crew is unanimous: jobs with NEAS are exciting, well-paid and offer an incredible quality of life. "Although you go to sea for several months, you also get several months off. You can't put a price on that", he concludes.



On the picture : Jean-Sébastien Daigle.

operations to ensure that everything runs safely and smoothly. When asked to name his most difficult duty, this Chief Mate doesn't hesitate: "personal management and interpersonal relations on board. I have to manage people from all kinds of different environments, who learn and operate differently. It takes a lot of leadership, respect, listening and experience to be able to manage it all properly."

As Chief Mate/First Mate on the Umiavut, he needs extensive knowledge, a capacity to work independently, excellent organizational skills and the ability to make quick, clear decisions. "You have to want to always do better and to perform," Jean-Sébastien maintains.

Despite working conditions that include extreme cold and waves, he loves his job: "At NEAS, it's a great adventure. We're a young, dynamic team and are all very professional! It's so unique to go unload in the North...it creates a great working atmosphere and very strong team spirit." Five years from now, Jean-Sébastien sees himself leaving active navigation and taking a more stable, land-based

Regardless of the harsh weather, the cold and the many challenges involved in serving the Canadian Arctic, the Umiavut's crew is united. Work runs smoothly, the days resemble one another...but the scenery changes enormously: "In the Arctic, we see new things all the time. Unique landscapes...a different world. There's nothing like it." There's also an active social life on board ship: card tournaments, videogame challenges, improvised gym for working out, etc. Communications with friends and family are better than they used to be, thanks to cellphones, the Internet and satellite telephones. It's not as lonely any more.

From the cabins to the kitchens, the crew is proud of their sailing season. Five and a half months are over. Things went well and it's time to say goodbye. From the youngest members, in their twenties, to the oldest, in their sixties, all leave the Umiavut, their second home, their second family. A family that is courageous, hard-working, versatile and that loves the sea. The Umiavut family.

By Josée-Ève Poulin, agente de communication  
Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de l'industrie maritime

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