

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)



*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*  
**M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES**  
*The Official Union Newsletter – "The Word to the Wise"*  
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## **M.E.B.A. IS PART OF OPERATION DEEP FREEZE**

Once again, the M.E.B.A. is participating in the annual resupply mission to support scientists working at the South Pole's McMurdo Station. The Military Sealift Command has supported Operation Deep Freeze since 1955, the year the station was established. The M.E.B.A.-crewed Waterman-managed heavylift vessel M/V OCEAN GIANT was loaded up with key supplies in Port Hueneme, CA recently in advance of its journey to the remote Antarctica outpost. The Coast Guard's 399-foot heavy icebreaker *Polar Star* departed Sydney, Australia on Friday to cut through the ice leading up to the station and allow safe passage for vessels participating in the operation.

The OCEAN GIANT was loaded up with containers filled with mechanical parts, vehicles, construction materials, office supplies, electronics equipment and mobile office units. In addition, pieces to construct a 65-ton floating Marine Causeway System were loaded onto the OCEAN GIANT. The causeway will replace the ice-pier this year, at McMurdo Station. Previously, an ice pier made up of rebar and frozen seawater, has been used for cargo offloads. Due to severe damage, the ice-pier is unusable this year. Once in Antarctica, the causeway will be assembled in sections on OCEAN GIANT's deck and placed into the water. Sections will be attached to one another to form the final pier.

The vessel is on its way to Christchurch, New Zealand, where it will load additional cargo. After it completes its McMurdo mission, the vessel will load retrograde cargo for transportation off the continent. This includes trash and recyclable materials for disposal and equipment no longer required at the station.

## **SHORT WINDOW FOR ILA/USMX TALKS AMID LOOMING STRIKE THREAT**

The clock is ticking for the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) as they attempt to finalize a new master contract before the looming expiration of their current agreement on January 15. Failure to reach a deal could result in a coast-wide strike beginning January 16, forcing shipping lines to brace for significant disruptions.

While both sides reached an agreement on wages back in September — resulting in a promised 62% increase — negotiations have stalled on the contentious issue of automation. Employers argue that embracing automation is vital to enhancing port efficiency, but the ILA counters that it threatens

job security for dockworkers. Adding a layer of complexity to the talks is the impending inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47<sup>th</sup> U.S. president, just five days after the contract's expiration. The President-elect met with the ILA principals last month and voiced his support for the union and against automation in the dispute.

Meanwhile, some shipping companies have already announced that they will be enacting new surcharges for customers should there be a work stoppage. Reports indicate the parties are set to resume negotiations next week, leaving a slim window for a resolution.

### **WI-FI PILOT PROGRAM IN AMHS FLEET**

Passengers on the M.E.B.A.-crewed Alaska Marine Highway System ferry MV COLUMBIA can now stay connected with the successful launch of a Wi-Fi pilot project, a step in the modernization of the fleet. The COLUMBIA became the first AMHS vessel to provide free Wi-Fi access ship-wide, including the solarium, lounges, staterooms, and bar, as well as crew quarters and crew dining areas. Over 450 users connected during the first week in service, demonstrating high demand for onboard connectivity.

“For our crew, staying connected to family and modern life during off-hours is essential, and this effort reflects our commitment to their well-being and job satisfaction,” said Commissioner Ryan Anderson, Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities. “For passengers, especially those on multi-day voyages like the Bellingham run, Wi-Fi enables continuity in communication, and the ability to share the unique experiences of sailing Alaska’s National Scenic Byway in real time.”

Future phases will expand Wi-Fi access across the fleet, starting with the MV AURORA and MV LeCONTE, utilizing recently secured federal funding.

The implementation required overcoming significant technical and logistical challenges. AMHS collaborated with a cross-functional team of marine engineers, IT specialists, and project managers, alongside contractors and other state employees. The advent of low Earth orbit satellite technology, such as Starlink, solved long-standing issues with traditional satellite connectivity in Alaska’s mountainous Inside Passage. Unlike older systems, Starlink’s direct, vertical satellite positioning avoids signal interference caused by terrain.

### **APPLY FOR UNION PLUS SCHOLARSHIPS**

M.E.B.A. families have until January 31, 2025 to apply for college education assistance money through Union Plus. Union Plus is doling out one-time cash awards of \$500 to \$4,000 for study beginning in the Fall of 2025. M.E.B.A. members, retirees and their families - as well as members of affiliated M.E.B.A. unions - are eligible courtesy of the Union’s enrollment in dozens of moneysaving U.P. programs ranging from life insurance to financing children’s educations.

Visit [www.unionplus.org/scholarship](http://www.unionplus.org/scholarship) for details. Families of M.E.B.A. members or affiliated members are among past scholarship money recipients. Union Plus Scholarship are granted to students attending a two-year college, four-year college, graduate school or a recognized technical or trade school. Recipients are selected based on academic ability, social awareness, financial need and appreciation of labor.

Applications can be submitted up until Friday, January 31, 2025, at noon (EST). Applications arriving after the deadline will not be considered. The award date is May 31, 2025. During the first week of June 2025, award recipients will be notified.

Current and retired members of unions participating in any Union Plus program, their spouses and their dependent children (as defined by IRS regulations) are eligible. Grandchildren are not eligible unless a legal dependent (as defined by IRS regulations). At least one year of continuous union membership by the applicant, applicant's spouse or parent (if applicant is a dependent). The one-year membership minimum must be satisfied by May 31, 2026. Members of participating unions from the U.S., Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada are eligible. The applicant must be accepted into a U.S. accredited college, university, community college, technical or trade school at the time awards are issued. Awards must be used for the 2025 - 2026 school year. Undergraduate and graduate students are eligible to apply.

Get the official application and all the details including eligibility criteria by visiting [unionplus.org/scholarship](http://unionplus.org/scholarship)

### **MAKE SURE YOUR DOCUMENTS ARE IN ORDER FOR JOB CALL!**

It is the responsibility of members and applicants to have all their necessary documentation in-hand ahead of time for job call. Those who have recently upgraded their license should make sure their STCW reflects the upgrade. Your license, passport and other important documents should be valid for at least six months from the time you begin working aboard ship. Your drug-free certificates have to be valid at least until the day you join your ship. Check your expiration dates!

If flying with your documents on the way to a hall, double-check that you haven't left any essential documents at home and make sure to keep your docs with you in your carry-on luggage. The primary documents you'll need include your Merchant Mariner Credential with current STCW, VSO or VPDSO endorsement, TWIC, Passport, USCG Medical Certificate, Annual M.E.B.A. physical card, Drug-free Certificate or Drug-Free Letter, Group Card, Fit-for-Duty, Dues Receipt and proof of vaccination(s). Permanent or relief employees should get their company clearance to the hall ahead of time. Work with the Military Sealift Command will require security clearances.

As you should know, no one can be dispatched to a job while on vacation or while receiving a paid vacation benefit without a waiver. The Union requires a return-to-work date when clearing for a vessel so make sure you have your vacation pay and vacation carry over statements, shipping discharge and port relief pay voucher for verification of return to work. It should also be noted that failure to obtain prior Union permission to return to work early, before the return-to-work date as listed on your carry-over or vacation statement, will subject you to a penalty.

Remember, a member or applicant cannot be dispatched for a job requiring STCW credentials if the Coast Guard Medical Certificate is due to expire prior to the completion of the job called. Members are encouraged to have their paperwork for the USCG Medical Certificate completed and to submit it for renewal at every annual physical in order to avoid an issue at job call. Certain jobs require proof of benzene or shot records, MSC Physical and MSC courses, GMDSS, High Voltage/Marine Propulsion, Crowd Control, Welding, or other courses to satisfy company requirements.

Mariners are reminded to keep their vaccination records with them when sailing – especially when shipping onboard MSC-contracted vessels. Keep your documents with you at all times when travelling and NEVER leave them in your car. If unsure what is required, it is a good idea to check with an M.E.B.A. clinic. If you have questions about your documents, direct them to your local hall.

### **MEMBERSHIP ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND UPCOMING MEETINGS**

Members and applicants (and retirees) are strongly urged to attend one of the fourteen January membership meetings taking place next week (Jan. 6-10) at the Union halls. Membership meetings are a great way for members, applicants and retirees to stay involved, get informed, and deliver input to help advance the business of the Union. There is another full agenda that will benefit from healthy meeting attendance and participation. Among other items, there will be discussion of a series of important issues including the wage and benefit victory for mariners on the USNS SEAY and USNS PILILAAU, a review of last month's election report, a resolution vote and a chance to start off the New Year with newly elected officials.

If you can't attend in person, we encourage you to participate in the Wednesday Online Informational Headquarters meeting that occurs during regular meeting weeks. This format has allowed members serving aboard ship to take part in meeting week, and we encourage those with sufficient internet or those in port to participate as their work may allow. Check the schedule at the bottom of the page to see what works for you.

### **FULL POWER AT HOUSTON & TAMPA HALLS**

As a reminder, M.E.B.A.'s new Union halls in Houston and Tampa are both fully operational and membership meetings next week will be conducted at the new locations.

M.E.B.A.'s new Union hall in Tampa, Florida is at 2018 E 7th Ave., Tampa, FL 33605. Phone, fax and email information remain the same. The new hall is close to the downtown area in Ybor City.

M.E.B.A. relocated its Union hall in Houston, TX back in November. The new space is located at 6604 South Loop East, Houston, TX 77087. Phone, fax and email addresses remain the same.

### **NEXT MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS** *(All times are local)*

Monday, January 6 – **Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300.**

Tuesday, January 7 – **CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230.**

Wednesday, January 8 – **Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315; Online HQ “Town Hall” Meeting@1300 (No Voting) – Register by emailing [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org)**

Thursday, January 9 – **L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300.**

Friday, January 10 – **Honolulu@1100**

-----FINISHED WITH ENGINES-----



***M.E.B.A. does not tolerate assault, or harassment of any kind.  
If you see something, say something – The M.E.B.A. Emergency Hotline  
can be reached at 1-888-519-0018.***