

Port Authority says goodbye to another key veteran

By [Brady Slater](#) on Apr 1, 2018 at 7:45 p.m.



1 / 2 Jim Sharrow, director of port planning and resiliency, is retiring after 15 years with the Port Authority and 28 years with CN's Great Lakes Fleet before that. As president of the Duluth-Superior Sailing Association and vice president of the Duluth Boat Club, Sharrow will continue to be involved in sailing in his retirement. Bob King / rking@duluthnews.com

Jim Sharrow recalls his sailboats in the way an old-timer remembers classic cars — all meaningful, all with stories to tell. The first one was a beat-up 22-footer made out of wood, which made it easy to refurbish, he said. He bought it for cheap and rebuilt it with his twin brother when they were adolescents.

"Since I started sailing there's only been two years I haven't had a boat," said the 66-year-old Sharrow, currently the owner of a sleek white number named Obsession.

Sharrow will sail into retirement from the Duluth Seaway Port Authority on April 9, ending a 15-year stretch there to cap a career which began with 28 years at the Duluth-based Great Lakes Fleet.

"I'm going to be fully engaged right up until the last day," said Sharrow, the Port Authority's director of port planning and resiliency.

Sharrow received a round of applause at his final Port Authority board of commissioners meeting last week. There will be an open house April 9 from 2-4 p.m. at the Port Authority office along Port Terminal Drive to celebrate his retirement.

Saying goodbye to Sharrow marks the second major personnel loss for the Port Authority this year.

When Vanta Coda defected to the ports of Indiana in January, it left the local Port Authority without its top executive.

"It was a nice step up for him," Sharrow said, describing Indiana's larger operation in charge of multiple ports.

"Vanta was a visionary," said the Port Authority's government and environmental affairs director Deb DeLuca. "He came in with a very direct mission to expand the revenue sources for the Clure (Public Marine Terminal). It's always a loss when you lose capable people, but we have a lot of capable people on staff and we're well-networked."

The commissioners are taking their time to replace Coda, said Port Authority spokesperson Adele Yorde. To date, the executive director job has not been posted. But it is expected to be soon. Comfortable with Chief Financial Officer Kevin Beardsley in the interim role, the board's personnel committee is "being deliberate in terms of steering a ship that's already on a great course," Yorde said.

Sharrow's duties will, for now, be split among others in the office. His replacement will come only after a replacement executive director is in place, Yorde explained.

Meanwhile, Sharrow is busy finalizing details on a 15,000-square-foot expansion of the Port Authority's industrial building, which houses the bustling Altec Inc., on the Clure Public Marine Terminal. Additionally, he's working with the city of Duluth on a \$2.5 million rail expansion along docks 5 and 6 which make up parts of the Clure's eastern and southern seawalls. The grant-funded project will allow easy in-and-out access for ships with container cargoes — one of the fastest growing aspects of port business.

Sharrow is leaving behind a cadre of colleagues sorry to see him go. Not only is he a fount of knowledge about the shipping industry, he's ready to share it with an easygoing manner.

"I so much enjoy working with Jim," DeLuca said. "He's the consummate gentlemen and also has this sensational curiosity. Work is not work for him. It's more of a calling. He's been so committed to the maritime industry."

Sharrow grew up on the Great Lakes, in Erie, Pa., and it was a family trip to the Welland Canal that helped to chart his course in life. A 50-foot sailboat split the water through the canal that links lakes Erie and Ontario and in doing so inspired him in boyhood.

"That's when I developed a love for boats and sailing," he said.

After graduating from the University of Michigan with a degree in naval architecture and marine engineering, Sharrow joined the Great Lakes Fleet — then owned by U.S. Steel and currently owned by Canadian National Railway and operated by Duluth-based Key Lakes Inc.

Sharrow arrived in 1974, in time to be involved in the design and construction of the Edwin H. Gott and Edgar B. Speer — the fleet's two thousand footers. He later managed a \$15 million annual maintenance budget for the fleet.

As a member of the Port Authority staff, Sharrow has worked closely with the development of best practices for the treatment of ballast water — something he said has been largely effective in keeping invasive intruders out of the lakes.

But he's most proud of the work he was part of to solve the corrosion issue which dogged the local port's 14 miles of steel seawalls. Research and development of cost-effective treatments kept the Port Authority and other entities from having to entertain crippling replacement scenarios.

In retirement, he'll continue to lean into his passion for sailing. As president of the Duluth-Superior Sailing Association and vice president of the Duluth Boat Club, he's involved in training young sailors at bargain rates and has his sights set on some development projects along Park Point. He'll also continue to renew his licenses and stay involved in various professional societies, he said, intent on being ready for anything.

Said Sharrow, "I feel I still have something to contribute."