

Spotlight on John Beckett, Chair of the ICHCA Board



In this second of our series of interviews with ICHCA Members, Spotlight is in conversation with John Beckett, Chair of the ICHCA Board.

Spotlight: John, your association with ICHCA goes back 15 years we understand. What drew you to the organisation and how has your dedication led you to your current role as Chair of the Board?

John: When I started working on the waterfront, I was new to the industry and wanted to establish communication with professionals who were experts in the sector. In the past whatever business I've been active in, I've always looked for the leading association that can put me in touch with like-minded individuals across a range of functions, from whom I can learn and collaborate with to drive improvements.

Spotlight: And so, you discovered ICHCA. What appealed to you about the group and its Members?

John: Well to begin, ICHCA is dedicated to cooperation through working with the ILO (International Labour Organisation) on dockworker issues, and the IMO (International Maritime Organisation) on bringing in maritime and seafaring interests. ICHCA, being the third side of the triangle – made up of cargo handling entities – seemed like a great fit as they worked closely with the other two on Codes of Practice. Safety is at the heart of ICHCA and that's what also makes mine tick.

Spotlight: So, you joined and now you are Chair of the Board?

John: Indeed, and I have been for five years now. I'm proud of what we do on the Board and at ICHCA generally, helping to drive activities and strategies to improve safety at sea, on the docks and where ships meet shore.

Spotlight: Would you say the direction and purpose of ICHCA has changed over the years of your involvement?

John: ICHCA has always been dedicated to safety awareness but, yes, I think it is justifiable to say that its role, particularly as a recognised NGO at the IMO has grown in influence. Let me say upfront that the current CEO Richard Steele and his administration, building upon the good work by his predecessor Richard Brough, has taken the global presence of the Association to another level. Its ability to share knowledge and communicate effectively is improving all the time.

Spotlight: Thanks John, this would seem an appropriate time to ask you why to those reading, who are not ICHCA Members, you would recommend joining.

John: I'm sure those operators out there who are concerned with the safety of their employees and the reputation of their businesses will all agree that we do better together. There is no competition when it comes to safety. We will achieve a safer and more secure working environment by sharing our experiences, successes and even failures to better understand the myriad of dynamic challenges that face us all. ICHCA is an ideal vehicle to communicate and become part of a truly global community, in which to request assistance, explain your own best practices and solve common problems together.

Spotlight: Could we explore those challenges in a little more detail? What would you say are the most critical problems in the face of which ICHCA's support is required?

John: It all comes down to transparency. At sea, the seafarers are a forgotten tribe. Little is known, even by those who utilise the global supply chains that are so reliant on these people, who frankly risk their lives on a daily basis. At the shore-side interface, there are numerous risks of minor to serious injury that can be damaging both physically and increasingly, mentally to a workforce that are equally essential to the flow of the world's trade. It is our job to safeguard these people, to ensure their working conditions are of a high safety standard and we need increased awareness of any sub-standard conditions, where they occur and how to correct them.

Spotlight: You clearly have a passion for this work John. What positives do you see in the industry today that are improving the situation?

John: Of course, progress is being made, even though it is slow. Accident occurrences are down, shore-side regulation and oversight has been vastly improved over recent years. In particular, vertical integration of functionality along the supply chain—shipping line investment in ports, terminal operators' management of logistics centres and means of distribution—brings with it a greater uniformity and consistency of safety standards.

Above all, what I would call a 'New World of Communication' is making a big difference and will be pivotal in the future to continuing the trend of knowledge sharing. The pandemic had very few up-

sides, but one has been the use of the internet for us to communicate ‘face-to-face,’ if not in person. Yes, it may mean some late nights for some and very early mornings for others, but the video conferencing facility is a gift we should leverage to the maximum in listening and learning from our peers throughout the world. I’m proud to say that ICHCA is playing a significant role in providing opportunities for such positive community development.

Spotlight: You are the VP of Operations at British Columbia’s Maritime Employers Association based in Vancouver. How did you develop your passion for safety in the workplace and what inter-personal skills do you value in instilling cooperation between the various stakeholders you work with?

John: Safety has always been a priority for me throughout my career, and in my personal life come to think of it. I’ve served in the Navy, worked in heavy construction, flew planes, and am an avid boater, so safety has always been paramount. In my current role I am responsible for training on equipment, safety and inventory control. I find data analytics increasingly important to matching the right labour force with the appropriate demand, which can be variable. I feel that I’m an organizational thinker with 30+ years of leadership experience, leading teams from five to 200. I see a clear presentation and design of appropriate training regimes as essential in the success of leadership, motivation of people and encouragement of teamwork. Healthy workplaces produce safe ones.

Spotlight: Finally, John you touched on your personal life. What are your own drivers of happiness and satisfaction?

John: Undoubtedly my four kids, who are now grown with families of their own. My wife and I are inordinately proud of our family and nothing gives me greater pleasure than taking them (well a few at a time) to explore some of the 400 islands and thousands of inlets that are on our doorstep in the waters between Seattle and Alaska - a truly awesome environment. Of course, my 49-year-old boat needs a lot of care and attention, but that is worth every penny spent an hour of tinkering for those moments of peace and tranquility with my dog adrift on its sturdy deck.

Spotlight: Many thanks John. We envy you.