



TESTIMONIAL: JASON BELCHER, FLORIDA MARINE TRANSPORTERS



Florida Marine Transporters is proud of its association with Delgado Community College and its Maritime, Fire and Industrial Training Program. My name is Jason Belcher and I serve as Florida Marine's chief financial officer and as a director. On behalf of our CEO, Dennis Pasentine, and our President, John Roberts, I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Rick Schwab of Delgado. Our relationship with Rick has evolved into a friendship. His leadership and laser focus is not only commendable but an example for others to follow. Rick and his staff are proof that post-secondary education can be practical, beneficial, and results oriented. On behalf of our management group, captains, and crews I wish to thank Rick Schwab, his staff, and Delgado for their substantial support.

Generally, much pomp and circumstance accompanies an event such as this (the grand opening of the Mandeville Florida Marine – Delgado Maritime, Fire and Industrial Training Facility) which is then followed by a precipitous decline in commitment and, eventually, less than desired results. This facility will be an exception to that rule. Florida Marine, along with our industry peers such as LeBeouf Brothers, Crosby Tugs, Transit Marine, Noble Drilling, and others, is committed to the success of this project. The jobs that are created within these walls coupled with the continuing education of our crews and employees will make a demonstrative contribution to improving this states economy. I challenge any politician present to find another industry that is a better corporate citizen than the members of the Maritime industry. The support allocated to this joint effort will pay dividends into the next decade and, I dare say, many more decades to come.

Our world post Katrina has changed significantly. In the turmoil following the worst natural disaster in memory, this facility evolved into much more than we could have imagined. What started as a temporary accommodation became the joint effort we honor today. One of the crown jewels of this collaborative effort is the new towboat navigation simulator. If our guests have yet to visit the towboat simulator which is located within this building I request that you do so before departing. It is this nation's most advanced simulator of its kind. Delgado's staff deserves much of the credit for working many long hours to accomplish most of what you see today, including the development of this state of the art simulator program. I would also like to recognize our Safety and Training Manager, Tom McWhorter. We are proud of the work Tom and his staff has done, especially in a world of high expectations and limited resources. To say that Tom and his staff have had a material impact on this project would be the understatement of a lifetime.

Let me also mention that beyond these walls Delgado has built one of the best fire fighting schools which is located in east New Orleans. In the days following hurricane Katrina, we learned the value of self sufficiency and the need to increase recruiting, training, and deployment of our own emergency responders. Our industry will use that location to further the education of boat crews and staff while local and state agencies can prepare our responders for the challenges that may be brought about by hurricanes, industrial, and epic disasters.

In closing let me state that this facility will have an impact on the careers of every position within our industry. From the greenest deckhand to the most experienced seaman this facility is dedicated to the task of making marine navigation a safe, environmentally friendly, economical, and prosperous means of moving the bulk cargos that feed the fuel of our states economic fire. Thank you and May God bless our mutual efforts.