

Leading Ladies of Logistics - *Operating the 5th Largest East Coast port in High Heels*
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Women in logistics are more visible now. You were a pioneer. Tell us about how you ended up as COO of South Carolina Ports.

While working in government relations for the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, I was approached about an opening at South Carolina Ports. My career up to that point made a great foundation for me to become SC Ports' vice president of government relations. I then became the senior vice president of external affairs, overseeing all public relations, government relations, community relations and environmental affairs for the maritime agency.

Over the years, I became more fascinated with the maritime industry. I worked to gain a deeper understanding of the port and maritime community. In 2015, I became the senior vice president of operations and terminals. In 2018, I became the Chief Operating Officer for SC Ports.

As a top 10 U.S. container port, our operations are key to efficiently moving cargo and attracting new business. For me to lead as a strong COO for SC Ports, it was crucial that I dedicated time to learning all aspects of port operations and the people behind the jobs that keep freight moving.

I also earned a Masters in Business Administration in Global Supply Chain from the University of Tennessee's Haslam School of Business, which has been instrumental in understanding the business side of running a port.

What was your education and earlier career moves?

I grew up in Georgia and earned my bachelor's degree in political science from Georgia Southern University. My first foray into government relations began in the Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget as a policy analyst. I moved to South Carolina to serve as the director of government relations for the Charleston Metro Chamber before joining the port in 1998.

You have given credit to Jim Newsome for his vision and for recognizing your ability to go into the port "business". Can you please explain?

Jim joined the port in 2009 and led a great turnaround effort, ensuring that we remain globally competitive and continue to grow above the market. Under his tenure, we doubled cargo volumes in a decade and opened the country's first greenfield container terminal since 2009, the Hugh K. Leatherman Terminal, which launched operations in March.

Jim has the great leadership quality of challenging his team to think of creative solutions. He encourages all of us at SC Ports to take risks and big swings. He recognizes talent and he nurtures it by entrusting people to lead alongside him. I have been fortunate to learn from him and work with him.

Certainly there is no typical day in the port business. Nevertheless, what is your typical day? Perhaps you can describe what it might be.

No two days in logistics ever looks the same! SC Ports offers efficient operations, capacity and fluidity to customers, and my team is responsible for making that happen.

My day might include a meeting with operations team leaders to get status updates on projects, going on terminal to oversee operations, a meeting on a key infrastructure project, a presentation to legislators about our growth, a discussion with a customer or supply chain partner, a brainstorming session on how to best optimize our operations, a ride-along with a truck driver, and occasionally a hands-on day involving the relocation of a hybrid RTG in our container yard.



Your husband, you have said, prefers to keep a low profile in your career. How do you all balance business and personal life?

I focus on whatever is in front of me. This helps me be present. I also take time for myself to exercise daily, as well as travel with family and friends. I hope it becomes normalized to ask the work/life balance question to professional men as much as it is asked of professional women, as we all strive for fulfilling personal and professional lives.

What advice do you have for young people, particularly women, considering a career in logistics?

Take opportunities when they present themselves if they interest you. Be willing to get uncomfortable, as this is often when you learn the most. Dive in, ask questions and learn from those around you. Knowing your business and the people in your organization is crucial to finding solutions. Tackle challenging projects and take risks.

The maritime industry has made great strides in diversity, but there is more work to be done. We must pay attention to who we hire, train and promote. It is hard to be what you cannot see, and seeing women excel in the maritime and logistics industry enables future generations to envision themselves excelling in those careers as well. For those of us that have pursued successful careers in this field, we do not have to expect the women that follow to have to work as hard as perhaps we did in that regard. Rather, we can lift each other up by encouraging other women to be bold in their careers and bring their ideas to the table.

Anything else you would like to impart?

For anyone working in the maritime industry, take risks, be decisive and celebrate the victories. One of the most fulfilling projects in my career was certainly a big risk. Since 2011, I have led the Charleston Harbor Deepening Project for SC Ports – a hugely important initiative for both SC Ports and South Carolina. It was paramount to successfully convey the importance of deepening Charleston Harbor to our federal, state and local partners to secure support and funding. I worked closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District on the extensive permitting and approvals processes.

The \$565 million project is now fully funded by state and federal partners. Charleston Harbor is on track to be 52 feet deep in 2022, making it the deepest harbor on the East Coast and capable of handling mega container ships any time, any tide.

This project taught me the power of collaboration, and it is deeply rewarding to see it being realized after a decade of hard work and partnership.