

## Mike Grandonico and Steve Ganoë

Owners of G&G Shipping Port of Dania, St. Johns Shipbuilding Putnam County, Fla.

Leslie Warrick, another of our past Florida Transportation Leaders, nominated Mike Grandonico and Steve Ganoë, the two principals of G&G Shipping at the Port of Dania. She could have just as easily nominated G&G's Jim Hampel, who sits on the seafarer's board of directors and is the public face of the remarkable shipping enterprise. We think Jim will have his day. But he insisted on nominating his bosses who have gone from a couple of enterprising river rats to a major force in Caribbean shipping and a critical component in the remarkable, \$15 billion direct foreign investment in the Bahamas Family Islands.

Today G&G Shipping operates an ocean highway across the gulfstream that links the Bahamas Family Islands to the resources of South Florida. Their arrival was eagerly awaited by construction crews, homemakers, millionaire developers and isolated teenagers each with crucial cargo onboard.

"Our philosophy is very simple," said Steve Ganoë, president of G&G. "Our clients are the focus of everything we do. All our work is done with them in mind, with a desire to provide continuous and courteous service."

In its 16th year of operation and 11th year as an ocean common carrier, G&G Shipping has seen a list of competitors come and go while it has expanded its fleet and its staff to keep pace with the vitality of the Bahamas.

How it happened is almost a Horatio Alger story.

In his nomination of Mike and Steve, Hampel said, "Many success stories in business start with fundamental concepts, among them: enjoy your work, (in this case, boating); build from nothing, (in this case, rebuild and restore an abandoned boat). Know every aspect of your business (in this case, be the captain, operate the forklift, drive the truck, write up a bill of lading, and collect the money.) As your business grows, remain involved in day-to-day operations even though you hire staff to attend to the details (Sign every check so you know where you \$\$ goes and spend wisely). Think ahead. (Plan for expansion, make changes to accommodate growth.) When you do those things, chances are you will rise to a leadership position in your industry."

Hampel added, "With this work mission, Mike Grandonico and Steve Ganoë, owners of G&G Shipping, in the course of 18 years in the cargo shipping industry, now have a fleet of nine vessels, operate their own USCG- and DHS-accredited port facility, commenced cargo operations in Port Canaveral, own a shipyard and dry-dock operation in Palatka, Fla., which has constructed three ships in less than two years of operation. Neither one has even celebrated their 40th birthday yet!

"Through the various enterprises, the two "G's" have close to 300 people on staff, support economic opportunity among thousands of Florida businesses transacting hundreds of millions of dollars in trade activity to the Bahamas and Caribbean."

It is a story we have enjoyed following in the pages of Florida Shipper. The two Merritt Island High School classmates spent their spare time fixing up boats and boat engines. Grandonico

was mechanically crafty and Ganoë was great with glass and resin. A hurricane-wrecked Carolina sailboat found its way into their hands and they turned it into a splendid little yacht that they sailed all along the Atlantic Coast and down to the Bahamas.

With a course set on the sea, the two men passed the Chapman's School and secured captains' licenses. After a couple of years apart working private boats, Ganoë and Grandonico got together on a project to refit boats and motors at a shop along Fort Lauderdale's New River. One of their first and most important projects was a funky, one-off 60-footer they set up as a shallow-draft supply vessel and bachelorette pad.

Hankering to get back to the Bahamas and alert to the need for supplies, especially auto parts, the Sea Viking was put into service between Fort Lauderdale and the thriving Andros Island metropolis of Morgan's Bluff.

At the time there was a dependable service calling at Bimini from the Miami River and a few other carriers supplying Nassau. From Nassau, mail boats and tramp service vessels made the rounds to the Out Islands, also called the Family Islands. But they could only call where channels could accommodate and docks were in place.

In 1992, G&G established a regular weekly schedule to Morgan's Bluff and called, on charter, to Chubb Key and Cat Key. The next year, service was extended to Nassau with charters added to Rock Sound, Eleuthera and Driggs Hill, Andros.

By 1995, the company secured a second vessel and moved to the Dania Terminal as a tenant. The next year, Ganoë and Grandonico found the aptly named Captain Rusty, a 165-foot roll-on, roll-off vessel that the young men completely reconditioned and recommissioned as the Sun Express. It immediately went into biweekly service calling at Governor's Harbor, Eleuthera.

By 1999, G&G operated four vessels. It purchased two competitors and extended its trade routes beyond Abaco in the north down to Exuma, Spanish Wells; Long Island; and Cat Island. Freeport also became a regular stop.

The next year, the company's 10th anniversary, the 190-foot Caribbean Express was launched. And the next year, with the acquisition of Arawak Shipping, another 190-foot landing craft was added to the fleet and service to Turks & Caicos.

With the addition of the 234-foot Gulfstream Express in 2002, G&G's capacity increased to handle as many as 70 containers.

By the middle of 2008, with one vessel built at its own yard and eight other vessels the company calls at 50 ports throughout



Steve Ganoë



Mike Grandonico

the Bahamas, Turks & Caicos, U.S. Virgin Islands and the Tortollas. The east terminal was "hardened" with Maritime Transportation Security Act-compliant security measures; company and terminal security officers were trained and posted along with vessel security plans for company ships greater than 500 tons. G&G was one of the first port facilities in Sector Miami certified as compliant by the U.S. Coast Guard.

With the increased attention to security and the increasing value of the export cargo, G&G found a silver lining in compliance.

Ganoë was not satisfied with the ships the company contracted for at a Florida yard and, when he located an abandoned boat yard in Palatka, the company began construction of its own boats and boats for sale.

The project, St. John's Shipbuilding, involves the revitalization of an existing 98-acre shipyard that had endured hurricane damage. It still offered the grid of tracks and the foundations for sheds to construct steel vessels up to 260 feet with a 70-foot beam.

The yard also came with Bobby Barfield, a 20-year resident of Palatka who operated the yard in its heyday and is now manager for the G&G principals.

Ganoë and Grandonico have supervised construction of their fleet in other yards. Within months of revitalizing the moribund yard, St. John's Shipbuilding won its first contract to build a 165-foot, all-steel offshore supply vessel for Robert Perez, who will operate the ship in the Gulf of Mexico oil patch.

Barfield offers 30 years of experience, including 20 at that yard. The G&G partners are experienced managers, and the 25 employees are also experienced shipbuilders and steel workers, Ganoë said. "We did not have much of a problem with a learning curve."

After a year the yard has completed three ships, including the Cape Express, the first company-built ship to be deployed for the use of G&G. It represents several other firsts. It is the first in the fleet with a centerline-mounted third diesel engine. It is the first to use biodiesel. It is the first to be based at Port Canaveral. It is one of 10 G&G ships that can be easily manned by American crew members and fill a void in Jones Act, short-sea shipping when the opportunity presents itself

Ganoë said all ships built at the yard "from OSVs (ocean survey vessels) to dinner cruise vessels" will be inspected by the American Bureau of Shipping and the Coast Guard according to the Code of Federal Regulations. And each will qualify for a coastwise endorsement.

The current G&G fleet operates just below the 500-ton threshold but is still capable of transporting 660 tons with an on-deck loading area of 6,200 square feet capable of stacking 14 40-foot containers and 28, 20-foot containers in addition to roll-on, roll-off cargo.

Once a tenant at 30-year-old Port Dania, G&G now owns the facility and has established it as a U.S. Customs-bonded port of entry, compliant with Maritime Transportation Security Act regulations and with clearance for pleasure and cargo vessels.

Good-natured and looking younger than their years, the two

founding partners were asked what advice they would give new clients. Grandonico and Ganoë shrugged and smiled. Then Ganoë deadpanned, "It would help if they check the water depth before buying an island."

Of course, a major aspect of the G&G success story is the versatility of its shallow-draft vessels, which can land on any beach, and the seamanship of their captains. And in times of crisis, the G&G operation immediately goes into high gear. They have operated a hurricane-relief donation center and served as unscheduled shipper transporting relief cargo after numerous storms, including Hurricane Ike relief for Grand Turk, Turks & Caicos and relief following Hurricane Frances, which devastated Freeport, Grand Bahama.

Those who know Bahamas know it was no small tribute when on Aug. 25, 2006, Cabinet members from the Bahaman government and local shippers joined with G&G Shipping for the christening of the Sea Express II, which was christened by Miss Bimini Christette Sawyer at a joyful sunset party at the G&G Port of Davie terminal, just down the cut from Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale.

Bahamas Minister of Transport and Aviation Glenys Hanna-Martin praised the company for its facilitation of the development of the Bahamas, where no other transportation company could call. She also thanked G&G for its special assistance in emergency relief and rebuilding after the recent hurricanes. She said G&G had not only boosted the general economy but on one occasion when an airport terminal burned on a remote vacation island, G&G rushed in the material to get the airport open again, jump-starting the island's principal source of income.

Council General Alma Adams presented G&G with an award for its dedication to the Bahamas during times of trouble.

Minister of Tourism Obie Wilchombe described the success of G&G as a rare instance when opportunity works in everyone's favor. "Because of G&G, islands that could not have been developed with homes and resorts are now enjoying a prosperity they never had before," he said. "And because of this, G&G is also enjoying prosperity and the gratitude of the people of the Bahamas."

"As they work to help us build our Bahamas, we are developing anchor companies all over the country and just to know there is a development on every island of the Bahamas, we are pleased that G&G is a part of that."

Grandonico is a graduate of Chapman's School of Seamanship and a licensed captain. He and his wife, Simone, reside in Fort Lauderdale and support Port Everglades Association, Seafarer's House, the Marine Industries of South Florida, the Waterway Clean-up, Chamber of Commerce City of Dania Beach, American Cancer Society Relay for Life.

Steve and his wife, Deborah Carr-Ganoë, have two sons, and a baby due in April.

They reside in New Smyrna Beach from which Steve manages the boatyard and supports the community-redevelopment efforts of Putnam County Chamber of Commerce. Also a licensed captain, he too attended Chapman's School of Seamanship. 🦋