

Human Capital

Portal to the future

Exec seeking to boost Port of Baltimore traffic

Premium content from Baltimore Business Journal - by Jimmy DeButts, Staff

James J. White isn't waiting for opportunity. The Port of Baltimore's executive director is going after the anticipated increase in cargo that will make its way up the Eastern seaboard once the Panama Canal's expansion project is completed in 2014.

Competition for larger ships, and their cargo, will be fierce among Baltimore, New York City, Norfolk, Va., Charleston, S.C., and Brunswick, Ga. Those cities will fight to be the distribution point for various goods coming from the Pacific via the canal. White is overseeing the Port of Baltimore's contracting efforts to welcome those larger ships at the Seagirt Marine Terminal.

Larger ships could help the port boost its shipments. The port posted 753,000 tons of general cargo in November, a 15 percent increase over 2009.

The terminal's berth is being expanded to 50 feet to accommodate those ships. That expansion is expected to be completed in 2012.

White, who is in his second stint as head of the port, was appointed Gov. Martin O'Malley in 2007.

BBJ: What does the Port of Baltimore need to do to remain competitive?

White: Keeping the channels dredged is important if the ships can't get here, Maryland won't realize the full economic impact of the port. We've done a lot to differentiate ourselves from other ports. We're very business friendly. We offer a full package of options for customers. We can stevedore them or if they want to we can supply land and charge dockage fess.

Then, if they want, they can choose their own stevedore. We're unique in that way. Other ports mandate product lines.

BBJ: How critical is upgrading Seagirt Marine Terminal?

White: It will be done two years before the Panama Canal project is done. There will be four new container cranes giving us 11 cranes in a 50 foot berth. The Panama Canal project will be a real game changer for ports on the East coast. Bigger ships will be able to deliver more products.

Since we sit in the third largest consumer area in the nation, we feel we'll fare better. You can take the freight to where the consumers are for a lot less money.

BBJ: What do you like best about your job?

White: I love the negotiations of entering long-term contracts. A couple of years ago we shifted away from two- and three-year contracts. We cut a deal with Mercedes-Benz for 20 years. We distribute all Mercedes-Benz vehicles in the North Atlantic. Those deals secure jobs long-term and gives us some economic stability.

BBJ: How important is the cruise industry to the port/state?

White: We think the cruise business has been very important to the state's economy. It produces about \$91 million in economic impact to our region. That business is growing. In 2008, we did 28 cruises, in 2009 we had 81 cruises, in 2010 we had 91 and in 2011 we'll do 112. We're studying adding another cruise terminal to our port.