

## **Transporting gold, the ship was predestined to become part of the long tradition of the Port of Montreal!**

### ***Helena G's* captain wins the Gold-Headed Cane**

**Montreal, January 2, 2024** — On this second day of January at 7: 17 am the *Helena G* was the first ocean-going vessel of 2024 to cross the Port of Montreal's downstream limit at Sorel without a stopover. True to a tradition that dates back more than 185 years, the Montreal Port Authority (MPA) is awarding the Gold-Headed Cane to the vessel's master, Eduard Voshchuk.

The *Helena G* sailed from Bulgaria's Port of Burgas on December 12, 2022. Flying the flag of Portugal, this vessel is carrying gold and pyrite, and it ended its journey at Port of Montreal's berth 43, operated by Logistec. The *Helena G* will set sail in a few days bound for Québec city.

Captain Voshchuk, who is of Ukrainian origin, was honoured to receive the Gold-Headed Cane for the first time. He and his crew were highly motivated to win the Gold-Headed Cane. The Atlantic crossing, which took 3 weeks, went off without a hitch.

Captain Voshchuk began sailing at the age of 18. He comes from a family of sailors. His father, grandfather and uncles were all captains, so he decided to follow in his family's footsteps. Sailing gives him the opportunity to visit other countries and interact with different peoples. This is his second visit to Montreal.

The Gold-Headed Cane inscribed with the name of the winning captain and the ship's name was awarded by Geneviève Deschamps, Acting President and CEO during a ceremony held at 14:00 pm. aboard ship.

"It was a great pleasure for us to present this year's Gold-Headed Cane to Captain Voshchuk, master of the first ship to cross the limits of the Port of Montreal's waters this year. This tradition celebrates the City of Montreal's rich port heritage and helps draw attention to the crucial work of mariners, pilots and captains from all over the world, who work year-round in a marine industry that is essential to supplying the population with goods and commodities of all kinds," said Geneviève Deschamps, Acting President and CEO. "Carrying gold to the Port of Montreal, some would say that the *Helena G* was predestined to receive this prestigious honor! This year's presentation of the Cane takes on a special character, with part of the ship's crew and a Ukrainian captain on board. This reminds us of the resilience of the Ukrainian community, which, despite the war, contributes to the smooth running of the international maritime industry," she added. Ms. Deschamps also took the opportunity to welcome the captain with bread and salt, a tradition

notably present in Montreal's Ukrainian community, and a sign of respect, hospitality and goodwill for this captain and crew who have spent the holiday season at sea.

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transport, Canada, congratulates the captain and his crew: "Congratulations to Captain Voshchuk and the crew of *Helena G* for receiving this distinction. The iconic Gold-Headed Cane reflects the Port of Montreal's long history as one of the most important gateways of trade in Canada".

"Deputy Premier of Quebec and Minister of Transport and Sustainable Mobility, Ms. Geneviève Guilbault, also extended her welcome to the first vessel, stating: 'We need a robust maritime industry to support our supply chain, and our government remains committed in backing the port industry of Quebec. The Gold-Headed Cane, a significant tradition in this field, provides an opportunity to celebrate the inaugural ship's arrival in Montreal, symbolizing our global openness. Congratulations to Captain Voshchuk and the crew of *Helena G*, and a warm welcome to Quebec!'"

Montréal Mayor Valérie Plante added her voice to the chorus of congratulations. "I congratulate Captain Voshchuk and the entire crew of the ship *Helena G* on winning the Gold-Headed Cane. On behalf of all Montrealers, I welcome them to our beautiful metropolis. It's a pleasure to start the New Year with this ceremony in our port. I'd like to thank the Port of Montréal for perpetuating this cherished tradition, which dates back to 1840. The Port of Montréal is one of the most important in North America, and an essential partner contributing to Montréal's social and economic vitality," said Montréal Mayor Valérie Plante.

The Montreal Port Authority also salutes the work of the Corporation of the Mid St. Lawrence Pilot, Martin Foisy, who safely guided the ship to port.

### **Preliminary results for 2023**

To mark the start of the new year, the MPA is releasing preliminary (unaudited) results for 2023.

All sectors combined, the Port of Montreal posted a 2% decline in volumes compared to last year, with a total of 35.2 million tonnes of goods handled in 2023, reflecting the impact of a global economic slowdown.

Container volumes were 8.8% behind the previous year's total of 13.1 million tonnes. This decline was mainly due to a decrease in imports linked to the economic context, i.e. lower consumer demand, as well as a decline in the construction sector. Despite the economic context, exports by Canadian companies to the rest of the world remained at levels similar to 2022.

Even so, some container markets continued to grow, notably Asia, which increased 4% over 2022 imports, as well as those from Ontario and the Midwest, which grew by 2% and 8% respectively on the export market.

The liquid bulk sector rose 7.1% to 13,9 million tonnes, largely as a result of the return to travel and the significant increase in air travel. It is noteworthy that new types of fuel keep gaining market share, such as ethanol, a lower-carbon alternative fuel whose volumes doubled compared to the previous year.

The dry bulk sector held steady at 8 million tonnes. The grain sector also remained stable despite unfavorable weather conditions for farmers.

Lastly, general cargo and non-containerized goods accounted for 0.26 million tonnes.

The results of the 2023 cruise season were positive, confirming the sector's post-pandemic recovery. We welcomed 23 ships from 15 different companies, with over 51,000 passengers and 16,200 crew members, up nearly 35% compared to the previous year. The average ship occupancy rate reached 86%, compared to 75% in 2022.

Please note that these preliminary results will be audited and officially released in full at the MPA's annual meeting in May.

### **About the Gold-Headed Cane tradition**

The Gold-Headed Cane is awarded to the master of the first ocean-going vessel to reach the Port of Montreal without a stopover in the new year. Until 1964, the Gold-Headed Cane was presented in the spring to herald the resumption of navigation, as Montreal was cut off from the world during the long winter months. Since the advent of icebreakers, which allow year-round navigation, the Cane has been awarded to the master of the first ocean-going vessel to reach the Port without a stopover at the start of each year. It is a trophy long coveted by the captains of many countries.

To learn more about this great Port of Montreal tradition [click here](#).

### **About the Port of Montreal**

Operated by the Montreal Port Authority (MPA), the Port of Montreal is the second largest container port in Eastern Canada and a diversified transshipment centre that handles all types of goods: containerized and non-containerized cargo, liquid bulk and dry bulk. The only container port in Quebec, it is a destination port served by the largest shipping lines in the world. It is also an intermodal hub with a service offering that is unique in North America, featuring its own rail network directly dockside connected to Canada's two national rail networks. The MPA also operates a Cruise Terminal and a Port Centre.

The MPA factors economic, social and environmental components into its corporate initiatives. This commitment is governed by a sustainable development policy whose guiding principles focus on involvement, cooperation and accountability. Port activity supports 19,000 jobs and generates \$2.6 billion in economic benefits annually.

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