

GIVING FREIGHT A VOICE



■ Barry Horowitz

MY COLUMN THIS month comes to you from Boston, well actually from Newton, Mass, where just a few months ago this community and the country itself was shocked by a domestic terrorism attack at the conclusion of the Boston Marathon. I wasn't in Boston for anything related to that horror, but gathered with some 200 others for the 12th Annual Northeast Cargo Symposium presented by the Coalition of New England Companies for Trade. The subject of terrorism and security as it relates to our industry was certainly part of our agenda.

CONNECT is the largest nonprofit member-based international trade organization in the U.S. Northeast. Its membership includes companies and individuals from six states — Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine — and across all industry sectors: importers and exporters; ocean carriers, ports and terminal operators; freight forwarders, non-vessel-operating common carriers, customs brokers and distribution centers; banks, attorneys and consultants; state agencies; industry associations; media organizations and others. CONNECT's broad and deep membership forms the basis for its mission of trade advocacy, continuous education and networking activities.

The fall Cargo Symposium is one of two major annual CONNECT events, the other being the Annual Northeast Trade and Transportation Conference, held each year in Newport, R.I. Other significant activities include a group mission to Washington, D.C., to meet with, brief and be briefed by New England federal officials, and various other trade-related meetings.

While the old industry adage that "freight doesn't vote" remains true, CONNECT doesn't take this to mean that cargo has no voice. From

the organization's beginning in 1991, it has represented the interests of New England importers and exporters in matters of international shipping and logistics and all issues dealing with Customs and every other regulatory agency that has any impact on companies' ability to efficiently move their products into or out of the United States. It's a very ambitious agenda and one that isn't often accomplished in such a sustained and focused manner.

The fall symposium provides an excellent example of the wide range of subjects of interest to CONNECT's members. Current (Acting) Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection Tom Winkowski as well as former Customs Commissioner George Wiese spoke in great detail about the changing landscape at Customs and the Department of Homeland Security, of which Customs is a part. Covering a wide scope of activities dealing with the movement and security of products and people across all of America's borders, having two commissioners on the same panel provided attendees with tremendous access and detailed information on this vital agency's activities.

I shared the podium with Bill Rooney of Kuehne + Nagel to discuss the potential impact of a new form of ocean carrier alliance and some description of many of the issues that lie ahead of our industry in the coming year, including waterfront labor uncertainty, carrier overcapacity and weak demand for space, the ongoing chassis dilemma, continued downward pressure on rates and the effect on carrier financial results, among other topics.

Other panels discussed the subjects of the ongoing hours-of-service rules for the trucking industry, regulations in the air freight industry, Customs' 2014 agenda for importers, exporters, forwarders and brokers,

and a description of the agency's Centers of Excellence and Expertise. Peter Friedmann, an international trade attorney, provided an insider's look at what goes on in the halls of the federal government.

Concurrent with the main symposium agenda was a separate one for CONNECT's Young Professionals' Conference. This group was established last year by CONNECT for relative newcomers to our industry (age 33 and younger) as an acknowledgment of an important issue facing this business in the future: the need for a more serious approach to succession planning across our industry. With the Young Professionals' Conference, CONNECT aims to build a network of the next generation who will form the cadre of industry leaders over the next three to four decades.

This extended review of the symposium isn't intended as a CONNECT promotional vehicle. I'm neither a member nor even a regular participant at the organization's events (my most recent attendance at a CONNECT event was in May 2010). I just wanted to highlight the excellent service CONNECT offers to the local and regional international trade community and the effective trade promotion activities, for exports as well as imports, of this group. If you don't know CONNECT, check them out at www.conect.org. If you have a similar group in your area, attend their meetings and get involved. If you don't have access to a similar organization, get together with your local industry friends and colleagues and get one started.

Freight may not vote, but we can speak with one voice. Make sure you're heard. **joc**

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