

NEWS LEADER

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MARY MAGUIRE/NEWS-LEADER

Somers Isles Shipping will celebrate the 1,000th voyage of the ship Somers Isles between the Port of Fernandina and Bermuda. Company employees met the ship at the Port on Saturday. From left are Cathy Kaltenbach, Robin Bishop, manager of North Florida Shipping Inc., Terry McCarthy, Jack Watson, Robby Long, Teddy White and ship Capt. Emiel Koelhuis.

1,000 voyages from Port to Bermuda

MARY MAGUIRE
News-Leader

One of the busiest companies at the Port of Fernandina is located a few miles south of the facility on Bailey Road, not far from South Eighth Street.

Somers Isles Shipping Inc. (SISL) operates from a spacious office where employees arrange shipping for a wide range of products from washing machines and wallboard to luxury yachts and living room furniture to travel from Fernandina Beach to Hamilton, Bermuda.

Two to three times each month, the company fully loads the Somers Isles cargo ship with 165 containers and then sends it on a 3 1/2-day trip into the North Atlantic Ocean where its haul will be unloaded in Bermuda's capital city.

This port-to-port service started in 1986 and next week the company will celebrate the ship's 1,000th voyage. There is a party scheduled in Fernandina Beach on Sept. 23 and in Bermuda on Sept. 30.

Several of the company's board members and executives from Bermuda are traveling to Fernandina to attend the celebration.

"We want to say thank you to our

clients and local leaders for all of the support we've received from the community over the last 28 years," said Robin Bishop, who is chairman of the company's wholly owned U.S. subsidiary, North Florida Shipping Inc.

"We have always liked the small-town atmosphere in Fernandina, we love the Port and we enjoy being part of the community."

The company has seven employees, including two mechanics that handle container repairs in a workshop behind the office space.

When the ship heads out to sea it's run by a nine-member crew, including a captain, said Bishop, who relocated to Fernandina Beach from the Netherlands with his wife and child.

A company based in Holland handles staffing for the ship, said Bishop, and draws people from all over the world to work on the crew. Bishop said the ship is leased.

Bishop lives in Jacksonville but the company owns its building at 2661 Bailey Road as well as all of its equipment. This includes the chassis and containers. Some of the containers are refrigerated (the industry calls them reefers) because Somers Isles also

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sends food to Bermuda, such as freezer foods, soda, beer, cookies and detergent.

The company ships for Kraft, Sam's, Procter & Gamble and Kimberly Clark, among other consumer product companies.

"A lot of diapers go to Bermuda," said Bishop. "Anything you can find at the grocery store, we send it."

Bishop offers high praise to the Port's manager Kinder Morgan and its director Val Schwec.

The company is hosting its party with Kinder Morgan. The energy company based in Houston has managed the Port

since 2001 and also manages terminals.

"The Port goes out of its way to help us. We really have a better deal here with service than what we would get at a bigger port," said Bishop.

He knows. Bishop said the company operated out of Jacksonville in 1985, the year before moving its business to the Port of Fernandina.

Schwec says operating a small port allows Kinder Morgan to focus on customer service. "The beauty of being in a small pond like we are here is that we have the opportunity to treat all of the people who use the Port as big fish," Schwec said.

Somers Isles Shipping is owned and operated out of Bermuda, though North Florida Shipping Inc. represents the shipping line in this country and provides agency services, such as taking care of the vessel, handling documentation and helping the crew. Should a crew member need a doctor, the company will schedule the appointment.

Bermuda has also been known as Somers Isles and it is where the ship gets its name. But it's not the original ship.

They need to be replaced. While most of the cargo is in containers, the company's website says about 10 percent of its business last year was in break bulk (think of it like packing suitcases in a car's trunk and putting your bicycle on a rack).

The company's ship was the first vessel to call at the Forest Products Terminal operated by Nassau Terminals Inc. in Fernandina Beach.

Cathy Kaltenbach is a customer service representative and has been with the company for 28 years. She travels to Bermuda from Fernandina once each year for sales calls.

"It sounds glamorous but the days are filled with appointments," said Kaltenbach.

"I've become friends with many of my clients so I often get invited over to their homes for a barbecue dinner."

Yes, she said, Bermuda shorts are worn in Bermuda and considered proper business attire.

"As long as you throw on a jacket and tie," she said.

To learn more about Somers Isles Shipping Ltd., 2661 Bailey Road, Fernandina Beach, call 261-2662.

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Barnabas
CENTER, INC

The food pantry needs donations of non-perishable food items all year round. For more information, call: 904.261.7000

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