

Sanders leads Plaquemines Port Delegation in Panama

As the 100-year anniversary of the opening of the Panama Canal approaches and the much-anticipated wider canal lanes near completion, there is a high level of excitement on what this means for trade at ports around the nation and the Plaquemines Port is no exception.

Executive Director Sandy Sanders will lead a contingent of Plaquemines Port Commissioners to Panama next month to participate in a fact-finding mission designed to continue marketing port development opportunities in Plaquemines Parish and build relationships with Panamanian decision makers. "Everyone in the port business is excited about what is happening in Panama. East and west coast ports are already backlogged so ports along the gulf coast and the Mississippi River are prime targets to handle the increased cargo coming through the new canal," Sanders said. "In the port trade, there are very few things that commands everyone's attention and the Panama Canal is certainly one."

The planned build-out of the Plaquemines Port site south of Myrtle Grove and other available industrial sites along the river such as the former AMAX facility in Braithwaite and Freeport Sulphur Company in Port Sulphur makes Plaquemines Parish suitable for just about any type of cargo and light manufacturing associated with the Panama Canal expansion. "We are the closest port to deep water being located at mile 55 of the Mississippi River and as ships get larger, our proximity gives us a competitive advantage," Sanders added.

Dr. Stuart Guey, Port Chairman, said the mission to Panama is coming at a crucial time because the increased traffic through the Panama Canal is less than two years away. "Timing is everything. We've followed the Port Master Plan getting our governance established, we've hired an executive director and we are marketing nearly 2000 acres for development. With the Panama Canal expansion so close, we have to show them what we have to offer and how it fits into their global transportation plan," Guey said.

Former Port Chairman Anthony Buras said the trip is important because it offers an opportunity to build relationships as well as to discuss potential projects. "I think being there shows the Panamanian officials we are serious at what we are doing."

Developing the port has often been promoted as a source of jobs and income but for many years the port acted only in the capacity of providing security and collecting tariffs. That changed in late 2013 when the port purchased 550 acres. The port property, along with an adjacent 1500 acres, is being marketed worldwide for development. "The decision to invest in purchasing land to build a port was a major step for us. Developing the property and producing jobs and income is our top priority and Panama is where we might be able to attract shippers to come to Plaquemines," said Port Commissioner Keith Hinkley.

The Panama Canal Authority is currently considering a proposed Memorandum of Understanding with the Plaquemines Port, which was delivered to the Canal Authority by Panamanian Ambassador to the United States, Mario Jaramillio. The port contingent is hopeful that the MOU can be finalized while they are in Panama.