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PORTS ASSOCIATION OF LOUISIANA (PAL) ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

BATON ROUGE, LA – The Ports Association of Louisiana (PAL) Board of Directors elected its new officers who took office for a three-year term beginning August 7, 2024. The new officers form the Executive Committee for the board, which is tasked with representing the organization, along with its Executive Director. The Committee serves to keep PAL’s membership abreast of any legislation, educational opportunities, or potential partnerships pertaining to the advancement of the maritime industry. The PAL Board is comprised of 32 corporate members, each representing a different port from across the state. PAL also has nearly 100 associate members representing ancillary businesses and stakeholders from across the nation.

The new officers are:

Weldon Danos, President; Executive Director, Grand Isle Port Commission
Ben Russo, Vice President; Executive Director, Central Louisiana Regional Port
Jay Hardman, Treasurer; Executive Director, Port of Greater Baton Rouge

“It is an honor and privilege to serve as the next President of the Ports Association of Louisiana, Danos said. “The Port Industry is a big economic driver in the state of Louisiana, and I look forward to leading the Ports Association through its opportunities and challenges for the next several years. I am very proud to represent the Ports and the Associate Members that support our Ports.”

“Our entire organization could not be more grateful for the leadership team that has stepped forward to lead PAL over the next few years,” Executive Director Jennifer Marusak said. “Their expertise, efforts and time will prove invaluable to not only our port members, but our Associate members who do business with our ports, as well.”



Weldon M. Danos takes the helm as PAL's president. Danos was appointed as executive director of the Grand Isle Port Commission in November 2020. Danos has held various management level positions domestically and internationally in the Oil & Gas, Marine, Chemical and Refining Industries. He has held the position of Secretary from 2022-2024 and Vice – President from 2024-2025.

Located on Louisiana's only inhabited barrier island, the Grand Isle Port Commission regulates commerce and traffic at Grand Isle's Port. The island is a hub for the petroleum industry, commercial fisheries and tourism, and the Port serves to promote safety and commerce of Grand Isle and the surrounding waters.

In his role as Executive Director, he is responsible for overseeing the daily activities of the Port's mission to promote safety and commerce of Grand Isle and surrounding waters including the petroleum industry, commercial fisheries, and tourism. His accomplishments have included obtaining the funding and overseeing the largest project in the history of the GIPC including the Pier & Bulkhead Repair at the Port's Commercial Dock located on Bayou Rigaud. Additional activities have included obtaining grants for hurricane public assistance critical projects, the expansion of the AOC Aquaculture Oyster Farms and the planned construction of the 1st Oyster Harvesting Facility in the town of Grand Isle.

The Grand Isle Port Commission has successfully lobbied for and secured millions in funding for numerous dredge projects including multiple dredge projects of the federal navigation channel including Barataria Pass and Bayou Rigaud. Although considered a shallow water port, Grand Isle has one of the highest tonnages of any shallow water port in the state. The port continues to improve navigation around the island and strives to rebuild and protect our coast and vanishing wetlands.

Danos holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Life Sciences & Technology from Nicholls State University, an Associate of Science Degree in Occupational Safety & Health from Delgado University, and an Executive Leadership Certificate from Rice University.



L. Benny "Ben" Russo Jr. has been serving as the Executive Director of the Central Louisiana Regional Port Authority since October 2020. Bringing a wealth of experience with over three decades in the specialty chemical and electric utility sectors, Russo began his career in environmental health and safety and industrial hygiene. He spent over 20 years in origination, economic development, and business development, holding multiple strategic roles that significantly contributed to business growth and renewable energy initiatives. Russo has been instrumental in leading the port through significant growth and development. Before joining the Central Louisiana Regional Port Authority, he founded and led Rugallo LLC, a consulting firm.

In his role as Executive Director, Ben Russo is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the port, including the strategic business and economic development of its assets. He works closely with the port commission and other stakeholders to advance the port's mission of supporting both international and domestic commerce while facilitating regional economic growth. Under his leadership, the port has secured millions in state and federal funds, increased its tenant base, and significantly enhanced its infrastructure. Russo has overseen the design and implementation of key infrastructure improvements, played a crucial role in obtaining grants for critical projects, and worked diligently to increase the usage of inland rivers by the military. His efforts have been pivotal in optimizing the port's assets to meet the future needs of the community, ensuring the port's continued growth and contribution to the regional economy.

Russo holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Toxicology from Northeast Louisiana University. He has actively contributed to numerous organizations throughout his career, including the Port Association of Louisiana, Inland Rivers Ports and Terminals, Red River Valley Association, Louisiana Central, and the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce. He has also served on various advisory boards, including the University of Louisiana's Center for Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Energy, the Louisiana Military Advisory Council, and the University of New Orleans' Advanced Materials Research Institute. His involvement in these organizations underscores his commitment to fostering economic development and advancing industry standards across various sectors.



John G. “Jay” Hardman, P.E., was appointed as executive director by the Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission in November 2006. Hardman has held a number of key staff positions since joining the port in May 1999 as the director of engineering and environmental services and then its managing director.

In his role as executive director, he is responsible for the port’s day-to-day management of the port. Hardman, along with the port commission and other port stakeholders, have the responsibility to build on the port’s mission of supporting international and domestic commerce and facilitating economic development.

In recent years, the port has made significant improvements to its marine assets to meet the growing demands of transportation and trade in local industry. Hardman has been responsible for the design and implementation of more than \$100 million in infrastructure improvements to the port’s general cargo docks, road and rail. He has also been involved in enhancing port security measures and designing and developing new economic development projects such as the wood pellet plant, bulk sugar storage and distribution complex, container-on-barge facility, Maritime Security Operations Center and other improvements and rehabilitation projects at the port’s Inland Rivers Marine Terminal and other upgrades to the port’s public maritime infrastructure.

About the Ports Association of Louisiana

The Ports Association of Louisiana (PAL) is a nonprofit trade association that serves to promote the exchange of information between ports relative to new techniques or technologies on development, organization, administration and management; to facilitate the formulation of common positions, policies or plans on questions of common interest and to present such positions at regional, state, national and international discussions; to initiate measures which represent the interests of Association members within intergovernmental and other organizations in order to improve conditions and efficiency of the state’s port system; to promote academic research and educational interest in the ports and marine sectors; and to foster and encourage economic development within the State of Louisiana. For more information, visit www.portsoflouisiana.org.

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