

FIRST IN HER FLEET, CAPTAIN LILLY GALLO TAKES COMMAND

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IN LATE 2018, THE CONTAINERSHIP, *PRESIDENT FD ROOSEVELT*, SAILED ACROSS THE PACIFIC OCEAN. AT HER HELM, STOOD THE FIRST FEMALE CAPTAIN OF ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MARITIME COMPANIES IN THE WORLD.

The containership, *President FD Roosevelt*, is known for its hardworking crew on a route that sails from the US West Coast to ports in China, South Korea, and Japan. She is 1000 feet long and 75,752 gross tons, capable of sailing at 25 knots and carrying 7,500 twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) containers.

The *President FD Roosevelt* was built in 2010 and is owned by [APL](#), a company with a dynamic maritime history that goes back to the 1840's. Today, APL operates a fleet that includes 9 U.S. Flag container vessels. The company is part of the CMA CGM Group, a leading worldwide



shipping group.

On board the *President FD Roosevelt* during a voyage west across the Pacific Ocean last Autumn, a rubber chicken was securely tied to a railing in a passageway. The chicken was last seen in the galley, and a couple days later while in port, the plan was to safely secure it near the gangway, waiting to surprise the next person who stepped on board.

Just like at the last port, visitors would be seen squeezing the rubber chicken and laughing. The chicken represented some of the fun brought on by the vessel's diverse crew.

The owner of the rubber chicken is one of the latest captains to take the helm of the *President FD Roosevelt*, Captain Lilly Gallo. In her early 30's, she achieved the remarkable accomplishment of becoming a captain in the US Merchant Marine. Most notably, she is the first female master at APL.

Captain Gallo grew up on the shores of Long Island Sound in awe of ships that transited the waters of New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. At that time, she dreamed of working on research vessels and thought she might pursue a career in meteorology.

In 2005, Gallo entered the gates of the State of New York Maritime College, known as [SUNY Maritime](#) to pursue a degree in marine sciences. Yet, her career goals changed after completing her cadet sailing periods, which included sea time with [NOAA](#); SUNY Maritime's training vessel, *Empire State VI*; and a roll-on roll-off containership that has since been decommissioned, called the *El Morro*. After acquiring a year of sea time, Deck Cadet Gallo was hooked on a career of deep-sea shipping.

In 2009, Gallo graduated with a bachelor's degree in marine environmental science and a USCG unlimited tonnage 3rd mate license. Over the past 10 years, she worked on containerships for APL through the maritime union, [International Organization of Master, Mates, and Pilots \(MM&P\)](#).

Gallo recognizes that her job is unique and is often reminded of this when people are surprised to hear what she does for a living. In an industry that is approximately 98% male, most are astonished to hear that she is a captain.



Proudly, Gallo shares that she has been motivated to pursue a career in the US Merchant Marine by the never-ending learning experience that going to sea offers. She states, “Every day provides different challenges that make the job engaging. I like working with a new crew. I learn something new every day.”

While a career at sea is exciting, Captain Gallo recognizes there are many challenges, more so now that she is captain. Being gone for months at a time with limited communication capabilities can feel tremendously isolating. A schedule that involves transiting multiple ports in a week can be extremely stressful. Now as the master of a containership, she is up at all hours during port calls, tending to agents and vendors, while managing a crew.

Looking back over her career so far, Captain Gallo credits her mentor, Captain Steve Werse, who is an experienced captain of the US Merchant Marine and now the Treasurer-Secretary of MM&P. Gallo says that he pushed her along the way to achieve her career goals, encouraging and guiding her to make it to the top.

Gallo also offers a piece of advice for mariners emerging into the industry; document your experiences. “I honestly regret not keeping a journal. I would have a whole volume of books if I did,” she says.

Gallo’s sea stories are endless, filled with colorful sunsets, an abundance of marine life, severe storms, and energetic crew members. Her stories go back to her cadet shipping days on the *Empire State VI*, when on one afternoon Gallo was working on the bridge of the training vessel. Deck Cadet Gallo casually sat in the captain’s chair. In that moment, she stated she would be a captain one day.

Last Fall and less than ten years after graduating from SUNY Maritime, Gallo was promoted to captain a voyage of the *President FD Roosevelt* across the Pacific Ocean. Captain Gallo transited the ocean, standing tall on the bridge of a containership belonging to one of the most successful maritime companies of all time.