

2017 AAPA Communications Award Program
Entry Classification: Community/Educational Outreach
Title: Public Lecture Series

Summary – Public Lecture Series

The Port of Vancouver USA offers 10 free, public tours each year. Staff running the tours always get a lot of questions about what we do and how we do it, and because of the size of the group and time constraints, staff can't go into detail and really have a conversation about these questions. So, we launched a public lecture series in 2017 to help deepen the public's understanding of the port industry and provide more



opportunities to educate our community. Over a total of four free, public lectures, Port of Vancouver staff as well as partners from labor, non-profit, rail and other ports can explore topics and showcase the talented and knowledgeable staff in our industry.

Feb. 13, 2017

The Mighty Columbia – Our Working River

A look at how commodities move on the river. Featured a Columbia River pilot and the Executive Director of Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA).

Feb. 23, 2017

Railroading 101

A look at Class I,II and III railroads, railroading jobs, railroad cars, equipment, and the port's rail system. Featured the port's Director of Operations and Rail Manager.

April 27, 2017

1 Great Region. 3 Great Ports

Features the CEOs of all three Clark County ports: Port of Vancouver, Port of Ridgefield and Port of Camas/Washougal. A look at how the ports are unique and how they work cooperatively to market our region.

May 2, 2017

Marine Operations 101 – Meet ILWU Local #4

Members of International Longshore Workers Union Local #4 discuss how they move commodities at the port and the interesting equipment they operate.

1. Communication Challenges or Opportunities

Challenges:

- The port conducts regular public tours as part of its public outreach program. During the tours, the Community Relations Specialist – as tour guide – will cover many topics in broad brush terms, but there is not adequate time to go in depth on any one subject.
- The port is involved in an initiative to bring an oil terminal to its facilities in Vancouver. Terminal opponents have claimed the port has not been transparent in its deliberations and decision making.
- The port employs many talented experts in logistics, rail infrastructure, marine movement of cargo, real estate, engineering and finance, but many of these individuals are invisible to the public. The port also partners with many organizations in the maritime industry – as well as our Longshore workers – whose important work is often not known to the public.

Opportunities:

- The lecture series offered an opportunity to focus on aspects of the port's business in more depth.
- The lectures allow the port to discuss subjects openly and thoroughly, helping dispel the myth that operations are secretive or that the port doesn't want to talk about how it conducts business.
- The lectures offer an opportunity to let the public hear from and meet experts they would not necessarily encounter in their daily lives. This puts faces to actions, and real human beings behind the port's operations and partnerships.
- The port is redeveloping 10 acres of waterfront property that includes a non-operational hotel and restaurant. Known as Terminal 1, the site is the birthplace of the port, and we are scheduling events and activities at the site so it remains active and busy. The lectures are held in the former hotel Grand Ballroom and help attract evening crowds to the space. These attendees help encourage activity at the site, keep "eyes on" Terminal 1 and help the port deter graffiti and vandalism.
- The lecture series offered an opportunity to reach out to our Longshore workforce to help them tell the unique story of their work and why it matters to our community. Since they typically work in secure areas of the port, it is difficult for them to showcase the important work they do each day.

2. Complement to Overall Mission

The Port of Vancouver's mission is to provide economic benefit to our community through leadership, stewardship and partnership in marine, industrial and waterfront development. The lecture series itself has never been tried before, and helps position the port as a **leader** and innovator in sharing information about how it does business. The lectures allow us to convene subject matter experts to discuss the importance of the Columbia River to local and regional commerce, and showcase our in-house experts, too.

Partnerships are also part of our mission. Inviting the other two ports to participate in the lectures showcases how we work cooperatively to create jobs and economic development on a regional scale. Our cooperative work includes marketing Southwest Washington together, which in turn stretches port dollars farther and provides good **stewardship** of public funds.



3 Ports lecture, featuring leadership and commissioners from the ports of Vancouver, Ridgefield and Camas-Washougal

3. Planning and Programming Components

Our goals and objectives for the lecture series were:

- Create an opportunity for the port to expand on topics of interest to the public that cannot be fully covered on port tours
- Demonstrate that the port is open and transparent in discussing how it does business
- Showcase port staff as experts in their fields to demonstrate expertise to the public and build pride for port staff
- Invite port partners to present
- Keep Terminal 1 active
- Hold one lecture with ILWU Local #4 to build positive relationships with Longshore representatives

Audiences

The **primary** audience for the lectures is the Vancouver public at large, especially those residing in the port district.

Secondary audiences included:

- The other presenters, including the PNWA, Columbia River Pilots, CEOs of the ports of Ridgefield and Camas-Washougal.
- Port staff, since we were building pride in showcasing the expertise of our own employees
- ILWU Local #4 workers who wanted an opportunity to tell the public about the work they do each day

Our main measurement of success was how many members of the public attended each lecture. Normally we book 40 people per port tour so we hoped for that same number at each lecture.

4. Actions Taken and Communication Outputs

Our communication outputs were primarily aimed at citizens, especially port district residents. We also made sure we informed our staff and commissioners about the lectures. There was no advertising budget for the lectures. We used these tools to get the word out and solicit RSVPs:

- Electronic invitation to various list-serves maintained by the port
- News release to local and regional media
- Information was sent to the Daily Insider, an electronic newsletter popular with Vancouver citizens that lists local events and is updated and distributed daily
- Information was also sent to the Weekly Update, an electronic newsletter sent weekly through the city's Office of Neighborhood Involvement

Staffing

Staffing needs at the lectures were minimal and were covered by External Affairs staff and a few port staff volunteers. Each lecture cost about \$500 in audio/visual needs, cookies and coffee.

Since there was about a one-month break between the first two and last two lectures, the steps below were taken for lectures 1 and 2 and then were repeated for lectures 3 and 4.

Actions/Tactics/Timeline

Eight weeks out:

- Contact was made with the outside speakers to book dates that would work with their calendars.
- Contact was made with the catering and events manager at the Red Lion to schedule the grand ballroom for the lectures. An initial catering order was placed.

Six weeks out:

- External Affairs staff worked with the port's Rail Manager and Longshore workers to help build these PowerPoint shows. Some new rail photos were taken so that those used for the Railroads 101 presentation were current and interesting. A PowerPoint template was developed to assist the Longshore and port photos were shared to supplement their own members' photos.

Four weeks out:

- Electronic invitation was sent to targeted list-serves maintained by the port
- Check ins completed with all speaker to see that their presentations were on track for completion
- Met with catering and events manager at the Red Lion to go over room set up
- Email sent to port staff asking for a few volunteers to help at each lecture
- Email sent to port security letting them know of the evening activity planned at the Red Lion
- Worked with Commission secretary to get the lectures on the calendars of all port commissioners

Two weeks out:

- Rolled out social media campaign and promoted lectures on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn
- Information sent to the Daily Insider and Weekly Update (see question 3)

One week out:

- Media release issued
- Finalized catering order with Red Lion manager
- Final check in with all presenters
- Arranged door-prize items to give out including port hats, mugs and books
- Checked in with port volunteers to explain their assignments

5. Outcomes and Evaluation Methods

We were extremely pleased with the results from our lecture series, including:

- **Number of attendees**

We set an initial goal of 40 participants at each lecture. A total of 57 people attended the Mighty Columbia lecture, 72 attended the Railroading 101 talk and 45 attended the Three Ports lecture. (As of this submission, the May 2 lecture has not yet taken place.) Attendance numbers exceeded our expectations for a first-time event.

Attendee Sean Philbrook emailed this comment about the Columbia River lecture:

"Thank you for an outstanding lecture Monday evening at Terminal 1. The depth and breadth of knowledge brought to light by Kristin Meira and Captain Amos simultaneously engaged and enthralled the crowd. I greatly anticipate the next lecture and wish to thank you again for coordinating this series."

And attendee Bob Adams sent this email after the same lecture:

"Thank you for pulling this together. This was such an entertaining and informative presentation. Please extend our thanks to both of your speakers."

Ron Schmidtplan via Facebook: "Superb presentations by Kristin and Paul, thank you. And great to see Port Commissioner Eric LaBrant, always a positive and proactive representative."

- **Participation by port partners**

The organizations we contacted to present at the lectures were very pleased to be asked and found the outreach very beneficial. PNWA is working to reach citizens about the importance of maintaining locks and jetties on the Columbia River, and the river pilots want to get the word out about jobs available in their industry. The CEO's of our partner ports in Clark County were appreciative of the opportunity to talk about their important work and initiatives. And the Longshore workers had never had an opportunity like this to reach out to the Vancouver general public to share slides and video about how they perform their jobs.

Kristin Meira, Executive Director of PNWA sent this email following her lecture:

"Thanks again for including me in the lecture series event last night. It was great to see so many interested residents turn out from Clark County. I hope I added to their general knowledge about the river and its importance to local employment and trade."

And Columbia River pilot Capt. Paul Amos sent this email:

"I thought it was a very nice evening and I very much enjoyed being able to speak to the public and I am encouraged by their interest. I want to applaud the Port of Vancouver for creating and hosting a lecture series. You did a very nice job putting it together and the venue was perfect."

- **Showcase port experts**

Two of the lectures allowed us to showcase our own experts. At the Railroading 101 talk we featured our Director of Operations and our Rail Manager - staff members that the public does not get to interact with frequently. At the 3 Ports talk we featured our CEO and Chief External Affairs Officer.

- **Demonstrate port transparency**

The port has never held a lecture series before. It offered a new way to share what goes on at the port in a very public way. The railroading lecture allowed us to demystify the process of how commodities move in and out of the port. We also featured our CEO at the 3 Ports talk so attendees could ask her questions directly.

- **Activation of the Red Lion site**

The lectures allowed us to activate the empty hotel site in the evenings to keep "eyes on the property," which helped our security personnel.



Port of Vancouver's Rail Manager, Wayne Harner, speaks at the Railroading 101 public lecture

There is no doubt that those attending the lectures came away with better knowledge of our industry and the critical role ports play in our region and communities.

Social Media Outcomes

- **Twitter:** We tweeted several times in the weeks leading up to the events and during the events themselves. All tweets around these events received 3,289 impressions and 65 engagements, giving them an engagement rate of 1.97 percent. Photos and video from the events performed exceptionally well compared to text-only tweets.
- **Facebook:** Sharing these events on Facebook worked very well for our audience. Across all events and posts, we received 1,711 impressions and 202 engagements, giving us an incredible engagement rate of 11.8 percent.
- **MailChimp E-mail Invitation:** We used our MailChimp lists to let the community members whom subscribed to our newsletters know about the lecture series events. Our MailChimp invites performed better than the rest of our platforms and exceeded our expectations. 4,088 community members received MailChimp invitations to the lecture series and 952 of them engaged with the digital content, giving us an engagement rate of 23.3 percent.