



South Ferry Company File Photo

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Actionable Intel Ensures Smooth Sailing
for South Ferry

“With Wheelhouse, we don’t miss the routine or non-routine activities that might keep a ferry service from running optimally. That translates to safe and streamlined operations for everyone and better service for our customers.”

Cliff Clark, President, South Ferry Company



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Challenge: New Fleet Focused

The family-owned and operated South Ferry Company on Shelter Island in New York has shuttled people and vehicles between Long Island’s Shelter Island and North Haven since the 1700s. For Cliff Clark, it’s a family institution that he’s been involved with since 1976. He took over as President in 1999 when his father, Bill Clark, passed away. Since the 1970s, the operation has expanded considerably, increasing annual carry loads from 150,000 vehicles and 350,000 passengers to more than 700,000 vehicles and 1.2 million people. As well, the staff has increased from 15 to 48 full time employees.

In that time, the company has also modernized the ferry service with four larger

capacity, more modern boats, upgraded infrastructure including new and raised bulkheads, docks, terminals, and office building, as well as computer-enabled management capabilities.

“Surprising to some, we’re one of the highest movers of people and vehicles in the country. With each of our four boats making 3 to 4 roundtrips, we can move 360 cars per hour during peak seasons,” says Cliff. “In the late 90s, we began replacing 65-foot vessels with state-of-the-art 101-footers.”

Today, the South Ferry fleet numbers five boats including the new Southern Cross (christened in 2020), the Sunrise (built 2002), the Southside (built 2009), the Lt. Joseph Theinert (formerly Southern Cross

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– named in memory of the Shelter Island native and former South Ferry deckhand who was killed while serving in Afghanistan), as well as the smaller Captain Bill Clark.

As the new fleet was put in service, Cliff, brother and Vice President Bill Clark, and the company’s maintenance and engineering team recognized that its operations management tools were dated and paper-based. He says, “Bill, a retired Coast Guard captain, was a big proponent of technology to help automate and track maintenance activities in particular. With that in mind, we started looking at available solutions.”

Now retired Chief Engineer Captain Phil Dunne, working with help from Bill Clark and current Chief Engineer Joe Clark (no relation), evaluated available systems with an eye on real-time visibility and inspection alerts.”

Solution: Beyond the Boat

In 2011, South Ferry selected the Wheelhouse computerized maintenance management system from Wheelhouse Technologies, Inc. Wheelhouse is a software as a service (SaaS) application that computerizes common vessel activities including maintenance tracking, logs, and work orders, while also offering automated reporting tools such as maintenance history and runtimes.



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The Wheelhouse team, working closely with retired chief engineer Phil Dunne, gathered all the information about the vessels as well as the infrastructure. This included dock systems, vehicles, equipment and storage areas, while paying particular attention to user manuals, drawings and documentation, maintenance schedules, and spare parts. Safety equipment on board and shore side, such as life rafts, AEDs, fire extinguishers, and associated inspection and maintenance details were also included in the system.

Cliff recalls, "Populating the data within the system is one of the best things about working with the Wheelhouse team. They do it all. We added a new ferry boat in 2020 and everything about it was in the system before the first sailing. Wheelhouse is very responsive and have been like a member of our team since implementation."

Benefits: Raising Awareness

For Chief Engineer and Captain Joe, instant accessibility to maintenance has

greatly improved the overall operation of the organization. "Every system, on the boats and onshore, is on our maintenance tracking program. We even track the material quantities such as salt in our storage areas. Since we know ahead of time what maintenance activities need to be completed, we can also ensure that we have all the necessary tools, parts and materials, to complete the work required," he confirms.

Over the last decade, the maintenance system has helped ensure safety and efficient operations across the organization many times. Joe recalls a recent ramp repair as an example. "We have several ramps on our docks. All of the parts on these ramps, such as the hydraulic cylinders, undergo regular maintenance to ensure smooth and safe operation, and of course, we use the Wheelhouse system to alert us when it's time for inspection," he says. "During the most recent inspection, we found that one of the cylinders was starting to leak and were able to fix it before it became an incident."

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South Ferry also uses Wheelhouse to maintain certifications and renewals for their personnel.

Cliff concludes, "With Wheelhouse, we don't miss the routine or non-routine activities that might keep a ferry service from running optimally. That translates to safe and streamlined operations for everyone and better service for our customers. And, Craig Parkhurst is always available and responds personally when we have questions."



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