



# The Gazette

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## ON A SLOW BARGE UP THE NORTH SHORE



COLIN O'CONNOR, THE GAZETTE

Crane operator Alberic Gauthier surveys the horizon on the Betsiamite barge that carries wood chips on the St. Lawrence from Forestville to Trois Rivières.

## New life for the St. Lawrence

**SHORT-SEA SHIPPING** Pilot projects are reviving maritime transportation and our fabled waterway

MARK CARDWELL  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

**QUEBEC** — The soft glow of first light slowly filled the eastern sky when Ocean Echo 2 steamed past the darkened ramparts of this historic city.

Fastened to the stern of a barge the size of a football field by two huge hydraulic bolts, the small tug plowed through the ink-black waters of the St. Lawrence River, pushing the 117-metre-long vessel slowly upstream at a

speed of six knots, or approximately 11 kilometres an hour.

The entire barge was buried under a mountain of freshly-cut wood chips that, in some spots, almost reached the top of a 10-metre-high containment fence. Produced just days earlier by two Kruger-owned sawmills on Quebec's rugged North Shore, the sweet-smelling, pale yellow chips were en route to the pulp and paper giant's plants in Trois Rivières to be transformed into newsprint and other pa-

per products.

"We're carrying a normal load, 8,800 tonnes," said the tug's interim captain, Germain Lavoie, over coffee in the tug's cramped kitchen. "That's the equivalent of 300 truckloads."

A pilot project that began in May, when Kruger announced it would ship 400,000 tonnes of chips this year by water, the weekly barge is one of several maritime shipping projects that are helping to relieve congestion on Quebec roads and breathe new life into one of Canada's oldest and most important transportation routes.

In April, Alouette announced that it, too, would use a barge to move 250,000

tonnes of aluminum ingots from its massive refinery in Sept Îles to its main warehouse, also in Trois Rivières.

Together, the two projects are expected to eliminate as many as 40,000 trips by transport trucks on the 138, one of Quebec's busiest and most dangerous highways.

"These are excellent short-sea shipping initiatives," said Nicole Trépanier, executive director of the St. Lawrence Ship operators, which represents the 17 biggest domestic maritime shipping companies in Quebec.

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## Tense calm on Afghan streets

**Elections today**  
Taliban hard-liners threaten violence

BY NABILA  
CANADIAN PRESS SERVICE

**Kandahar, Afghanistan** — The streets of Kandahar were unusually quiet this weekend, with all private cars and commercial vehicles banned from the streets until polls close at 4 p.m. today.

Adding to the quiet was the closure of the city's shopping centres. By order of the Afghan government, the major outdoor markets are being taken to Kabul to counter the risk of car bombs and suicide bombers disrupting the country's first parliamentary elections in 30 years.

And another — and to some more intense — reason for the quiet is the American-backed elections and government. A coalition of Afghanis are expected to choose from 1,000 candidates in what is widely seen as the next stage of the country's move to greater democracy from war and repression.

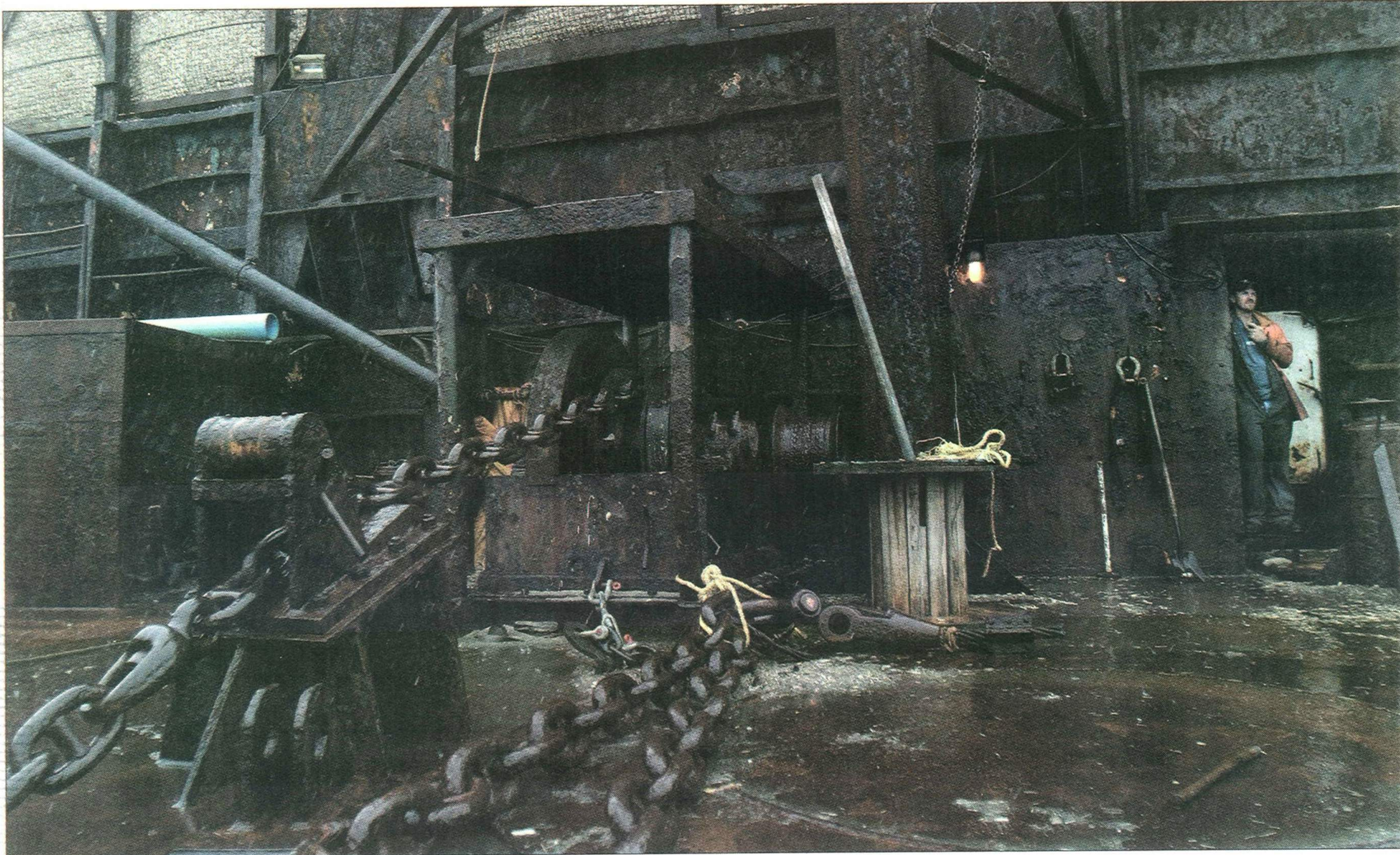
From warlords and drug lords to professors and poets, the candidates have a wide range of agendas, cultures and talents reflecting the country's recent troubles — but also its traditions.

For example, the new parliament is expected to include a strong contingent of former mujahideen commanders, some of whom are suspected of human rights abuses during the decade of war. According to Ahmed Nader Shahidi, deputy head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, some of the more notorious figures among them may be receiving immunity from prosecution over in particular.

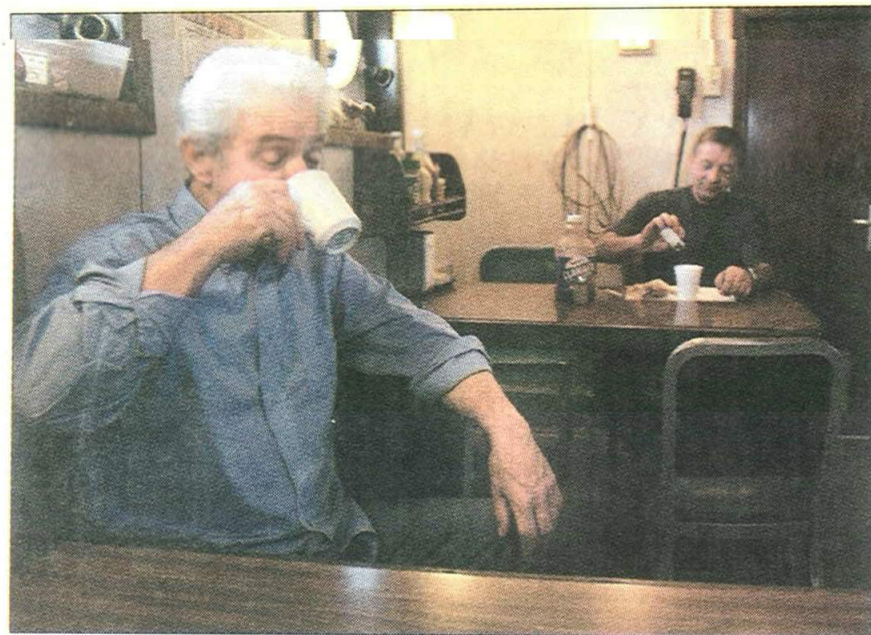
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# SHORT-SEA SHIPPING



Pumpman Christian Larouche is in charge of operating the engine at the front of the barge to steer it into port when it arrives at pulp and paper giant Kruger's plant in Trois Rivières.



Breakfast on-board: Lavoie (foreground) and crane operator Alberic Gauthier.

## 'On the river since he was a kid'

Captain recalls cutting and hauling the trees used to build his family's boat at a local shipyard

QUEBEC - The icy waters of the St. Lawrence River run through Germain Lavoie's veins.

Born, bred and raised in La Petite Rivière St. François, an old coastal village that is now home to Le Massif ski centre, he remembers following his father deep into the forests of Charlevoix in winter, on snowshoes, to pick, cut and haul the trees needed to build his family's *golette* at a local shipyard.

"We weren't the only ones," Lavoie, a leather-faced mariner who retired just a

"We were simply replaced by trucks and bigger steel ships."

few weeks ago after spending the past 50 years at sea, mostly in the estuary and gulf of the St. Lawrence. "Every village on the river had a shipyard back then and a lot of families owned and operated their own *golette*."

A class of shallow-draft, wooden schooner used mostly by French-Canadian sailors to haul lumber, charcoal, fish, general cargo throughout the St. Lawrence, *golettes* were a big part of everyday life on the river for two centuries.

By the 1950s, however, the construc-

tion of roads on the north and south shores, together with the advent of big shipping companies like Canada Steamship Lines, sounded the death knell for the *golette*.

"We were simply replaced by trucks and bigger steel ships," said the 66-year-old Lavoie, who was a deckhand on his family's ship until age 21, when his father died and he became the owner. He sold the vessel three years later, he said, "because it was no longer profitable."

Like many of his friends and colleagues, Lavoie went to work for one of the many pulp and paper companies that built and used their own ships on the St. Lawrence.

He had worked his way up to first mate on the Echo 2 when paper-products company Daishowa sold the tug and two barges in 1992 to Groupe Océan, a Quebec City-based shipping company. However, he was immediately hired by the vessel's new owners and made captain.

"You can't buy experience like that," said Gordon Banks, founder and owner of Groupe Océan, which owns approximately 150 tugs, barges and workboats and employs 400 people. "Germain's been on the river since he was a kid. He knows it like the back of his hand: the currents, the tides—everything."

"They don't make sailors like that anymore."

MARK CARDWELL

## Cargo | Back to

Millions of tonnes of goods are moving by river — that means fewer trucks clogging highways

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"Hopefully, they'll help to convince others to follow suit."

Also known as cabotage, a centuries-old French term for the transportation of goods between ports within a country or region, short-sea shipping accounts for about a quarter of the roughly 110 million tonnes of cargo that are handled by Quebec's 20 commercial ports every year.

Made up of mostly primary natural resources like wood, pulp, paper, grains and minerals, this domestic cargo is ferried throughout the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes waterway by Canada's merchant fleet, which consists of dry bulk carriers, tankers, general cargo vessels, ferries, tugs, barges and container ships.

International trade — from iron ore and wheat, Canada's two biggest export commodities, to imports like oil, bauxite and chemicals — represents the other 75 per cent of commercial traffic in Quebec ports. While passenger transportation (ferries and cruise ships), tourism, fishing and recreational boating are important economic maritime activities for the province, the transportation of freight

is by far the biggest. It generates an estimated \$4 billion in revenues for port-related companies, providing 27,000 direct and indirect jobs and more than \$1 billion in salaries in communities all along the St. Lawrence.

The main gateway into Canada and the North American interior since colonial times and the entrance to the St. Lawrence Seaway and a 3,700-kilometre-long system of navigable waterways that goes as far west as Minnesota, the river's popularity as a conduit for people and products has nonetheless declined over the past 20 years.

The main reason has been the phenomenal rise of trucking.

"Shipping by truck is faster, cheaper and more flexible than ship or rail," said Marc Cadieux, president of the Quebec Trucking Association, whose 700 members own roughly half of the 115,000 heavy trucks in Quebec, a 30-per-cent increase from the 80,000 that were on the road in 1980. "Companies simply don't want to have big piles of inventory sitting around anymore."

Another advantage trucking has over shipping is logistics. Many more people are involved in shipping, from crews, river pilots, wharf administrators and stevedores to Coast Guard

and Transport Canada officials who verify everything from ship fuel, lifeboats and fire services to ballast and sewage. Also, short-sea shipping isn't suitable for the transport of small quantities of goods or for perishable items like milk. "The trick is to generate volume and to have goods that aren't being sent far and aren't urgently needed," said Trépanier.

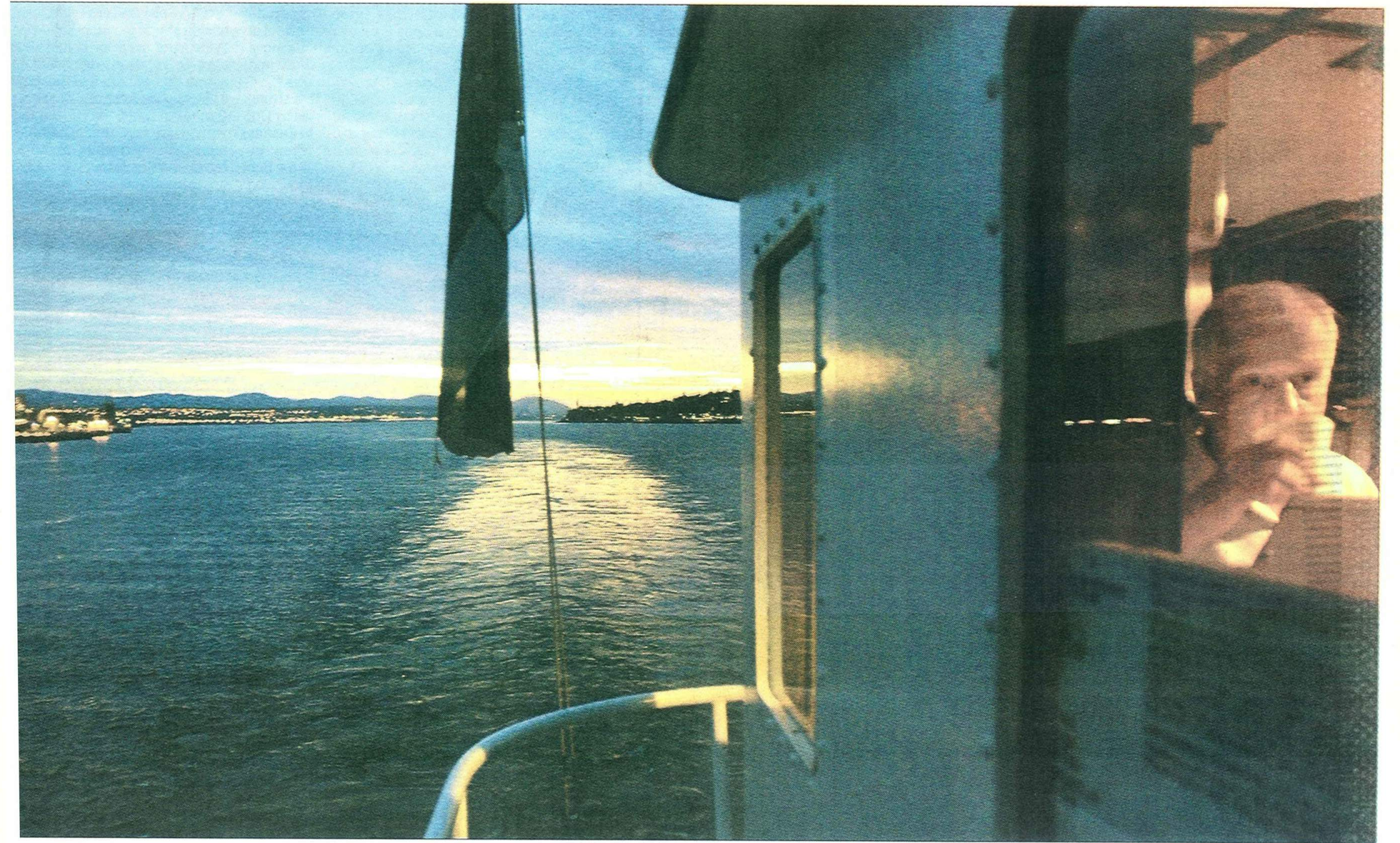
Trucks, however, aren't the only challenge to shipping along the St. Lawrence. Railways, ocean ports and alternative shipping routes like the Mississippi River are also fighting to maintain or increase their share of the freight-transport pie. And then there's the challenge of winter, which shuts down the St. Lawrence Seaway for two months of the year.

Another difficult challenge stems from the federal government's decision a decade ago to slash marine funding, charge user fees for traditional services like the dragging of the main navigation channel in the St. Lawrence, and to share responsibility and control of 300 ports across Canada (including 40 in Quebec) with municipalities, provincial governments and private stakeholders who have sapped the competitive ability of shippers across Canada.



Headed to the Kruger plant: Sailor Janot Doyl Matelot guides the Ocean Echo 2 and its barge full of wood chips.

PHOTOS BY COLIN O'CONNOR THE GAZETTE



ly in the morning, Ocean Echo 2 pilot Pierre Frenette has a cup of coffee as he guides the tug and its barge full of wood chips up the St. Lawrence River from Forestville.

## Highway H<sub>2</sub>O

"Let's just say the management changes and added costs have not been helpful," said Trépanier. "And marine infrastructure is very expensive to maintain and a lot of it is getting old. Governments have to be involved in a big way for our industry to function properly. It's a question of investment and political commitment."

The Quebec government responded in 2001 when it passed the province's first maritime transportation policy. Among other things, it promised to work with the federal government and other marine stakeholders and provide support and funding for shipping projects designed to increase both cabotage and international freight traffic along the St. Lawrence.

In addition to participating in regular marine forums, the Quebec government last year invested \$2.5 million in shipping-related projects. "That's not a lot when you consider that we spent \$1.4 billion on roads last year," said André Meloche, director of the Quebec Transport Department's maritime, air and rail transportation planning office. "But Quebec is 100-per-cent responsible for roads, while the waterways and ports are a shared concern. And the money we spent on shipping helped to generate \$10-\$12 million in total investment."

Roughly a quarter of that money went into improving the small quay in Forestville to support Kruger's plan to begin shipping chips by barge, a trans-

portation method that was widely used throughout the pulp and paper industry until the 1970s.

According to the vice-president in charge of the multinational's paper-making division, the company had considered several different shipping scenarios in recent years. "When you ship by truck it represents about 30 per cent of the cost of primary-resource exploitation," Daniel Archambault said earlier this summer, before

"A single barge equals hundreds of trucks, so the risk of road accidents is much, much higher."

the recent jump in gas prices. "In the end, we figured we'd pay a lot less by barge."

In addition to reducing highway traffic, transport officials estimate Kruger's shift from trucks to barges will cut 12,000 tonnes of greenhouse-gas emissions. "Trucks are far less efficient at burning fuel than ships," said Émilien Pelletier, a professor at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canada Research Chair in Molecular Ecotoxicology and one of this country's leading experts on pollution in coastal areas.

Recent advances in electronic navigation, he added, have also made ships

the safest method of freight transportation. "It's false to say that shipping raises the risks of accidents," said Pelletier. "A single barge equals hundreds of trucks, so the risk of road accidents is much, much higher."

To be sure, accidents on the normally placid waters of the St. Lawrence are rare. According to Pelletier, the last major one occurred in 1988, when a supertanker lost 500 tonnes of crude oil while trying to hook up to the refinery in St. Romuald. "Compared to other spills, even that was minor," he said.

By comparison, accidents involving heavy trucks accounted for 20 per cent of the 647 people killed on Quebec roads in 2004 and seven per cent of the accidents that left 57,000 injured.

In addition to safety and environmental concerns, recent reductions in lock fees and collective marketing efforts like "Highway H<sub>2</sub>O," a highly-successful 2004 public-awareness campaign that has become a brand name for the 20 major ports in the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes system, are helping put the wind back into the sails of short-sea shipping.

"We're seeing some positive results from our efforts," said Richard Corfe, president of the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation, noting the seaway had 5.3-per-cent tonnage increase in 2004, and he expects a similar increase this year. "We've won back some business and we're working every day to get more."

## Shipping gas could save millions: study

Building pipeline would cost more, says proponent of cabotage

MARK CARDWELL  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

QUEBEC - Nicole Trépanier concedes that milk will never be transported by ship in Quebec.

But she thinks that just about every other big-volume, non-perishable liquid product could — and should — be.

That's why she's upset by the Quebec government's support for a proposal by Ultramar to build a \$200-million underground pipeline from its refinery in Lévis to its Montreal east distribution terminal, a distance of 250 kilometres. "It just doesn't make sense," said Trépanier, executive director of the St. Lawrence Shippers' Association and chairperson of the Quebec Shortsea Shipping Roundtable, a committee of public and private bodies that was created a year ago to promote and support the development of cabotage on the St. Lawrence River.

"The refinery's right next to the river and most of its production goes to the Great Lakes region. Why build something new when other possibilities already exist?"

Instead of a pipeline, which has raised both environmental concerns and fears of expropriation, Trépanier

said she thinks Ultramar should consider a project similar to one now being looked at in Saguenay.

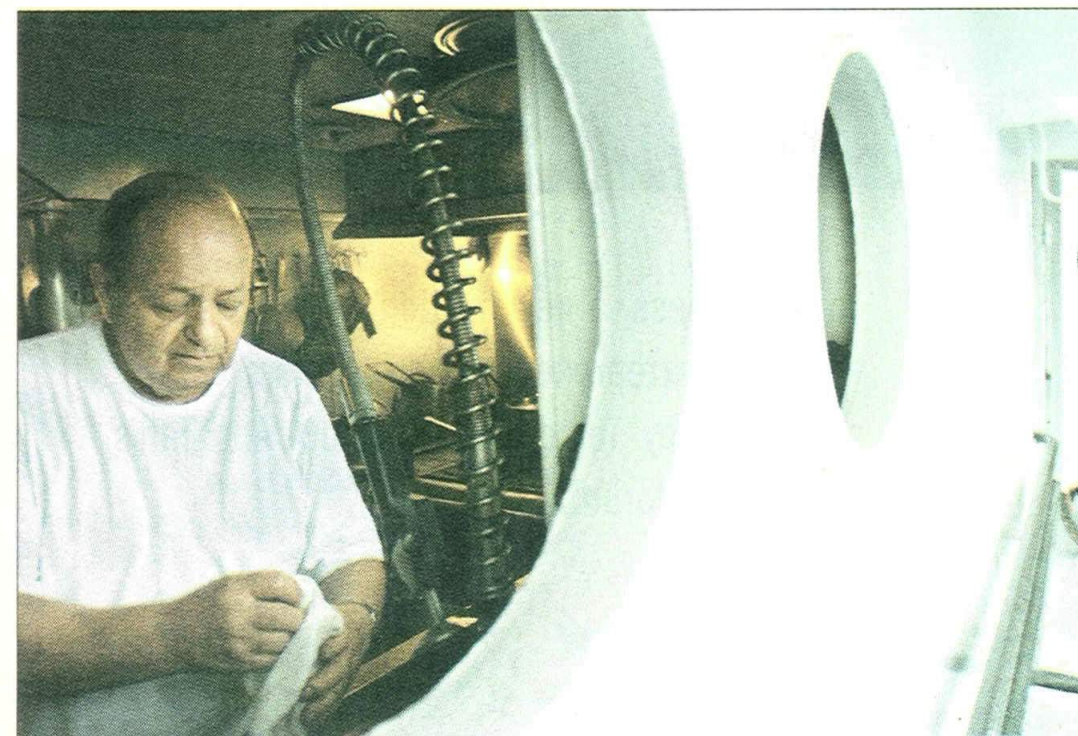
An initiative of TPQ Vraque Liquide, a consortium of Quebec City-based marine companies, the project proposes the construction of a sea terminal that would allow ship-borne gas and home-heating oil to once again be stored and distributed in the northern region.

Trucks took over from ships in 1992.

An impact study commissioned by Transport Quebec which, together with the federal government, granted TQO Vraque Liquide \$420,000 in February to help pay for a continuing environmental study, concluded that the transportation of fuel to Saguenay by ship would cost \$34.5 million less over 20 years. It also found that the gas carried by only 34 tankers a year would eliminate the need for the 11,000 round-trip voyages made by gas trucks, which provide fuel to some 300 service stations in the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean regions.

That would represent a seven-per-cent decrease in the total amount of heavy-truck traffic on Highways 169 and, in particular, 175, a notoriously dangerous north-south artery that passes through the heart of the Laurentides wildlife reserve.

"This is a very popular initiative here," said Pierre Paquin, general manager of Port Saguenay, where seven new gas storage tanks will be built if the project goes ahead. "People are concerned by road traffic and pollution."



Chief cook Raymond Paradis cleans up after breakfast on the tugboat.



The Ocean Echo 2 tug pushes the 117-metre barge from Forestville to Trois Rivières.