

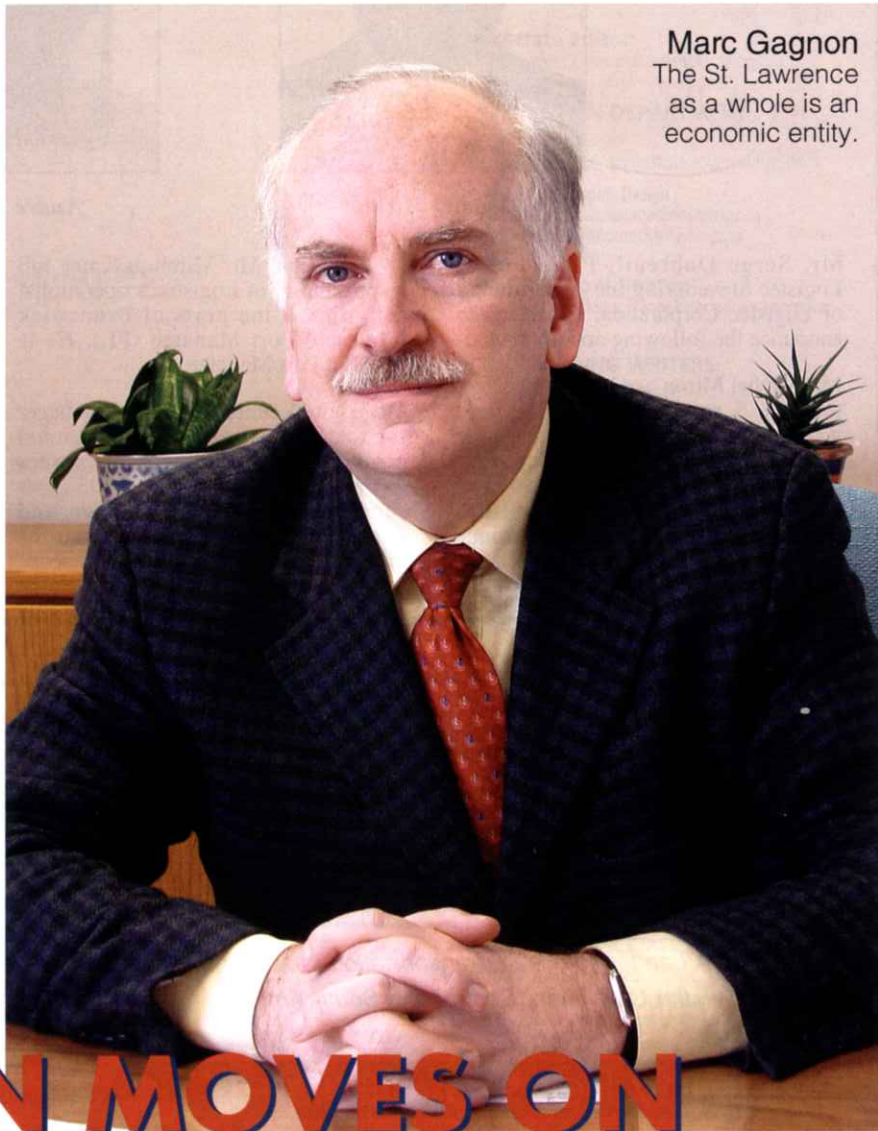
COVER Story

By MARK CARDWELL

When Marc Gagnon first took up his functions as executive director of the fledgling St. Lawrence Economic Development Council (SODES) in the spring of 1986, Quebec's maritime industry was in the throes of a decade-old decline that threatened the existence of many ports and companies, and even the stature of the river as one of the world's great trading waterways.

After more than 22 years at the helm of a non-profit group that works to protect and promote the economic interests of the St. Lawrence, Mr. Gagnon, who recently left SODES to join Fednav, said he is feeling both happy and proud about the role the association has played in the economic and social resurgence of the maritime industry along the historic river.

"I think SODES has been a place where people with common interests but different viewpoints can talk to each other about difficult issues in changing times," Mr. Gagnon told *Canadian Sailings*. "And more than anything else, I think SODES has helped people to recognize that the St. Lawrence as a whole is an economic entity and that we have to take care of it."



Marc Gagnon
The St. Lawrence as a whole is an economic entity.

GAGNON MOVES ON **after two decades at SODES helm**

**JOINS FEDNAV
AS DIRECTOR OF
GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS**

That was hardly the case in 1983, when Mr. Gagnon, a Quebec City native with a newly minted master's degree in geography, was hired as a researcher on contract with *Projet Saint-Laurent*, an initiative that the governing *Parti Québécois* hoped would provide it with ideas on how to enhance Quebec's interests – and visibility – along the river.

"There was an impression then – rightly or wrongly – that the Seaway

was bad for Quebec and only good for Ontario," Mr. Gagnon said. "The PQ wanted to change that."

By 1984, the project had morphed into a small secretariat with Mr. Gagnon as its administrative head and researcher. Part of his mandate was to represent the government on a committee made up of maritime community groups that met in November at Montreal's Ritz-Carlton hotel to organize a symposium

Masson appointed SODES president



Robert Masson has been appointed president of the St. Lawrence Economic Development Council (SODES).

Mr. Masson has worked in the maritime industry for the past 27 years. He started his career at the Trois-Rivières Port Authority where he rose to the position of president and CEO between 1999 and 2006. He then moved on to the Montreal Port Authority where he was vice-president of marketing and development.

During his career, Mr. Masson has been involved with numerous committees, boards of directors and working groups related to transportation. He was president of the Association of Canadian Port Authorities in 2002-03 and a director of SODES from 2001 to 2004.

celebrating the 20th anniversary of the opening of the St. Lawrence to Montreal during the winter months. The participants didn't know it then, but the luncheon meeting was essentially the first-ever board meeting of SODES.

Held at Le Concorde hotel in Quebec City in early February 1985, the three-day symposium featured such notable speakers as the captain of the first vessel to make the winter journey to Montreal in 1964 – a small Danish cargo ship, which belonged to Lauritzen Line. According to Mr. Gagnon, the event was such a success that the organizing committee decided to hold another one that summer in Sept-Îles – and despite suspicions about his PQ affiliations, they asked him to run it.

By then, however, the Quebec Liberals under Robert Bourassa were back in power – and one of their first acts was to announce an immediate end to contracts like Mr. Gagnon's. "I told the organizing committee I was now free and that, if they wanted me to (run the symposium), they'd have to pay me," he said. "Thankfully, they did."

With only a single employee and a shoestring budget, Mr. Gagnon said the early years of SODES focused on small- or no-cost initiatives and activities aimed at bringing together people from all walks of life in the marine community, from shipowners, terminal operators and academics to ports, pilots and the province.

That was a big change, he added, from the old-fashioned ways of doing business – and the old boys' club atmosphere – that had long prevailed on the waterfront in ports all along the St. Lawrence. "There were many more people in the community then (and) a lot of excess," Mr. Gagnon said. "Feuds between companies were pretty typical then, too, with everyone trying to develop his own business. And there were lots of cliques. Domestic and international shipowners, for example, didn't talk to each other."

In an effort to rise above those divisions, Mr. Gagnon said SODES has focused its efforts – and enjoyed its greatest successes – in the promotion of horizontal issues such as the environment, and corridors and gateways, which affect and resonate in all sectors of the marine community. "We try to be an overarching forum and a way of thinking about the St. Lawrence as a whole, and how we can work collectively to improve it," he said. "And I think we've been very successful in that regard."

In addition to the production of a regular newsletter, Mr. Gagnon said SODES, which now employs a half-dozen people and boasts a budget of \$400,000, has played a key role in the development of initiatives such as Quebec Marine Day. Currently, SODES is actively involved in three major files: the St. Lawrence trade gateway and corridor, Green Marine, and a Quebec awareness campaign,

which ends this year and is based on yearly surveys.

While the results of the latter haven't been tabulated yet, Mr. Gagnon said early feedback shows that more Quebecers better understand the importance of the marine industry to the province's economic life. "Marine transportation is a tool, a means," said Mr. Gagnon, who made his last appearance on behalf of SODES on June 26 when the St. Lawrence Great Lakes Trade Gateway Leadership Council, under the chairmanship of Madeleine Paquin of Logistec Corporation, submitted its recommendations to the federal and provincial governments. "We don't make anything, but we're important because the economy would collapse without us," he said.

This month, Mr. Gagnon begins a new job as director of government affairs and regulatory compliance for Fednav. Headquartered in Montreal, Fednav is mostly an international shipping company, which owns some two dozen vessels – making owner Laurence Pathy Canada's biggest shipowner – and charters three times that many.

Mr. Gagnon expects his new functions to be similar to those he had for so long with SODES, namely in the bringing together of several different departments within the company on horizontal issues such as the environment and compliance. "It will be a great challenge, one I'm really looking forward to," he said.