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Waterfront Alliance Celebrates Maritime Leadership at Heroes of the Harbor Gala
Honoring Diego Aponte, Lillian C. Borrone, Captain Zeita Merchant, Joseph Seebode
October 19, 2023 at the Hyatt Regency Jersey City

New York, NY - The Waterfront Alliance, a U.S. based nonprofit organization and cross-sector coalition of more than 1,100 Alliance Partners, is proud to announce four outstanding Heroes of the Harbor for 2023.

Heroes of the Harbor are recognized for their leadership and commitment to the vibrancy, sustainability, economy, education, and awareness of the New York-New Jersey harbor, its port, and the metropolitan area. The annual celebration takes place this year on October 19, 2023, from 6-9pm at the Hyatt Regency Jersey City.

2023 Heroes of the Harbor are:
- Diego Aponte, Group President, Mediterranean Shipping Company
- Lillian C. Borrone, Assistant Executive Director (Retired), The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
- Captain Zeita Merchant, Commander, Sector New York & Captain of the Port, United States Coast Guard
- Joseph Seebode, Deputy District Engineer and Chief of Programs and Project Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District

Waterfront Alliance celebrates the maritime industry and business, nonprofit, and corporate sectors, and supports youth and STEM education, and communities on the frontlines of climate change. See more about Waterfront Alliance’s impact here.

“The New York-New Jersey harbor is central to the economy of the region and all who depend on it. A green and blue infrastructure strategy, jobs strategy, and protections for the maritime and working waterfront industries are core to our future of the region. The Heroes of the Harbor celebration is an opportunity to support critical leadership while we bring resources and funding to youth, communities, schools, and volunteers on the frontlines of change,” says Cortney Koenig Worrall, president and CEO of Waterfront Alliance.

Join the Waterfront Alliance in celebrating a region surrounded by water and leadership that makes it possible at the Heroes of the Harbor gala on October 19, 2023, at 6pm at the Jersey City Hyatt Regency in Jersey City, New Jersey. For more information, visit the Waterfront Alliance website and learn more about its support for communities here.

Meet the Honorees:

Diego Aponte, Group President, Mediterranean Shipping Company


Waterfront Alliance honors the work of Diego Aponte, whose commitment to decarbonization, as the head of the Mediterranean Shipping Company, the world's largest shipping company, is an inspiring testament to the role industry can play in securing our future. By embracing green fuels and adopting green corridors, partnering with the Global Centre for Maritime Decarbonisation, contributing to trials of lower-emission fuels, rerouting shipping lanes to protect whales, creating carbon insetting biofuel deals with freight forwarders, and committing to reach net zero by 2050, Mr. Aponte’s vision and leadership serves as an example of good corporate citizenship to the maritime industry around the world.

Lillian C. Borrone, Assistant Executive Director (Retired), The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

The Waterfront Alliance is proud to honor Lillian Borrone as a 2023 Hero of the Harbor. Lillian was one of the first women in the world to lead a major port, and the reason behind successes that have brought the New York – New Jersey region lasting prosperity and environmental protections. Assuming the role of port director (1988-2000), she faced seismic changes in the port industry throughout her tenure, including dramatic growth and demand for containerized shipping, the emerging environmental movement, and the regional politics of the shipping industry. Ms. Borrone and the port department steadfastly navigated this difficult period, culminating in the historic 50-foot channel deepening project in 2016. Facing myriad obstacles, Ms. Borrone set forth a blueprint of the future of the harbor that is being fully realized today—just this past year the Port of New York and New Jersey handled more container volume than any other U.S. port. We honor the work of Lillian C. Borrone, whose vision and leadership created the modern Port of New York and New Jersey. Read her full WaterWire honoree interview here.

Captain Zeita Merchant, Commander, Sector New York & Captain of the Port, United States Coast Guard

We honor the work of Captain Zeita Merchant, who as Commander, Coast Guard Sector New York and Captain of the Port is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of one of the nation’s busiest and most economically important port complexes, including facilities and waterways spanning New York and New Jersey, moving hundreds of billions of dollars in cargo and tens of millions of passengers annually. Her efforts are an inspiring testament to her commitment to the next generation of maritime leadership, particularly among women and people of color. We are proud to celebrate a leader whose many honors and accomplishments include serving as a National Security Fellow at both Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, receiving the American Red Cross’s Women in Service Award, and being recognized as one of the Top Women in Transportation Who Move the Nation.

Joseph Seebode, Deputy District Engineer and Chief of Programs and Project Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District

The Waterfront Alliance is thrilled to recognize Joseph Seebode, the Deputy District Engineer and Chief of Programs and Project Management for the New York District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as a 2023 Hero of the Harbor. One of the region’s most dedicated and accomplished public servants, his achievements are so numerous and pervasive that they are sometimes easy to take for granted. Like the tide he is sometimes called upon to manage, Mr. Seebode is gently relentless. His unflagging focus on consensus-building has made once-intractable dilemmas yield to progress and offers a brighter future in which the New York – New Jersey region is safer, more sustainable, and more prosperous. Read his full WaterWire honoree interview here.

Heroes of the Harbor is generously sponsored by:

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