

Interview of Joseph Albano  
**Deputy Commissioner for Staten Island Ferries**

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**JOSEPH ALBANO**  
**Deputy Commissioner for Staten Island Ferries**  
**New York City Department of Transportation**

This interview took place on December 5, 2003. It was conducted by telephone by Barry Strauch and Morgan Turrell, with Brian Curtis observing.

Mr. Albano manages the entire operation of the Staten Island ferry, including operations, engineering, and the terminals. He began his current position in 2001, several months before 9/11. He manages the entire ferry operation. Pat Ryan (Director of Ferry Operations) reports to him, as well as Tony Mancini, (Director of Terminal Operations) and Angelo Bongiorno, (Director of Administration). He sees each of them every day and discusses ferry management issues.

He assumed his current position after Pat Ryan had had been demoted or released over allegations involving overtime improprieties. He had heard about it through the grapevine, but the matter was adjudicated by the time he assumed his position and as a result it was not an issue for him. He wanted the "best maritime people" for the job, and selected Pat for the job he is in now. Pat is extremely dedicated.

Pat Ryan is Director of operations and he is responsible for day-to-day operations and maintenance. He, Joseph Albano, learns about operational issues from him. In fact, any issue, he would hear from Pat. John Mauldin and Pat Ryan are exceptional people, each making sure that the ferry operation runs as well as it can be run.

He was aware that John Mauldin was Pat Ryan's brother in law, having learned about it in 2001. He does not see that their relationship affected operations. He felt that Capt. Mauldin was doing a good job, and that Pat Ryan is the best person for the job.

Pat will call him about issues such as vessels having a mechanical breakdown, medical emergencies, outside events such as police actions, these are the types of things that he learns about from Pat. He learns from unusual incidents as well from Pat. He tracks the unusual events by reading each report of an unusual event individually and they are recorded in a database, and his assistant makes copies for the Port Office, Pat Ryan and Tony Mancini.

He reports to the New York City Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner Robert Grotelle. He is in daily contact with him and would inform him of matters of importance. For example, if there is a medical emergency on the vessel, he would direct Pat Ryan to send a page out to the DOT senior officials, including the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Press Office, and if the incident was security related, to security personnel, then he would send information to his direct supervisor, Robert Grotelle,

The first thing that he has learned from Pat is that passengers and safety are the most important things to the management of the ferry operation.

At the time of the accident, he was arriving at the facility when he noticed that people were running to the pier. He asked security and they told him that the vessel had hit the pier. He saw the vessel, it was dead in the water, and people were trying to pull someone from the water. In the meantime he was called by Pat and John Maulden and they told him about the accident. He called his boss and informed him of the accident, then he went to the slip and waited for the vessel to be tied up at the pier.

The ferry transports people back and forth, they do it expeditiously and safely. Running at almost 96% on time rating is not easy with 40-year-old boats, but it's a testament to the dedication of his people that they accomplish this.

Since 9/11 the ferry has made many changes in security. For example, they now prohibit low-level boarding in St. George, and they are still vigilant. They are in the process of submitting a security plan. They have obtained federal grant money from TSA and MARAD and they are buying cameras, electronic locks, and improved lighting and barriers. To the ferry management, safety and security go hand and hand, but if there is a conflict between the needs of both, safety comes first over security. They try to match security to the level that they need, but if there is a conflict, safety wins out.

They have always looked at safety issues, such as when they needed a second port captain for supervision and they created and filled that position, they looked at the way vessels came in and examined that, they looked at the cleanliness of the vessels, they developed a dry docking schedule so that they could get better operational schedule of not having more than one boat in dry dock. They try to make sure that maintenance is on schedule. One of the problems they had before was that maintenance didn't talk to operations and there would be times that maintenance would pull vessels out for maintenance without talking to operations to see what impact it had on operations. In response, he put Pat Ryan in charge of both operations and maintenance to make sure that they don't have the conflicts that they had initially. Since then those types of conflicts have stopped and maintenance and operations work fine together.

The Commissioner before him was Jack Larsen. Jack Larsen was in San Diego when he, Joseph Albano, was appointed to his current position. He has not talked to Jack Larsen before or since he took over as Commissioner. Commissioner Larsen already had plans to go to San Diego after he, Albano, became Commissioner

He can't stop somebody who has been on the job from marrying a sister. There are a lot of father and son relationships in the maritime industry, so these relationships seem to have been inherent in the ferry operation as well. New York has each employee fill out a nepotism form so managers are aware of the relationships among employees. This requirements has gone on for several years.

He makes sure that nepotism doesn't affect job performance. Jobs are specialty positions, you look at the job and make sure that there is nothing that shows favoritism in who gets the job because of marriage. From his observation, he doesn't see where John Mauldin and Pat Ryan's working relationship was affected by their personal relationship. They

worked as subordinate/supervisor. He has not seen favoritism with regards to job promotions. He has not seen favoritism, and if he thought that there was a problem as a result of favoritism he would make changes. It happened once where somebody was working with his girlfriend and they moved the person.

If he saw a problem with John and Pat he would have talked to them. It is a good working operation, they work well. "From what I saw, a working operation, well run and efficiently—nothing more, nothing less." Anything that needed done, it got done. He has never seen a conflict because of favoritism. He picked Pat Ryan because, prior to his current job, at some point, maybe in the late 80s, when John was the Staten Island borough engineer, he had gotten to know Pat. He knew him as a passionate and dedicated employee, one who is extremely passionate about his job. He likes that and that is why he selected him. The job comes first to Pat. For example, during 9/11 he had to order John and Pat to go home. They had been working 3 days straight, and didn't even have it on the job cards to claim overtime because they felt that it was their obligation. They were both that dedicated.

He has not had much involvement with the GMATS review of the ferry operations, that was done through his boss. Within the next week he should be getting a report from GMATS.

Robert Grotelle is the deputy commissioner, he speaks to him about every day. He was assigned to Manhattan, but they communicate daily, via e-mail, phone, etc. He, Grotelle, also oversees private ferries, private busses, and pre-K bus service (about 60,000 students) and alternate fuels. They have a good relationship. He has a great deal of respect for him, he has been in their corner from day one. He, Grotelle, reports to the first deputy commissioner, Judy Birch. She in turn reports to the Commissioner, Iris Weinschall.

They normally complete an performance appraisal annually, but he does not recall doing one in the past few months.

Changes have been made in ferry operations since the accident. They have a quality assurance program that has port officers riding the boats daily, they have tie back ropes, people ride the wheelhouses to make sure that 3 people are in them. They have the pilot house announce to the crew "taking docking stations" and then radioing back that they are ready, they make public announcements, they put up signs that tells passengers where to stand and that point out lifejacket locations, they have supplied all their crewmembers with radios, they put GPS receivers on the vessels to help the masters know better where they are.

They have had conversations with other ferries, not so much on ferry operations, but on security. They attended a two-day seminar at Rutgers U recently, and Washington State ferries were there. There aren't that many ferry services that are as unique as theirs, Washington State is closest.

They have been running for 98 years and have a pretty safe record. To them they didn't see many operational issues because they have had such a good record. Ferries probably have a better safety record in the US than just about any mode of transportation.

The 96% on-time rate, based on number of trips taken per week (648), for a while they have been running at 98% on time, that is, arriving within five minutes of scheduled arrival time.

Has been with the city 34 years, he is the Assistant Commissioner, SI Ferry. Before that he was the Manhattan Commissioner, overseeing all transportation for the Commissioner. Before that he was in charge of Signals and Street Light Division. Before that he was a Staten Island Borough traffic engineer, responsible for signals. Before that he was in charge of meter collections, and before that held jobs in design of traffic signals, etc.

He has an AA in design drafting from NYC Technical College  
A BA in engineering technology from NJIT, and an MA in transportation engineering, also from NJIT.

Barry Strauch

Morgan Turrell