

P R E S S R E L E A S E



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 26, 2009

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PORT OF SOUTH LOUISIANA PARTICIPATES IN LOUISIANA TRADE MISSION TO COLOMBIA

As a result of the collaboration between the New Orleans U.S. Export Assistance Center and the United States Commercial Service in Colombia, representatives from the Port of South Louisiana and 12 other Louisiana-based companies with maritime-related ties participated in the Louisiana Trade Mission to Colombia, March 8-15, 2009. The Trade Mission group, led by U.S. Embassy Commercial Service Counselor Margaret Hanson-Muse, traveled to four Colombian cities --Bogotá, Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Santa Marta-- to partake in pre-arranged one-on-one meetings with prospective shippers and business partners. The Port’s main objective for this mission was to introduce to Colombia’s maritime industry the advantages of the Port of South Louisiana as an alternative cargo destination in the U.S. Such advantages include its strategic location along the Mississippi River, its intermodal transportation network, and its access to almost two-thirds of the U.S. market via barge.

The trade mission kicked off Monday morning in Bogotá, where members were welcomed by U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield, who delivered a briefing regarding Colombia’s political and economic status. According to Ambassador Brownfield, Colombia is in a better position for growth than any other Latin American nation: it is not experiencing a negative growth as are other nations, the reality of Colombia is better than its perception, its political stance has stabilized since President Uribe has been in office, neighboring countries are unattractive and high-risk for business, and it is the most pro-U.S. country, with an 80% approval rating.

The Port of South Louisiana met with over 20 Colombian maritime-related company representatives at pre-arranged Gold Key meetings throughout the week. In connection with these meetings, the Port of South Louisiana had the opportunity to interact with other firms at a VIP networking reception, where over 50 Colombian representatives were in attendance, along with U.S. Commercial Service Deputy Chief of Mission Brian A. Nichols, Diane Farrell and Xiomara Creque of EXIM Bank, and Suzanne Etcheverry of OPIC.

During the week, the Port of South Louisiana and the Louisiana Trade Mission delegation were taken on tours of several ports along Colombia's Caribbean coast: *Regional Port Society of Cartagena*, a container, general cargo, and cruise ship terminal; *Docks el Bosque Port Operators*, a private port for public use specializing in dry bulk (esp. grain); *Regional Port Society of Barranquilla*, the largest public port of the city of Barranquilla, and the *Free Trade Zone of Barranquilla*, where the cargo handled includes dry bulk (esp. grain) and steel. While in Barranquilla, the Louisiana group attended a networking reception hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Barranquilla and the U.S. Commercial Service. In Santa Marta, they toured the Drummond port facilities and coal mine.

"The country of Colombia and, particularly, their Ports are to be commended for the huge strides that they have made to promote international trade and peace through trade," commented Joel Chaisson, Port of South Louisiana's Executive Director. "It is obvious that Colombia, one of our most important trading partners, is positioning itself to capture its share of international trade expected upon the re-opening of the expanded Panama Canal."

The Port of South Louisiana supports Colombia it is efforts and looks forward to formalizing sister port agreements with several of their ports, which should lead to future growth and prosperity for the people of both Colombia and the U.S.



Left to right: Margaret Hanson-Muse, U.S. Embassy Commercial Service Commercial Counselor; William R. Brownfield, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia; and Joel T. Chaisson, Port of South Louisiana Executive Director



Louisiana Trade Mission Delegation



Gold Key Meetings in Bogotá, Cartagena, and Barranquilla

The Port of South Louisiana, a 54-mile port district on the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, is the largest tonnage port in the Western Hemisphere. The cargo it handles accounts for over 50 percent of all Louisiana imports/exports.

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