

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

NEWS UPDATES AT WWW.NEWSOBSERVER.COM • PLANK-WALKERS EDITION, 50 CENTS

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2009

©2009 THE NEWS AND OBSERVER PUBLISHING COMPANY • RALEIGH, N.C.

We'll get off at this next port, please

... BUT DO ENJOY THE REST OF THE VOYAGE – MIND THE ICEBERGS

BY I. BEN WHACKED
PINKSLIP STAFF WRITER

The RMS McClatchy was a top-of-the-line ship, owned by the White Star Line and built in a shipyard in Sacramento, Calif.

During the golden era of newspapers, the White Star Line owned many profitable steamships that docked at wealthy and growing homeports along the Pacific and Atlantic.

Yet Capt. Gary, the golden boy admiral of the White Star Line, wanted a bigger ship. He wanted one big enough to ferry a fleet of corporate jets. He wanted one big enough to make Mick Jagger envious. He wanted one big enough to float \$3 billion in debt.

So he commissioned the RMS McClatchy.

The RMS McClatchy was one of the largest newspaper steamships in the world. She was welded together from the hulls of several old steamships, including a leaky tub called the RMS Knight Ridder that hailed from the chaotic port of Miami.

"We're bullish on old tubs," Capt. Gary said, flashing his boyish, million-dollar-bonus smile.

The RMS McClatchy was so big she was hard to turn. Yet she would haul thousands of passengers and workers, and the captain's quarters did befit a captain of industry. But to make way for the corporate jets, the steamship would have to ditch most of the life rafts.

"No problem!" Capt. Gary said, exuding his usual golden boy enthusiasm. "Who needs life rafts? Just bring along a few golden parachutes."

Capt. Gary said the newspaper steamship was unsinkable despite the heavy cargo of debt she would be hauling.

"We'll be OK as long as the ocean has no waves," he said.

Capt. Gary steered the RMS McClatchy on its voyage across the treacherous economic waters. Thousands came along for the ride — passengers, investors, readers, TV plagiarists, plus all the workers in steerage.

The waves tossed the big ship about.

On a stormy night in April, Howard, the second mate, reported to Capt. Gary that the crew had spotted icebergs.

"Icebergs?" Capt. Gary shouted with his usual boyish enthusiasm. "Great! We need more ice!"

Since the ship was too big to turn, Capt. Gary said the ship would hit the iceberg a glancing blow to sheer off ice for frozen drinks.

"I like frozen drinks," he said. "Any ice we don't need, we'll sell. It will be a new media product for the White Star Line!"

"Another brilliant idea," Howard said.

But when the steamship hit the iceberg and began to take on water, the groaning of the steel hull sounded even over the Stones music piped in the captain's cabin.

As the ship began to sink, Capt. Gary asked for volunteers who would like to go for a swim and then extended the plank. As the crew walked the plank, exit interviewers asked why



The Class of April '09 (from left): Sam Spies, Ned Barnett, Eileen Heyes, Wade Rawlins, Joe Miller, Marti Maguire, Rob Waters, Josee Meehan, Paul Magann, Lou Bonds, Gail Thrift, Jane Ruffin, Winston Cavin, Kay Wallace, Sabine Vollmer, Joyce Hicks, Peder Zane, Aimee Overton, Becky Ogburn, Roger van der Horst, and Jason Arthurs. Present in spirit: Van Denton, Colline Roberts, Laurie Evans, Tom Mosier, Susan Ebbs, Joyce Howard, Adelaide Nash, A.J. Carr, Maureen Skowran, Bonnie Rochman,

STAFF (FOR NOW) PHOTO BY SHAWN ROCCO



Gary Pruitt meets with the board of directors. This is a real photo.

FILE PHOTO

'We always say to our papers, your challenge is: No matter what, the paper must improve. It always drove me crazy where in a downturn, news hole cuts were made and the paper got worse. And I always thought restaurants don't make food worse in a downturn. Car companies don't make cars less safe in a downturn. Why is it OK to make a newspaper worse in a recession? That's your excuse for making your product worse? It makes no sense.'

GARY PRUITT, QUOTED IN 'THE VANISHING NEWSPAPER' BY PHILIP MEYER, 2004

TOP 10 QUESTIONS A COMPANY SHOULD NEVER ASK AN EMPLOYEE WHO HAS BEEN LAID OFF

1. Why are you leaving?
2. Can you volunteer at the soup kitchen (where you might soon be eating)?
3. Can you please refrain from wearing jeans?
4. Can you clean out your desk on your own time?
5. So, have you thought about what you're going to do now?
6. Would you like some fries to go with that nervous shake?
7. Would you like to donate some money to the United Arts or United Way?
8. What can you contribute to the going-away potluck?
9. Can we count on you to continue getting the paper? It's a deal. We'll charge you exactly what we charge the public (but you can't have the discount we give to college students or nursing homes).
10. Can you give blood?

they were leaving, and if they would like to return for another voyage. Those left aboard feared for their

lives and turned to Capt Gary for leadership. "Absolutely, we've got a future,"

Capt. Gary said with his usual ... well, you know. "It's up to us to invent life rafts!"

PLAN B: TOP WAYS TO EARN MONEY

- Hock shops.
- Sell bodily fluids or parts.
- Be a subject in an experiment. This is the Research Triangle.
- Temporary labor. Be they guy at road construction sites who changes the sign from "Stop" to "Slow."
- Go to India and get a job that has been outsourced over there.

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF BEING LAID OFF

- No survivor's guilt.
- Two words: Jeans. Cleavage.
- It just hasn't been as much fun here since Melanie left.
- Get to write cranky letters to the editor.
- Get to put obnoxious political bumper stickers on our cars.
- CCI? What's that?
- No more pesky calls from reporters and editors.
- Lots of opportunity to use our camping gear.

ARE YOU NEXT?

No one likes uncertainty. In these troubled times, you may want some measure of your relative security. Here are 10 questions to help you figure it out.

1. Have you been with the company for 10 years or more?
2. Do you aim for excellence in every job you take on?
3. Has your work won prizes or brought about change?
4. Are you doing work that used to be done by two or three people?
5. Are you a team player who cheerfully accepts assignments you didn't ask for?
6. Are you flexible about scheduling?
7. Do you consistently support and encourage your co-workers?
8. Do you perform a job that's vital to the newsroom?
9. Do you have specialized skills that serve the company's mission?
10. Are you the breadwinner in your family?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO ANY OR EVEN ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS ... IT DOESN'T MATTER! YOU STILL MIGHT BE THE NEXT TO GO! THANK YOU, FRIENDS IN SACRAMENTO, FOR MAKING THIS QUIZ POSSIBLE!

Dear Survivors,

We wish you the best. We liked working here, and we liked working with you. What you do is important. Don't let up. We'll be rooting for you. We'll miss you. Stay in touch.

The N&O Class of April 2009

MORE NEWS

UPDATES ALL DAY AT NEWSOBSERVER.COM

Wednesday is Earth Day. We'll reduce our carbon footprint by not driving to work.

'You want to invest in a business that even your stupid cousin could run, because one day he will.'

WARREN BUFFETT,

QUOTED BY GARY PRUITT IN A RECENT SPEECH

'That was the newspaper business in the second half of the 20th century.'

PRUITT'S COMMENT ON THE BUFFETT QUOTE

WE WON'T MISS

- Hearing this sentence: "The 1A editor has some questions."
- Thomas Wayne Allen
- Talking to callers who have been misdirected by The N&O's voice-activated answering service
- Talking to callers who are angry about having to talk to someone in the Philippines because their carrier threw their paper in a puddle

INDEX

Classified A1	Films A1
Comics A1	Puzzles A1
Deaths A1	Sudoku A1
Editorials A1	TV A1

