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WMU in the News

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Showing you care

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Recommended Citation

Anonymous, "Showing you care" (1989). *WMU in the News*. 74.
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1989

LLOYD'S LIST 21-9-89

Showing you care

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WORLD Maritime Day comes around again, observed by a few, ignored by the stolid majority who probably do not even know that it is an event to be celebrated, and even if they did, would scarcely know what to do. But perhaps if governments do not show they care about commercial maritime transport, it is a bit much to expect that individuals will take up the torch.

This year World Maritime Day is a little different with something for us all to focus upon with the launch of an appeal by the International Maritime Organisation for the World Maritime University (WMU) in Malmo. In short, it is an appeal for everyone with maritime transport at heart to demonstrate some commitment and get the WMU on a permanent firm financial footing.

When it began in 1983 there was a certain scepticism about the establishment of yet another maritime training institution at a time when maritime colleges were closing down because of lack of demand. But as the chancellor, C. P. Srivastava, never tires of pointing out, the WMU is very different from more conventional technical institutes, being specifically tailored to the needs of the developing world. What is even more special is that WMU takes mature students from the developing world and enhances their skills during the two-year course so that they go back to their countries with their professionalism honed to a keen edge. They will have come from a variety of different backgrounds — some from impoverished and inefficient systems, others from countries which would like their maritime infrastructures to be more efficient but lack the wherewithal.

Every year there will be 100 graduates who will spread out around the globe, many into very senior positions in nascent maritime administrations, others into the commercial hierarchies of their sponsoring organisations. They are a force for efficiency, without a doubt, and their influence is already being felt. Ships are already moving more smoothly in ports where there was once bureaucracy and congestion and maritime administrations are functioning more effectively because of the skills that have been transferred in Malmo. A global network of alumni trained to a common high standard has been set up and is being strengthened by 100 graduates each year. Shipping is safer as a result of their work and the standard of maritime education in their countries is improved.

So there is a vested interest in ensuring that the WMU is financially secure so that the work can continue. Everyone, emphasises chancellor Srivastava, benefits from the global spread of transport efficiency. If only a few ships save a day in port, or just a few accidents are prevented, then the \$2m extra per annum the university needs for its financial security pales into insignificance. The whole institution costs less than \$7m per annum to run, so in the terms of marine industry capital costs, its expenses are small.

It is not that the WMU sits on a knife edge, as its donors have been very generous. One-third of its costs is covered by the Swedish government, and Norway and Finland both provide annual donations. But the point is that there is nothing secure about its funds. Every year its students have to be sponsored and there is an annual struggle for short-term funds to make up the 25 % of the budget that is not committed. What is badly needed is a capital fund sufficient for the university to look rather further into the future, with funds raised in particular from the industry that so manifestly benefits from its work. Think of it as a token of thanks.