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MICHAEL SEARS / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

The Port of Milwaukee's powerful new Manitowoc crawler crane makes some of its first lifts on Monday.

# Great Lakes shipping season up and running

## Ports in Green Bay, Milwaukee ready

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The Great Lakes shipping season is underway in Milwaukee and Green Bay, with the first foreign-flag ship of the year expected at the Port of Milwaukee soon.

One of the largest lake freighters, the Stewart J. Cort, has left Milwaukee from its

winter layover, signaling the start of the shipping season here.

The first ocean-going vessel will arrive in the next couple of weeks with a load of steel from Europe, returning home with Wisconsin grain.

Most of that grain comes from farms located within 90 miles of Milwaukee, said Port Director Paul Vornholt.

The port has some of the largest cranes on the Great Lakes, allowing it to move large, heavy items, including

mining equipment, wind turbines, coils of steel and tons of grain.

Earlier this year, the port installed a new Manitowoc crawler crane that can lift up to 300 tons. The \$2.7 million model 2250 crane was delivered in late 2016, joining the port's complement of other crawler, gantry and derrick cranes.

The largest vessels on the lakes can unload 70,000 tons of cargo in 12 hours or less. Prior

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## Ports

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to self-unloading, it would have taken days to empty a ship of a cargo of that size.

Milwaukee is the only Great Lakes port in Wisconsin that unloads foreign steel. It's a custom product not available domestically, according to Vornholt.

The steel business has been strong the past couple of years, he said, indicating that local manufacturers using the raw material have been doing well.

"Our outlook for steel seems to be holding its own, or slightly better," Vornholt said.

The first ocean-going vessel has left the Port of Green Bay, bound for Quebec, Canada, with a load of ethanol.

There are 14 port businesses located along three miles of the Fox River and the Port of Green Bay.

Those businesses move about 2 million tons of cargo on more than 200 ships each year.

Some years, three of every four ships leave docks on the Great Lakes "light loaded" because harbors and connecting channels aren't dredged to proper depths and widths.

Ships have been unable to make deliveries to the port in Waukegan, Ill., because of insufficient harbor depth. There have been times when coal could not be delivered to a power plant in Holland, Mich., because of a buildup of harbor silt.

But that's not the case this year in Milwaukee and Green Bay, according to the port directors.

The Port of Green Bay

had a huge increase in handling petroleum products in 2016, up more than 1,400%, because of the closing of a petroleum pipeline serving northeast Wisconsin.

Prior to the closure, the port exported diesel, gasoline and ethanol to other markets.

Now, "the exports have flipped to imports to meet the demand for petroleum products," said Green Bay Port Director Dean Haen.

The 2016 Great Lakes shipping season tied a record for the longest navigation period on the lakes, with 286 days of ship traffic.

About 15 American companies operate 56 U.S.-flag vessels on the Great Lakes.

Each ship has a crew of about 25 people. If one of the big ships were stood on end, it would be taller than the U.S. Bank building in Milwaukee.