

INSIDE VIEW:

A SHIP WITH WARMTH

**A conversation with Captain Nicholas Pagonis
of Celebrity Silhouette**

by

Richard H. Wagner

For Captain Nicholas Pagonis, commanding Celebrity Silhouette is the high point of a distinguished career. Amongst his commands have been the popular Celebrity Constellation and the legendary Celebrity Century. He also participated in the start-up teams that brought out several key Celebrity ships. His current assignment first took him to Germany where Silhouette was being built, then to her sea trials and later to bring the ship across the Atlantic for her United States inaugural.

"I couldn't wish, as a captain, for anything better than to be on the flagship of the company, to have the art of technology [Silhouette has for] navigating the ship, and to see the safety standards that this ship can provide to our guests and to our crew. I couldn't wish for anything better."

"Silhouette was born with the latest software systems, navigational systems, computers on the bridge relating to stability and other multiple things. Whatever

is the latest, we have it. Some things we have are experimental. They are projects that they want to use in the future in different fleets and we have them onboard to test them and give them feedback on how those things are working. So this is how advanced that we are at the moment."

"Everything is designed on the ship to go along with the goal of our company to save energy. [Not just]-the solar panels and the design of the hull but also the antifouling paints that we put underneath in the water are calculated to be environmentally friendly and to give maximum efficiency to the vessel. In addition to that, we installed systems on the bridge that calculate for us the optimum ship's draft and trim in order to save energy and fuel."

"In general, we can go up to 24 knots with four engines, full thrust with normal weather conditions, not extreme weather conditions." Of course, going full

speed consumes more fuel so the ship's itineraries are planned so that she does not need to travel at that speed. However, if there is a need to avoid a severe storm, Silhouette has that extra margin of speed to enable her to do so. "You don't think of the fuel, you just try to avoid the storm as quickly as possible. In the parameters, first comes the comfort and safety of our guests."

Even before Silhouette entered service Captain Pagonis witnessed the extent of Silhouette's capabilities. "The sea trials test the ship to the maximum, things that you will not see in real life. We tested the stabilizers, we tested the main propulsion systems, we tested to see how she is behaved in slaloming. From full speed ahead, we went to full reverse to see how she would stop and her responses into that. The thrust of the engines and the power that this ship has is incredible. I found it incredible."

The importance of warmth

While a state-of-the-art ship with a beautiful décor is amongst the ingredients for creating memorable cruise experiences, it is not sufficient just by itself. The special ingredient is the personal touch.

"I like to involve myself a lot with the guests. The only challenge that I have is that I don't have the time to meet everybody. We have 2,850 people and a 12-day cruise is not enough to meet everybody. I try to meet most of them. I make myself available to every single guest." Indeed, Captain Pagonis is seen not only at formal receptions but also giving talks on navigation and walking around the ship chatting with the guests informally.

Captain Pagonis enjoys such interactions but they also serve valuable purposes. "I can relay the feedback the guests give me back to the management team that I have onboard and to our headquarters. Then we can swing things around and ensure that our guests will have this ultimate cruising experience, they will have this wow."

Perhaps more importantly, "we try to engage ourselves with our guests -- not only the officers but the crew -- so they get this experience; they get this smile; this good morning/good afternoon, sir or madam, every morning, every day, every afternoon, every evening. This is the ambiance and the color of Celebrity Cruises."



Captain Nicholas Pagonis

But what motivates his officers and crew to provide such an experience? "Everything has to do with good leadership and a good senior management -- how they approach certain things and how they maintain that with their own people. The people that I have are one of the strongest senior management teams."

"I know most of my crew because I involve myself with their activities. Whenever they see you there, they get happy. I started from the lower ranks. When I finished the [marine] academy, I was a deck boy. My dad said 'Don't you ever forget where you started from.' And I never did and I never will."

"They have to feel and see that somebody is listening. That is why, the human resources manager reports directly to me."

"Then we have excursions organized for them, parties organized for them, theme nights organized for them, special events and recognition for the services they perform."

"Yesterday, I had dinner with the nominees for employees of the month. I took them to the captain's table [in the main dining room] and we dined together with the guests. I had the cruise director announce the

winners to our guests while they were eating with me."

"The [nominees are] served at the captain's table by their colleagues from the crew. That is something that motivates the others - - 'I want to do that. I want to be recognized' and they will because they have something unique - - they are proud of what they do."

"What they do, they do it with pride. They are proud and they take ownership of the little sector that they are responsible for. When you take ownership and have pride the guest feels that. This is the little ingredient. 'Oh, but he is so proud of doing that' to serve you, to welcome you, to open the door for you, to give you priority."

In time, Silhouette will no longer be the newest ship in the Celebrity fleet. Indeed, the fifth Solstice-class ship Celebrity Reflection will enter service in October 2012. Nonetheless, Captain Pagonis is confident that guests will continue to return to Silhouette. "It will be the warmth of the people that serve in Silhouette - - from the last of the crew to the captain - - that will make the guests come over and over. They will feel this warmth and this hospitality that is a tradition on Silhouette."