

Ole Skaarup, Chairman of Skaarup Shipping in Greenwich Connecticut, was an industry icon. In business, politics and entertaining, Mr. Skaarup was frequently larger than life, always original, and deeply patriotic.

It was Mr. Skaarup's move from New York City in the early 1970s that gave birth to the now enormous Connecticut Maritime cluster. Mr. Skaarup chose Connecticut for its proximity to New York but, more importantly, for its schools and charm as he and his wife Gerda Emilie raised their three girls. Jacob Stolt Neilsen soon followed, and today part of his legacy must be the important international maritime industry in Fairfield County.

But that is only a small part of his legacy, which included service in the US Army, where he was instrumental in loading the ships bound for France during the invasion, a task he often referred to as his most fulfilling achievement. He concluded his military service as a Major. After the war, he designed and built what many call the first modern dry bulk carrier with the Wallenberg family as partner.

He built Skaarup Shipping on a model he held true in his heart and mind, on the principles of delivering transportation service to the customer, to the shipper. His best deals were long term charters where ships were built to serve specific trades and commodities and then reliably delivered for decades. He took enormous care of his ships and their crews. Once he invited former Congresswoman Helen Bentley, an outspoken critic of open registry shipping aboard his Liberian Flag Melvin Baker, then a 30-year-old vessel, which was finally scrapped at age 53, after moving over 38 million tons of cargo in her lifetime. He gave Congresswoman Bentley white gloves as he toured her through the spotless engine room. They became mutual admirers even if neither changed the other's thinking.

But he could also be an astute market timer, and was a trusted business colleague to numerous banks, expending and contracting his fleet of ships as markets moved.

His passion for solving charterer challenges helped fuel his equally strong passion for designing ships and cargo systems. His self-unloaders were only one example. Following the fall of the former Soviet Empire, when the peace dividend turned towards revitalizing US shipyards, he combined his design concepts with another passion, begging and preaching and lobbying Washington to take US shipping and shipbuilding seriously. He believed strongly that a nation should have a vital shipping industry and that US yards could compete on an international stage.

He would visit Congressmen whenever he was in Washington and testified before presidential commissions. His was frequently a lone voice of reason telling Washington that shipping is important. Former Congressman Christopher Shays once told Mr. Skaarup on the uphill fight he faced in pursuing his goals for shipping, "On the prospects of this shipping bill passing – See this large pile of letters? Every one of them has a reason why shipping is not important now. See this one letter? It's from you telling me why shipping IS important."

But Mr. Skaarup never tired of the fight and, at one point, had both the former Director of the US Shipbuilding Council, John Stocker, and former Federal Maritime Commissioner and articulate Washington insider, Rob Quartel, on his staff and team.

For many in the shipping community, Mr Skaarup will be remembered for his enormous talent at public speaking, music and joke telling — a powerful skill he would use to cheer large or small crowds. He would commandeer a piano at a small taverna on Hydra and sing ribald songs with a crowd standing around the piano. Or he would play a recital at his home in Greenwich for a fortunate few, his fingers moving with his love of music across the keys.

And then, of course, there were his tour de forces at the CMA annual Gala dinners, where he would hold a crowd of nearly 1,000 in rapt, frequently hysterical, attention as he poked fun at his dear friends from the maritime community. Who else could have called Gerhard Kurz, when he was the most powerful charterer and owner in the world at the head of the Mobil fleet, the “Fuhrer” in front of 1,000 CMA guests?

He was the CMA’s first Commodore, a role he took on in his generous way to assist the fledgling community’s growth. He always demanded the Association do more, and would threaten not to attend the annual conference and Gala Commodore dinner. But then he would make a grand entrance, French horn in tow, or dressed as an Admiral, or ready to be jump started by Richard duMoulin following what Ole always called D1, referring to the time at an ABS meeting during which he did, in fact die, a first time, only to be resuscitated.

There appears to be no second resuscitation and so we are all left with a terrible hole where a man for whom life was truly rich and special once spurred us on to be better than we might otherwise have been.