

Marsha Cohen to Retire as Editor of Terra et Aqua



Marsha Cohen will retire at the end of the year as editor of *Terra et Aqua*, a technical dredging journal, published by the International Association of Dredging Companies (IADC).

BY JUDITH POWERS

Marsha Cohen will retire at the end of the year as editor of *Terra et Aqua*, a post she has held since 1991. The technical dredging journal is published by the International Association of Dredging Companies (IADC) in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Cohen was honored by the organization at its 50th anniversary celebration in Hong Kong on October 23.

In her 24 years as editor, Cohen oversaw the publication's migration through the changing printing industry, starting with offset printing, moving to digital editions and now augmented by an interactive website. She oversaw a number of re-designs, working under three different IADC secretaries general and an ever-changing editorial board, which consists of representatives from the major Dutch and Belgian dredging companies, with participation from other member companies in the Far East and Middle East.

In the course of her career with *Terra* and IADC, Cohen became one of the few journalists with an intimate knowledge of the dredging industry, including equipment, people, companies and issues. Her position as an American writing about the international dredging industry gave her a unique understanding of the issues, often conflicting, facing both these communities.

Born and raised in New York City and Long Island, one of her unusual skills is her fluency in speaking the Dutch language, which she learned when she moved to the Netherlands in 1970 while in her 20s. She realized that she had an obligation to learn Dutch if she was living in the country. It took her several years of reading,

speaking, practicing pronunciation, and requesting friends to correct her usage before she was able to think in Dutch. Her marriage in 1972 to Dominique Boer helped, she explained, because with a Dutch husband and in-laws, she was in a "total immersion" program.

Cohen had worked for two American publishers, Viking Press and Van Nostrand, in New York. After her marriage, Boer, who also worked in publishing, steered her to a job with Elsevier, a publishing house in Amsterdam that focused on scientific books and journals published in English. In the late 1970s they moved to the States and, given their publishing skills, started their own communications company. After 10 years they decided to start a Dutch branch and made a move back to the Netherlands. The company flourished and five years later a business associate in The Hague introduced Cohen to the IADC, who was looking for a new editor to publish their technical journal, *Terra et Aqua*. She submitted a proposal in Spring 1991, one of a number of proposals IADC received, and hers was chosen.

Though not familiar with dredging, and unable to tell the various dredges apart, she was initiated on the hopper (trailer) dredge *WD Gateway* on a voyage in the North Sea "in quite high seas," which imprinted the features of a hopper dredge on her mind. Attending conferences, editing technical articles and laying out the magazine soon familiarized her with the equipment and other aspects of the industry.

Terra et Aqua came about when early in IADC's life, the 35 (now 10 main and 100 affiliated) members around the world saw the need for a way of communicating their activities to clients and stakeholders such as ports and other government entities, Cohen said. Rightly proud of the job they did, and faced with environmental and technical issues not understood outside the industry, they started the journal as a method of communicating unbiased information in a forum not dependent on advertising.

"The members saw *Terra et Aqua* as a way to shine a little bit of a light on an unknown industry," Cohen said.

One innovation that came about soon after she took the reins was the addition of a book review section, to highlight technical books that would get no attention otherwise, with the first reviewer being Chuck Hummer, retired U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredging chief, who was in Holland accompanying his wife Sandra during her tour at the U.S. embassy in The Hague.

The magazine usually features three technical articles and also includes an editorial by the IADC president, a calendar of dredging events, and a list of the members, all of which Cohen was responsible for editing, proofreading, and in some cases, writing.

Her experience at *Terra et Aqua* led the IADC and other maritime organizations to ask her to edit several books (like *Environmental Aspects of Dredging*, *Dredging for Development* and *Hydraulic Fill Manual*) over the years and to

write numerous articles for other magazines as well as IADC's Facts About series.

"Working on these books with engineers and environmental scientists was so fascinating and such a learning experience," she told IDR.

In 1996, Cohen and her husband moved back to New York, and she continued to edit the magazine from there, traveling to Holland for quarterly editorial meetings and also attending conferences all over the world.

IADC's meeting in Hong Kong commemorated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the organization at the site of the massive land reclamation project performed by dredging companies to build the Chek Lap Kok airport in the mid- to late 1990s. That project was a major turning point in modern dredging, Cohen said. The original "dry" plan was to use fill from nearby mountain peaks for the airport platform, but Dutch dredging company Ballast Nedam proposed "the wet" plan whereby hopper dredges would win sand from offshore and in-bay locations and create the a five square mile island in the bay. That launched a worldwide trend to use land reclamation to build islands for expansion and it ushered in the age of super and mega hopper dredges to do the jobs.

Almost a half century earlier, February 1, 1953, was another important turning point in modern dredging, when a massive storm surge destroyed sea defenses in the Netherlands and Belgium, killing nearly 2,000 people, and inundating many areas in the UK, where more than 300 people were killed. That event caused the focus on coastal storm defense, including the Delta Project in Holland, which depended heavily on dredges during construction, extensive annual beach renourishment projects on the Belgian Coast, the Thames Barrier in London, and a storm surge barrier on the River Hull.

"That was a wake-up call for Europe," Cohen said. "It took years to create the Delta Plan and 50 years to fully implement it. We need to be kinder to ourselves over here (regarding the projects to create storm protection structures on the U.S. East Coast.) Climate change has made coastal disasters more likely and careful shore protection projects take time," she said.

"There are so many fascinating aspects to the industry, and they develop the way the world develops," she said. Because the Netherlands is a small country and so much of it is below sea level, the Dutch are strong on coastal protection and land reclamation, and keep learning how to do it better, she said.

"The expertise in the U.S., especially in the Northeast, is contaminated sediment remediation, because of the Superfund sites, many left over from the Industrial Revolution. Methods and technology developed here are now being used in other parts of the world," she said.

When she leaves at the end of the year, her legacy to the new editor will be a well-produced, high quality publication that fulfills the founders' goals of providing necessary technical information to the dredging industry. 🐦