

Q&A

■ INTERVIEW

BY CINDY KIBBE

Susan McKenna of Manchester is a 61-year-old grandmother of four who works as a chief officer in the U.S. Merchant Marines, piloting 950-foot-long ships through some of the most dangerous waters on the planet. She's also a survivor of heart disease that could have taken her life prematurely thousands of miles from home.

■ **Q.** How do the Merchant Marines differ from the Marines, the Coast Guard and the Navy?

A. The U.S. Merchant Marines is a civilian organization of mariners. We're not affiliated with any military branch.

We are the people that work on all the various types of vessels throughout the world, carrying all sorts of different cargo, passenger ships, oil tankers.

It's a little bit convoluted, but basically, we're the people who move stuff around the world.

■ **Q.** How did you come to this as a career choice?

A. In the mid-'80s, I met my husband Charles, and he introduced me to the maritime industry. We did maritime construction. We both started sailing deep



'It's a little bit convoluted, but basically we're the people who move stuff around the world,' says U.S. Merchant Marine Chief Officer Susan McKenna of Manchester of her job.

(Photo by John Hession)

Susan McKenna, merchant marine

sea in the late '80s. He went to the engineering side and I went to the deck side. So he became a chief engineer and I got my captain's license.

It took a number of years. I started at the very bottom - I didn't attend the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, N.Y.

■ **Q.** How much of an issue is piracy becoming?

A. Pirates are definitely a threat. For instance, off the coast of Africa, East Africa and Somalia. Also in the South China Sea, Strait of Malaga, in the Singapore area.

When I have sailed through those areas, I have been on high alert for pirates.

On some ships, the deck is 100 feet off the water, so it's very difficult for someone to get on board. But the tankers are usually more susceptible, especially when they're full. They ride much lower in the water, making them more accessible.

■ **Q.** Recently, you were honored as a heart disease survivor at the 2008 Go Red for Women gala luncheon. Tell us about your experience.

A. It was April 2007. We were coming through the Singapore Strait, we were heading for Kuwait. It was about 2 o'clock in the morning.

I was awakened with this tight feeling in my chest. My first thought was that I was having a heart attack. Then I talked myself out of it. I convinced myself it was some sort of gastric issue.

I knew we were stopping in the United Arab Emirates to get fuel and supplies. I decided that if I had another episode, I'll say something.

Well, I saw a doctor there who did an EKG and all the other vitals and they didn't see anything strange.

I didn't get back to the States and off the ship until June, so I was dealing with this for almost two months.

I went to CMC and had an echocardiogram and stress test done. It turns out it was angina. I wasn't having a heart attack, but I had a 70 percent blockage in the left vessel. I also had one that was 80 percent blocked, and two at 60 percent. They didn't let me go home, and I had a

quadruple bypass.

I'm just incredulous with myself because I went in such denial about this. I'm a very independent, strong-minded person. I should have just left the ship in the UAE and flown home, but hindsight it always 20-20.

The message I'd like to get out there is, if your body does start sending out these signals, don't ignore them. I didn't have the luxury of dialing 911 or walking into a facility. I was very fortunate. Don't ignore your body. It's better to be wrong than dead.

I also want to raise awareness for women because so many women don't really appreciate how deadly heart disease is for us. **NHR**

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If you're one of those folks who elaborately decorate your house for Christmas, don't be surprised if some neighbors give you the cold shoulder. According to a survey by HCD Research of 768 people, **35 percent said that they were less tolerant this year of a neighbor's showy holiday decorations.** Some 43 percent of those respondents said a tight economy, with reduced budgets and less money to spend on decorations, was their main reason against the displays.

A recent study at Lehigh University presents a disconcerting scenario. Researchers gave full-time MBA students fake money to divide among themselves and another fictional party. Using either e-mail or pen-and-paper communications, the students reported the size of the pot — truthful or not — and how much the other party would get. **Less than 10 percent of those who used e-mail were truthful** about the amount of money to be divided, while about 40 percent were honest in the pen-and-paper scenario.

What's the best boost to low morale? Better communication, said 48 percent of 150 senior executives surveyed by staffing service Accountemps. Other remedies suggested included: recognition programs, cited by 19 percent; monetary rewards for exceptional performance, chosen by 13 percent; and unexpected rewards, such as gift certificates or tickets to sporting events, picked by 11 percent.

A survey of 115 chief financial officers and other finance executives by CFO magazine found that they felt that, that since September, **the quality of some services provided by their commercial lenders had deteriorated.** A majority said it costs more to borrow, banks are less able to make lending decisions and commitments, and that banks are also less flexible. Some 39 percent said that even the range of services and products available from their commercial lenders had narrowed.

A USA TODAY/Gallup survey conducted in early November found that **32 percent of Americans are saving more as a result of the economic downturn**, but the figures for young adults were much higher. Forty-four percent of Americans ages 18 to 29, and 39 percent of Americans ages 30 to 49 said they're saving more.



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