



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Ginger Vaughan
(ginger@quinnbrein.com)
206-842-8922

It All Started with a Flag: Celebrating 200 Years of Black Ball

*One of the world's oldest nautical flags still in service continues to fly on
MV COHO from Port Angeles, WA to Victoria, BC.*

It is synonymous with luxury, ingenuity, and reliability. A pop star once wrote a love song about it. It has played a key role in building empires, legacies, and the largest fleet of passenger ferries in the United States.

In 2018, the Black Ball flag celebrates 200 years of service. The distinctive banner—with a black “ball” set on a red background—is the oldest U.S. nautical flag still in use, responsible for a revolution in how people travel even today.

In 1818, the Black Ball flag was hoisted for the first time as the emblem for the Black Ball Line, which was the first shipping company to offer scheduled service; that is, its ships left on a specific date and time. Before that, ships would wait until their holds were full, which could leave passengers and freight stranded for weeks.

From there the reputation of the Black Ball Line, and the flag that served as its namesake, would only grow. Names synonymous with New York society and wealth—Peabody, Marshall, Astor, and Folger (yes, like the coffee)—would play a role in its continued success.

In 1897, fortune seekers flocked to the Klondike Yukon gold rush and Black Ball ships were there shepherding people and their treasures around the Puget Sound and into Canada. Soon after, the Black Ball Line would be among the first in the world to carry a new type of precious cargo: cars. Of course,

~more~

Black Ball 200th Anniversary

Page 2 of 3

these ships weren't made to carry automobiles so the earliest on-board vehicles (including that of then-Black Ball owner Charles Peabody) had to be partially disassembled and reassembled after the journey.

Soon, it became clear the future was in the automobile and Black Ball led the charge, retrofitting and giving new life to old ships. One of the most famous was the Art Deco-inspired *Kalakala*, which while it sailed under the Black Ball flag was the second most photographed object on Earth, right after the Eiffel Tower.

In 1951—the same year Bing Crosby & The Andrews Sisters recorded “Black Ball Ferry Line”, name-checking some of Black Ball's most famous ships—much of Black Ball's fleet was sold to the state of Washington in what would become Washington State Ferries. In recent times, Washington State Ferries carry 24.5 million passengers and 10.5 million vehicles every year.

Today, the Black Ball flag still flies proud and true over one boat—the *MV COHO*, which, when it was launched in 1959 by then-owner Robert Acheson, was the most expensive, privately-funded ship ever built in North America. Acheson ran the company until his death in 1963, when his wife, Lois, took over the helm.

Captain John “Jack” Cox, chairman and co-owner of Black Ball Ferry Line, worked on the *MV COHO* soon after it went into service. The summer Captain Jack served on the *MV COHO* she made quite the impression.

“That summer naval architects were coming from all over the world to see the *COHO* for themselves. She really was a phenomenon—unlike anything that was in Europe at the time. *COHO* really influenced many of the ships that came after it,” said Cox.

In 2005, Cox came back to work as a consultant for the ship that had impressed him so at the start of his career. In 2012, he and four business partners purchased the *MV COHO* and the company, now named Black Ball Ferry Line. Today, co-owners Ryan Burles, David Booth, Rian Anderson and Ryan Malane also manage the daily operations of the company.

As the last privately-owned company offering international service under an American flag, Black Ball Ferry Line has endeavored to carry on the traditions long established by generations of Black Ball service.

“We have worked to maintain the great spirit and style, quality of service, and culture of Black Ball, including taking care of our people,” said Ryan Burles, President and co-owner of Black Ball Ferry Line. “Everyone is on a first-name basis, and our employees are like a big family. We've had many people begin their careers and work to retirement on the *COHO*.”

Today, the *MV COHO* runs on the route from Port Angeles, WA to Victoria, BC. The company takes great care of the almost-60-year-old-ship, putting it into dry dock each spring for comprehensive cleaning and

~more~

Black Ball 200th Anniversary

Page 3 of 3

maintenance. While they maintain that the *MV COHO* is the finest and best-cared-for ferry currently running in Puget Sound waters, they recognize that, someday, she will need to be replaced.

“While someday we will need to say goodbye to the *COHO*, that time is many years, if not decades, out. Right now, our company’s focus is on a future with *COHO* in it,” said Ryan Malane, Vice-President of Marketing and co-owner of Black Ball Ferry Line. “The *COHO* really is a rarity—strong and reliable, but with a great charm that is unlike any other ship I’ve been on. It has a personality all its own.”

ABOUT BLACK BALL FERRY LINE

By way of its ship *MV COHO*, Black Ball Ferry Line provides the only daily, year-round vehicle and passenger service between downtown Victoria, British Columbia and Port Angeles, Washington. The company maintains terminals and offices at both locations. Employing over 100 people in peak season, the familiar sight and sound of the *MV COHO* has been a fixture in the region, having transported over 23 million passengers and 7 million vehicles since it began operating in 1959.

For more information about Black Ball Ferry Line, please visit www.cohoferry.com.

For media use only: For more information about the Black Ball flag, to schedule an interview, or to take a tour of the MV COHO and artifacts related to Black Ball’s history, please contact Ginger Vaughan at ginger@quinnbrein.com or 206-842-8922.