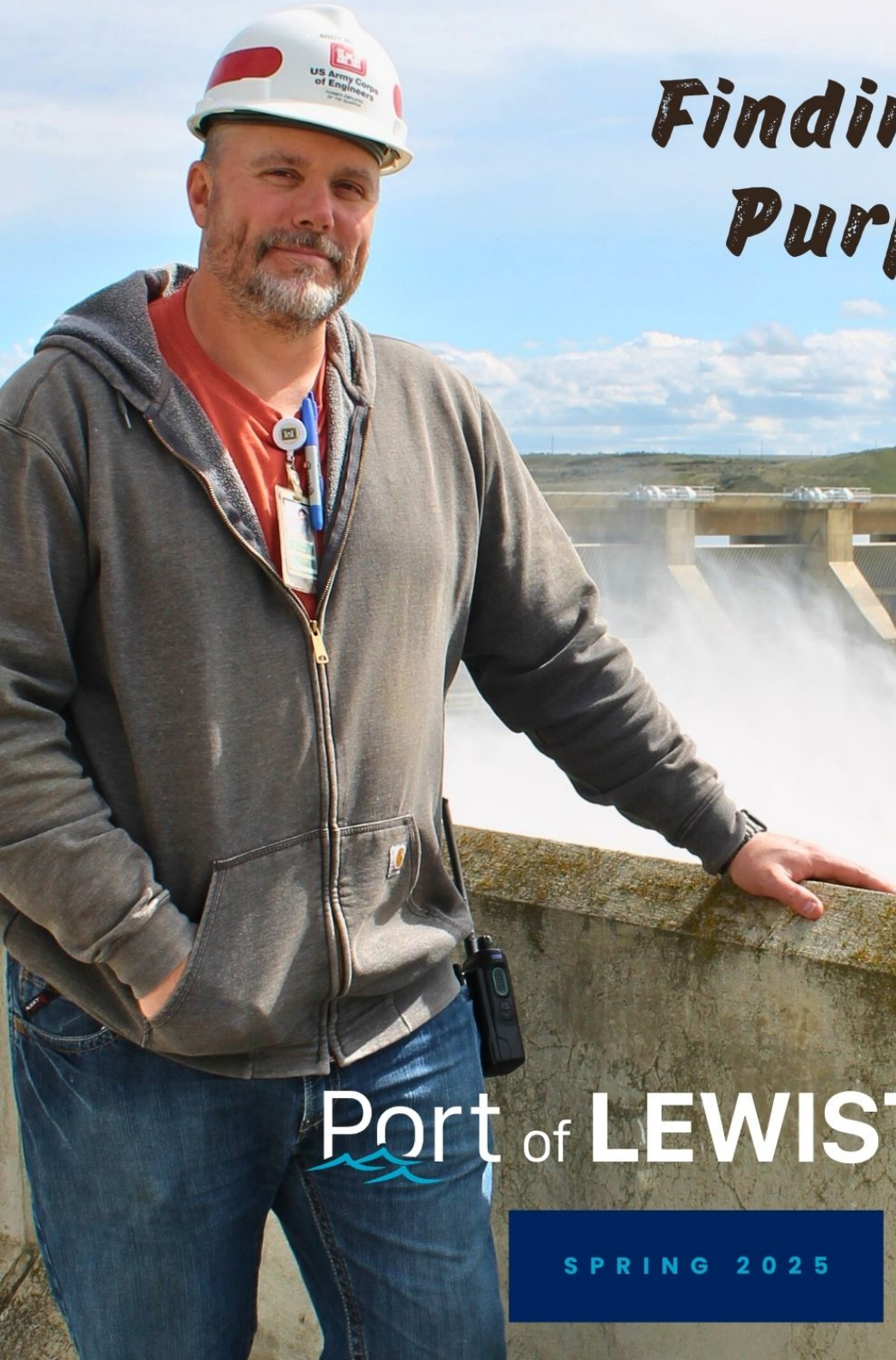


# THE *Confluence*

*Finding his  
Purpose*



Port of LEWISTON

SPRING 2025

Senior Power Plant Operator  
Andy Michel in front of Ice  
Harbor Lock & Dam.

# *Finding his Purpose*

## Service through Stewardship



Michel atop one of the massive 100-foot-tall turbines.

Andy Michel is a giant of a man, but even his 6-foot-5-inch frame is dwarfed by the immenseness of Ice Harbor Lock & Dam. Yet given enough time and proper shoes, he's prepared to show you every inch of it.

As one of the dam's full-time Senior Power Plant Operators and part-time history buff, he possesses an unparalleled understanding of the Ice Harbor Project and is eager to showcase its significance and functionality after 12 rewarding years at the facility.

"As an operator it is critical to know my plant," said Michel. "I guess you could say I'm the arms, legs, eyes and ears of this place."

Situated a little over 130 river miles west of Lewiston, Ice Harbor was the first of the Lower Snake River Dams to open in 1961. Towering 213 feet tall from foundation to top deck and stretching 2,822 feet in length, the massive facility is crucial for supplying hydropower to the Pacific Northwest. It also serves as an essential connection for the Palouse region, allowing tugs and barges safe passage. Tugboats push barges that carry a variety of crops, liquid fertilizer, logs, and even wind turbine blades between the Port of Lewiston to the coast, located 465 miles west, for export.

"Each dam has its part to play, and each one is necessary," said Michel. "All locks and dams in the river system work together, and everything we do is carefully coordinated."

As a husband and father, living in Kennewick with his beautiful wife Josie and daughters Myli and Izzie, he appreciates his job in a whole different way. The Columbia-Snake River System provides 60% of the region's energy, with Ice Harbor managing critical power needs for the entire Tri-Cities area. It also connects the Columbia and Snake River dams, extending Marine Highway M-84 to eastern Washington and Idaho. Without Ice Harbor and the other Columbia-Snake River dams, those who depend on them for safe and reliable river commerce would be left high and dry – and many residents could be left in the dark.

"I'm proud of what I do," Michel said. "I work with amazing people who make me want to come to work every day, and I know what I do matters."

Michel's career working with dams revealed how much these engineering marvels influenced his life. Growing up on a farm in Othello, WA, he remembered "the ditch of magic water," which was actually an irrigation canal fed from the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. This project, facilitated by the Grand Coulee Dam, helped transform nearly 700,000 acres of dry, sandy terrain into thriving agricultural land.

"Without Grand Coulee Dam, our family farm wouldn't have existed," Michel said.

As an adult, he left the farm in search of new opportunities. After working at a furniture store, he decided to pursue an associate's degree in electrical maintenance at Spokane Community College. While there, he applied for and was offered a position in the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Hydropower Plant Apprenticeship Program at Chief Joseph Dam near Bridgeport, WA.

"When the apprentice position was offered to me, I didn't have a lot to lose considering I worked at a furniture store, and it seemed like a great opportunity," said Michel. "God had a plan for me."

Michel spent 4 years at Chief Joseph Dam before moving to Bonneville Lock & Dam as a journeyman powerplant operator and lock master, gaining experience and knowledge. Following that, he worked at McNary Lock & Dam before moving to Ice Harbor.

"I'm learning every day. Think of what it took to build this," he said, gesturing widely to the concrete gravity dam's impressive system of spillway gates, navigation locks, and power producing turbine generators. "There's always something new to learn; I have a lot of variety to choose from."

Nothing is wasted at the facility – 1960s-era controls co-exist and serve as backup for more modern systems. Improvements are carefully considered and implemented in an orderly fashion that allows the dams to provide maximum return.

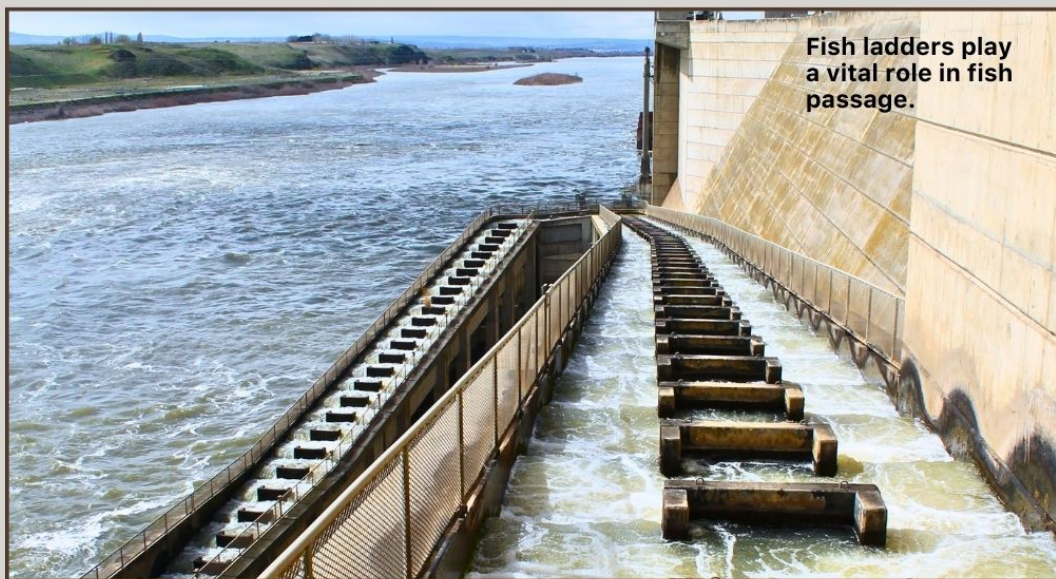
"It's not enough to know pieces of it," said Michel. "You have to know how it used to work to understand how it works now. I take a lot of pride in sharing what I've learned."

He credits the USACE for their calculated approach to scheduled maintenance, which minimizes the impact on those who rely on the river. "They really hit a homerun, every time," Michel said. "I can't imagine where our communities would be without them."

Currently the Ice Harbor team, with the assistance of contractors, is working to complete the replacement of one of the dam's three original hydropower-producing turbines – the other three came online in 1976. It's heavy work – one generator rotor alone is a massive 500 tons! The new turbine features completely redesigned blades and hub to improve fish passage. Currently, while only 7% of migrating salmon pass through the turbines, these enhancements aim to increase their survival rate.

"Before the first bucket of concrete was even poured, they were thinking about fish passage," said Michel, referencing temporary fish ladders used during construction in the late 1950s. "We do absolutely everything we can to ensure safe passage of fish here."

And the work has continued. Ice Harbor boasts two fish ladders, a juvenile fish bypass facility, and spillway weir, which allows juvenile salmon and steelhead to pass through more efficiently with less stress. There



**Fish ladders play a vital role in fish passage.**



**Navigation locks are 650x86 feet - a perfect fit for barges.**

are also meticulous fish counting processes in place to account for every adult fish that passes through the dam.

"We make a lot of decisions based on fish – what spillway gate to open next, equipment maintenance and repair, all of it," Michel said. "Every day – and I mean every day – we are working to improve fish passage."

Michel's pride in his workplace and his colleagues shines through as he strolls through the vast facility. He's confident that the Ice Harbor team, the USACE, and all other Columbia-Snake River dam operation and maintenance teams are critical to the safe functioning of these remarkable structures and the communities they serve.

"I'll take every opportunity to share what we do here," he said. "These dams serve everyone, whether they realize it or not. I'll tell that story to anyone who will listen."



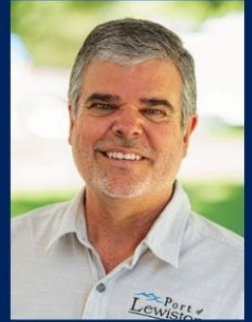
# Mission to Washington



*This spring, Port of Lewiston General Manager Scott Corbitt (right), Commissioner Joe Anderson (left), and Communications Coordinator Mary Iacobelli participated in the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association annual "Mission to Washington" event in Washington, DC. They met with members of Congress and their staffs to advocate for crucial topics such as navigation, energy, economic development, and other significant issues affecting the Pacific Northwest. The Idaho delegation specifically expressed their support for the Lower Snake River Dams and the larger Columbia-Snake River System.*

## The Eddy

Storytelling is an ancient art that has been a cornerstone of human communication for millennia. From cave paintings to modern-day novels, stories have shaped our understanding of the world, connected us to our past, and inspired our future. In today's fast-paced digital age, the impact of storytelling remains profound, influencing various aspects of our lives and communities.



**Scott Corbitt**  
Port of Lewiston  
General Manager

Recently, we had the opportunity to educate members of Congress

about our important priorities and issues. We even had the chance to lobby the White House and staffers at the Department of Interior/Bureau of Reclamation. While the general theme in Washington was one of uncertainty, we heard one point repeatedly: tell us impactful stories to make your point.

As we presented to a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Department of the Interior, he surprised us with his level of knowledge about the Columbia and Snake rivers. He knew the facts and data as well as we did about fish and dams, the Columbia River Treaty, and exports.

It was when we started telling stories about the impacts of dam breaching that he became more interested. We told him about specific challenges to Palouse farmers if they cannot barge their products to the export market. We told him about our near blackouts in January and July of 2024 that were prevented by hydropower. We told him about the danger to our local infrastructure and industrial intake and effluent, which would need re-permitting and reconstruction in a world where dams were removed. As we departed, this seasoned government official told us that these stories are what make a difference.

The Port has focused on the potential local impacts in our advocacy about preserving the dams. From testifying to Congress to meeting with the White House to partnering with the Dam Heroes Northwest Congressional delegation, our message has been clear: the folks at the eastern end of Marine Highway M-84 are not expendable.

Our newsletters tell the stories of the value the dams bring to our local communities. The Stout family's farming lifestyle at risk from potential dam breach. The City of Lewiston's Dustin Johnson who worries about the city's infrastructure in a world without dams. And Andy Michel, a Senior Power Plant Operator at Ice Harbor Dam, who LOVES HIS JOB bringing clean and renewable energy to the Northwest power grid and providing irrigation water to farmers. These narratives tell the story of the benefits of the Lower Snake River Dams, and they barely scratch the surface.

These dams create and support our local economy and lifestyle. For the past 50 years, our rivers have formed the lifeblood of our community, our family. Like any great family, we have our stories to tell. Those tales can make all the difference as we fight to preserve the dams. Don't be afraid to tell your story.

Ready, Set, Cruise!



Spring has taken firm hold on the LC Valley, bringing surrounding hills to life with vibrant color. The stage is set for the first American Cruise Lines passengers soon arriving at Idaho's only cruise boat dock. Pavers have been laid adding finishing touches on the site in anticipation. The dock, parking area, and bus turnaround represents Phase I of the Confluence Riverfront project, with Phase II, featuring an amphitheater and additional facilities, set to begin soon. Anchors aweigh!

## Commissioner Jerry Klemm Honored as 'Statesman'



At the recent Idaho Water Users Association's annual convention, Port of Lewiston Commissioner Jerry Klemm was surprised with the Water Statesman Award, which honors governmental officials for their efforts to protect the interests of Idaho's water users. Jerry, pictured right with Ruth Bailes of the IWUA, serves on the organization's Resolutions Committee. Congratulations, Commissioner Klemm!

## OUR VISION

The Port of Lewiston is a respected leader contributing to the region's economic growth and vitality: a model of excellence for transportation, international trade, and job creation.

## COMMISSIONERS



Pictured left to right: **Mike Thomason**, President; **Jerry Klemm**, Vice President; **Joseph Anderson**, Secretary/Treasurer

## OUR TEAM

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# Growth through Refined Focus



## Hells Canyon Armory

Mike Johnson of Hells Canyon Armory is the rare individual who can see the proverbial forest while also considering every part of the trees, from the leaves and branches to the seeds and soil composition. In the rifle business, he combines a keen eye for the overall market with careful focus on the minutest of details.

"For me, it's been a matter of identifying a need and providing a quality solution," said Johnson, who lives in the Genesee area with wife, Sarah and son, Augustus. "We focus on being the best at what we do."

HCA started as a custom rifle business in 2012 and in 2014 evolved to feature their top product, carbon rifle barrels, renowned for their accuracy and durability. Three years later, Johnson's expanding business led him to the Port's incubator program, which helps young businesses grow by providing structured lease rates.

"The Port provided a space at a price we could afford and grow with," said Johnson, who expanded into a second suite in 2021.

At the root of HCA's success is their high-quality product, born out of Johnson's search for better quality. When he found he wasn't satisfied with the carbon rifle barrels purchased elsewhere, Johnson and his team created their own method through trial and error. They now offer custom cut rifled carbon barrels, featuring their signature parallel and hybrid orientation fiber technology, to other builders seeking a premium product.

"When we can't find what we want, we build it ourselves," he said.

As a result, HCA's equipment ranges from a retro-fitted World War II-era rifling machine to modern CNC-controlled machines that fine-tune barrels to exacting specifications, down to the millionths of inches. Johnson stresses the need for quality over speed.

"We're not an assembly line," Johnson said. "We know what characteristics a barrel needs to have, and we take the time to do it right."



Clockwise from top left: Production Manager Cole Zacha carefully checks barrel land/groove measurements, ensuring they're within .0001 tolerance. Mike Johnson with a completed carbon barrel, and two rifle barrels in a "filament winding machine" that adds to the carbon's durability.