

# Camden Port Riding Wave of Growth

**By Athena D. Merritt, Staff Writer**

Last year, the Port of Camden handled a record 3.1 million tons of cargo. This year, the port is on track to match or do even better, said the South Jersey Port Corp., a state-sponsored agency that oversees the Beckett Street and Broadway terminals.

"As of August, the port is at 2.1 million tons of cargo, compared to 2.0 million tons of cargo last August. We're on pace to break last year's record. We are continuing that growth," said Port Corp. spokesman Jay Jones.

This month, a 30,000-square-foot warehouse was completed for Camden International Commodities at the Beckett Street terminal.

"That will help the growth we're experiencing to handle cocoa beans," Jones said. In 2001, more than 40,000 tons of cocoa beans were handled at the terminal.

A \$12.0 million bond issued two years ago also has helped to fund other projects to help bolster tenants, private businesses and public and private facilities that make up the Port Corp.'s network, he said.

"We are a partner of New Jersey. The bond comes from the state of New

Jersey. After profit, the state guarantees the difference. We are hip to hip with the state," said Joe Balzano, executive director of the Port Corp., of the bond.

The bond projects include \$28 million to build a pier and purchase a crane for St. Lawrence Cement, so the company can more efficiently transport a steel-making byproduct called furnace slag, which is used in manufacturing. The project, which started at the beginning of the year, is expected to be completed by spring.

Another building, at 53,500 square feet is being constructed to accommodate the growth of Del Monte Fresh Fruit, which ships more than 30 million cases of fresh produce annually. The project began in July and is expected to be completed by year's end, with a goal of boosting the capacity of cargo tonnage by 20 percent, Jones said.

The arrival of the Camden Shipping Corp., a minority and women-owned firm is also expected to present new opportunities for growth.

"I think anyone that gets involved with the Ports business, it will have an impact" Balzano said. "It depends, of course, on what their contracts are and what they can do. It seems that they are very aggressive in meetings I had with



them and with that kind of aggressiveness, I don't see them losing."

The firm, owned by Beverlyn Grissom, State Sen. Diane Allen and Michelle Bunting, plans to begin operations within the next year or earlier. The firm hopes to initially secure business providing layberth services for navy ships that are in reduced operating status and respond to military needs.

Grissom said opportunity also exists in the Port Inland Distribution Network, a system of moving cargo through the Port of New York and New Jersey by barge, rail and trucks to water-accessible points, such as Albany, to alleviate congestion.

"What we envision is creating a barge route ... to Camden," Grissom said. "This will create a number of jobs. There is an awful lot of talking, but no one is actually raising their hand to get the opportunity for the residents of Camden."