

Calling Port Manatee Home

In 1980, 10-year-old Port Manatee and its small staff were just beginning to grow. Two local boys in their early twenties, Michael Alligood and Bobby “Smokey” Bridges, were looking for a good job with good people.

Both found the opportunity they were looking for within five months of each other, practically in their own backyards at the youthful port.

Neither realized that 25 years later they’d still call Port Manatee home.

“We’ve had so many good times,” Bridges said in his familiar southern accent. “There’ve been plenty of hard times, but it was always fun.”

Like many of the seasoned staff members, Alligood’s affection for Port Manatee actually began as a child. “This land was my playground as a child,” Alligood said. “I grew up here and grew up with many of the people who work here -- Port Manatee was a part of me before it was even a port and has continued to be my home.”

Bridges, moving to this community when he was just three years old, also remembers the port when it was only a field. “It has grown so much,” he said.

While Port Manatee grew, so did its customers, staff and leaders. The once novice Alligood and Bridges are now experienced, diligent leaders. Alligood serves as the maintenance superintendent and project coordinator and Bridges is the grounds supervisor.

Despite their responsibilities increasing over the years, their work ethic has remained constant.

Bridges, a modest person by nature, is described by many, including Alligood, as someone who likes to have fun and would give you the shirt off his back. But when it comes to work, he wants to get it done.

Alligood describes himself as “detail-oriented” and “particular” and says his biggest challenge as a manager is delegating. “I loved getting my hands in there and doing the work, learning new things, and being physically part of the port’s operations,” he said.

“People like Michael and Smokey truly embody every advantage of working with Port Manatee,” said Executive Director David L. McDonald, PPM. “Our seasoned staff of professionals are experienced and know the industry, know every aspect of running a port, and offer a wealth of insight that continues to help us grow and improve.”

Even though a quarter of a century has passed, both men are determined to continue their careers with the port through retirement.

“We are family and the port is our community,” Alligood said. “Our new role is to help mold newer members of the family so that they can carry the port once we are gone.”

(This article was written by Chrissy Kruger-Gruendyke and appeared in the May-June 2005 issue of Deepwater, Port Manatee’s bi-monthly newsletter)