

# We're proud of Marinette's WMCOE

## OUR OPINION

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It was a long time in the planning and development stages, but the Wisconsin Maritime Center of Excellence (WMCOE) became a reality in our community Jan. 31 at impressive dedication ceremonies. Speaker after speaker stepped to the microphone and heaped praise on the magnificent structure of brick-and-mortar with a purpose of becoming a breeding ground for economic growth, based on its interior stockpile of technology, talent and spirit, to accomplish the mission.

The 23,715-square-foot edifice, five years in the making, reached fruition under the watchful eyes of the

Marinette County Association for Business and Industry (MCABI). Its main purpose will be to serve as a business incubator and to provide core surroundings for U.S. Navy personnel engaged in the development and construction of Litteral Combat Ships (LCS) at the nearby Fincantieri Marinette Marine shipyard. The sparkling new entity also will provide support for the potential of building other military vessels for the U.S.

and foreign countries.

Besides providing critical space for the Navy and its LCS program, the main goal of the MCABI is to lend a helping hand to individual and small businesses in their relationships with maritime businesses and to boost their advances toward becoming successful operations.

A \$6 million grant from the Wisconsin Building Commission helped launch the project back Dec. 11, 2013. The site chosen for the Maritime Center was nothing more than idle land for decades.

Gov. Scott Walker, who is getting to be a regular visitor to our city because of

the shipbuilding program and other economic development advances, was on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. He and State Rep. John Nugren of Marinette were key players in obtaining state funds for the startup. A boatload of other people were involved in the success of the Maritime Center maturation, many of them on hand for the dedication rites.

Gov. Walker made a strong point at the ceremony when he emphasized the Maritime Center is not just for Marinette, but for our regional neighbors.

"We need to have it not just in Marinette, not just with our neighbors across the way in Michigan and the U.P. and

all throughout this region," declared Walker. "We've got to have more young people getting excited and pumped up and worked up to take on the job market today. So this Maritime Center of Excellence is not just about area people, it's really about the whole state. We have great hopes, great plans for the future."

We believe the Maritime Center is already on course for great economic advantages for our region. We are proud to have it based in our community. We wish it and its leaders well as it sails toward bolstering economic development, not only in our region but throughout the state.