



## AAPA Lighthouse Award Project Highlight

### PORTraits



Port of Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, TX

## Project Overview

### PORTraits

Award Category: Excellence in Print or Digital Media Communications

Completion Date: 9/17/2025

Description: The PORTraits video series is an initiative by the Port of Corpus Christi designed to recognize and celebrate the employees who keep day-to-day operations running behind the scenes. By highlighting sub-managerial staff across departments, the series shifts the focus beyond executive leadership to showcase the diverse individuals who embody the Port's culture.

### Goals & Key Features

- Recognize and celebrate employees for their contributions
- Strengthen internal culture by fostering appreciation across teams
- Demonstrate the Port's inclusive and people-centered environment
- Share authentic stories that humanize the workforce for both staff and the wider community

### Impact

In the short term, PORTraits serves as a communication tool that enhances interdepartmental awareness, builds connections and reduces silos among teams. Over the long term, it provides leadership with insight into emerging talent while reinforcing strategic goals such as operational excellence, transparency and community trust. By focusing on "the people behind the mission," the series strengthens both internal cohesion and external perception of the Port of Corpus Christi.

## Inspiration

The inspiration for the PORTraits video series stemmed from the Port of Corpus Christi's commitment to shining a light on the people who often work behind the scenes yet play essential roles in the Port's success. While leadership and infrastructure projects typically draw the spotlight, the team recognized the need to celebrate sub-managerial employees whose daily efforts drive operational excellence. By capturing and sharing their stories, the Port sought to not only recognize these individuals but also build stronger connections across departments, foster a culture of appreciation and showcase the inclusive, people-focused environment that defines the Port's workforce.

## Challenges

One of the main challenges in planning the PORraits video series was ensuring authentic employee participation. Many sub-managerial staff were not accustomed to being in the spotlight and felt hesitant about sharing their personal stories on camera. To overcome this, the team created a supportive interview process emphasizing informal conversations rather than scripted responses which helped employees feel more comfortable and genuine.

Another challenge was coordinating production across multiple departments with varied schedules and operational priorities. The Port addressed this by working closely with department leaders to build flexible filming timelines that minimized disruptions to daily operations.

Finally, the team faced the task of ensuring the videos struck the right balance between professional storytelling and authentic representation. This was achieved by collaborating with communications staff who understood the Port's culture and could highlight both the individuals' personalities and their contributions to the mission.

Through these efforts the Port not only delivered a high-quality video series but also strengthened trust among employees, reinforcing the project's core purpose of recognition and connection.

## Lessons Learned

The PORraits video series highlighted the importance of investing in the people who keep daily operations moving. The team learned that authentic storytelling builds stronger internal connections and enhances external trust more effectively than traditional top-down messaging. We also saw that flexibility in planning is critical—adapting schedules to minimize disruption ensured greater participation and buy-in. Finally, the project reinforced the value of collaboration between communications teams, leadership and staff at all levels to capture voices that often go unheard.

For other ports, the key takeaway is that celebrating employees through authentic recognition not only strengthens organizational culture but also supports long-term goals like transparency, operational excellence and community trust.

## Value

The Port of Corpus Christi takes great pride in the PORraits video series because it reflects the heart of the organization—its people. By shining a spotlight on sub-managerial staff who often work behind the scenes, the project demonstrates a genuine commitment to recognition, inclusiveness and cultural strength. It celebrates employees not just for what they do, but for who they are, creating a deeper sense of connection across departments and with the wider community.

This project makes the Port proud because it goes beyond infrastructure and operations to show that success is built on people. PORraits humanizes the workforce, amplifies voices that deserve to be heard and reinforces the Port's values of transparency, appreciation and trust.

## Quotes

"There's a story behind every person – and at the Port we like to say, *our people are our most important asset*. This series allows a glimpse into the people who power the port and their personal interests and passions. It provides the audience an authentic perspective of their coworkers and what they

represent.”

— Pablo Schmitt, Videographer for Port of Corpus Christi

## Additional Information

### Future Plans

- Expand the series to include a wider range of roles across all departments.
- Integrate PORTraits into onboarding to help new hires learn about colleagues and workplace culture.
- Use episodes in leadership development programs to highlight communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- Encourage peer nominations so employees can recognize coworkers for their contributions.
- Develop an internal recognition platform where PORTraits can be paired with employee milestones or awards.

## Contact

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## Resources

Add any Links to videos or additional resources