

## **Geest in line for Portsmouth return for the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020**



***Captain Peter Dixon, managing director of Geest Line***

Eastern Caribbean shipping firm Geest Line is returning to Portsmouth two years after relocating to Dover.

The company moved its cargo handling operation to the Kent port due to scheduling difficulties at Portsmouth, which have now been resolved.

Geest Line's headquarters and its 32 staff remained in Hampshire and bosses say it makes logistical and business sense to return.

The company has been an exclusively Europe-to-Caribbean freight operator for more than 60 years, with weekly westbound sailings from the south of England and more recently the Netherlands.

Its fleet handles all kinds of general cargo from tiny perishables to large project machinery, both container and breakbulk, returning from the Caribbean with fruit, mainly bananas, for the UK and European markets.

Managing director, Capt Peter Dixon, said: "We left Portsmouth because of scheduling difficulties when we replaced our fleet with five larger and newer ships, increasing our capacity by 40 per cent.

"The port at Dover was able to accommodate us and enabled our business to continue and grow.

"But changes at Portsmouth mean it can now handle our larger and modified service and it makes sense to return.

"It has nothing to do with Brexit, but is simply a business decision and we intend to welcome our ships back to Portsmouth from January – two years after we left.

"We're grateful to the port and people of Dover and look forward to re-engaging with the port and people of Portsmouth."

Portico is Portsmouth's international cargo operator, a council-owned business which strengthens the city's global trade position.

It's located within Portsmouth International Port, the closest south coast port to main shipping channels.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, leader of Portsmouth City Council, said: "We're delighted to welcome back Geest to the city after securing a long-term contract.

"This strengthens Portsmouth's reputation for international trade and demonstrates the importance of investing in Portico, so it can provide a return on investment for the city and protect jobs.

"The wider Solent region will also benefit from Portico's growth, providing opportunities in the supply chain and also establishes the city's position as a serious industry competitor.

"We're now responsible for handling over 70 per cent of bananas coming into the UK, so the nation depends on Portsmouth to provide one of its favourite five-a-day.

"There can be no doubt about the city's position as the UK's major fresh produce port."

Steve Williams, Portico's operations director, said: "We're looking forward to working with Geest once again.

"Together we have been able to accommodate their requirements and also create stable foundations for existing contracts.

"Our partnership with Geest fits perfectly with our business ambitions. It's about making sure we have long-term, sustainable, agreements, investing in the right equipment and providing the very best for our customers.

"We have been through a significant restructure so we're confident we have the right resources in place. Industry has changed, it's less labour intensive but we now have a modern, efficient and capable team able to handle our customers' demands."