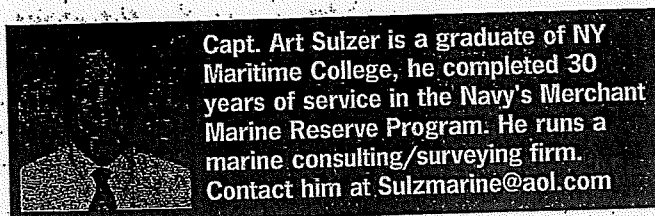


A Lighthouse Shines on Maritime Education



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Last month a light was lit at the MITAGS facility outside of Baltimore. This light illuminated the appalling graduation rates for many urban high schools. In the case of Baltimore, 60% of those attending 9th grade do not graduate from high school. This same light also illuminated a pathway through maritime education, to help those students losing their way to participate and graduate to a rewarding and meaningful career in the maritime field.

On April 2-3, 2008 a unique gathering of over 200 individuals came together at a Ship Operations Cooperative Program www.socp.us sponsored conference, "Maritime and Intermodal Education for Primary and Secondary Schools in America, Onboard to a Future Career". This group of individuals from government, industry and education gathered to learn about maritime education and to provide their knowledge and assistance to a small group of schools scattered around the country that are pioneering this initiative at the primary and secondary school level.

The spark that lit this conference off was provided by its keynote speaker, Congressman Elijah Cummings 7th District of Maryland who chairs the Congressional Sub Committee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. Congressman Cummings has been a big supporter of maritime education, and has a maritime high school in his district. His moving speech illuminated a national problem of low graduation rates from city schools. He stressed the need to expose students to the maritime careers at an early age. Educators have known that students in grades, 4th thru 6th begin to examine various careers, and begin to focus and take interest in courses and subjects that lead in that direction. Pitching a maritime career or program of higher education to a junior or senior is too late.

Following the Congressman's remarks, a plenary session was held on, "Mission Maritime/Intermodal Primary and Secondary School Programs" senior leaders from academia, industry and government spoke about this subject,

this group included VADM Joseph D. Stewart USMS Superintendent of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Tim Casey CEO of K-Sea Transportation, Katharine Oliver, Assistant State Superintendent, Maryland Department of Education, and Mr. John V. Ladd Administrator, Office of Apprenticeship, U.S. Department of Labor. They all echoed the Congressman's remarks, about the need to improve graduation rates, the shortages of skilled mariners, excellent wages and benefit the industry offers and the various programs their agencies or institutions have to assist the maritime schools. Casey mentioned that his company already has apprenticeship programs with maritime high schools in New York and Philadelphia, and urged other maritime employers to get involved with these schools.

In attendance were principals of 13 of the 18 primary and secondary maritime schools that have opened since 2001 when the movement started to grow.

The conference consisted of various workshops for participants and panelists to share ideas, these included such topics as; Curriculum Development, Maritime Training Assistance, Shipyard Apprentice Programs, Starting a Maritime Program, School Public Affairs and Marketing Your School to name a few. Also in attendance were individuals from cities that were considering starting maritime programs. Since the conference, this author has received calls from several cities that want to start programs this year; these include New Orleans, Houston and Detroit to mention a few.

In addition to the workshops exhibits were set up that offered products and services to assist in maritime training and all of the Maritime Academies as well as several union and community colleges that offer maritime training had representatives at their booths to provide information to the schools for their students about their programs.

There were several speakers from government and the private sector who spoke at various times throughout the conference about their agencies commitment to maritime education, these included RADM Jonathan W. Bailey Director NOAA Corp from the National Ocean and Atmospheric administration and RADM James Watson Director of Prevention Policy from the U.S. Coast Guard. A special speaker at lunch was Maria Brooks an independent film producer who has produced several award

winning films on the merchant marine, she showed a clip from one film "The Men Who Sailed the Liberty Ships" there were several moist eyes after that showing. I attendance were former Maritime Administrator VADM Herberger and former Congresswoman Helen Bentley.

The Maritime Administrator, Sean Connaughton, in a dinner speech, committed MarAd to working with groups such as SOCP and industry partners to develop model curriculum and courses that these maritime schools can use and to facilitate the further development of additional schools thru various outreach programs to be developed.

This author has attended many conferences, but this one was different in that there was a level of energy and passion for maritime programs and these schools that could be felt. This same feeling is what students and their parents in schools with maritime programs feel and helps them stay the course and graduate. Americans have a connection to the sea and our maritime heritage that needs to be reawakened. Comments often heard included, "what else can we do to help", "will there be another conference" and "how can I get a school started in my community".

This conference was a beginning, designed to bring together and connect individuals and institutions that have an interest and commitment to changing the level of awareness of this nation's rich maritime heritage, and the opportunities that a maritime education and career can offer. Change will not come overnight. Education can be a slow process and improving graduation rates in our cities will take time.

The editor of this magazine attended and participated in the confer-

ence. He has taken up the issue of maritime education and will be featuring articles from the schools and conference participants in future issues. A result of the conference is that MARAD, SOCP and others are forming a Maritime Education Consortium to work with educators and industry to provide resources, curriculum and courses for existing schools and future schools.

Many years ago our nation established and built a network of lighthouses in our seaports to guide mariners from the sea to a safe haven. This author hopes that a network of education lighthouses made up of committed organizations in our cities can be established to shine a light for urban students to find their way to a maritime education and career.

A graduate of NY Maritime College who holds MS in Management from SUNY Maritime, MBA Finance from HOFSTRA and is completing his Ed D at University of Pennsylvania with a focus on primary and secondary maritime education. Captain Sulzer completed 30 years of active and reserve service in the Navy's Merchant Marine Reserve Program. He is an actively sailing USCG licensed deck and engine, Master Mariner. A founding Board member of Maritime Academy Charter High School in Philadelphia, a middle and high school with 700 students that is maritime themed and career focused. He runs a marine consulting/surveying firm in Philadelphia that charters barges and marine construction equipment. Captain Sulzer was the SOCP Maritime Education Conference Chairman, and can be reached at Sulzmarine@aol.com



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