

Careers Afloat

Professions in the U.S. Merchant Marine.

by Ms. ANNE DOUGHERTY

Director of the Office of Maritime Workforce Development
U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration

Our nation has a large pool of highly trained licensed and unlicensed mariners, but the demand continues to outpace supply. Major recapitalization in practically every segment of the U.S. merchant fleet has created tight labor markets nationwide and drawn mariners ashore. Additionally, mariners are retiring or leaving the workforce due, in part, to the rising costs imposed on them to upgrade or advance their documents or to simply remain in a heavily regulated industry.

Sailing, whether in the deep sea, Great Lakes, or inland/river trade, is not for everyone. The physical labor involved in making and breaking an inland tow, or in mooring a 65,000-ton tanker, or tying up to an offshore drill rig is demanding, and the work is done without regard to time of day or weather. If your vessel is out of range of the cellular phone network, calling home is very expensive, if it can be done at all. And "What's for dinner?" is generally answered by "Dinner is what's on the menu."

Opportunities Abound

On the other hand, the opportunities at sea are almost unlimited. A young person starting at sea can be a skilled unlicensed mariner in a year afloat and a master (captain) or chief engineer in not much more than a decade. How far an individual goes largely depends on his or her drive and ability to learn. Plus, those who work afloat never have cause to complain about sitting at a desk from nine to five! Additionally, mariners on vacation usually have anywhere from

"Salaries are up and many seafarers are receiving multiple job offers. Employment opportunities are particularly robust in the offshore energy industry, the inland river system, and in the coastwise trades. The largest single employer of American mariners, the Military Sealift Command, is also aggressively seeking seafarers."

MARITIME ADMINISTRATOR SEAN CONNAUGHTON
U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration

two weeks to a few months off to pursue shoreside interests and spend quality time with their families and friends.

People who go to sea and stay at sea are a unique breed, so it's worthwhile to make every effort to retain them. It's also worthwhile to recruit more young men and women for what can be a very rewarding career afloat.

Getting Started

The U.S. merchant marine consists of privately owned, U.S.-registered merchant ships and a variety of towing, offshore supply, and passenger vessels that provide waterborne transportation for passengers and cargo. Employment on these vessels is the responsibility of the owners, and is handled by maritime labor organizations or through direct employment by the company.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

U.S. Department of Transportation
Maritime Administration
West Building
Southeast Federal Center
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590
(800) 996-2723

Office of Workforce Development
(202) 366-5737
www.marad.dot.gov

CAREERS



YOU'RE NEVER TOO YOUNG TO START

The Maritime Administration, through a joint effort with the Propeller Club of the United States, runs the Adopt-A-Ship program. The program is an effective way to inform young Americans about the maritime industry and the need for educated merchant marines, embracing not only the fleet of the ocean and the coastal vessels, but also those on the navigable rivers, lakes, bays, and sounds. Students gain maritime industry learning experience by communicating with ships via e-mail or written correspondence. They learn about the movements and the activities of the vessels at sea, which fosters interest in geography, history, transportation (foreign and domestic trade), science, math, and English.

Maritime programs are offered in various middle and high schools around the country. These programs provide rigorous academic programs with a focus on maritime studies, science, and technology. They also provide students the opportunity to enter maritime careers upon graduation or to pursue more advanced maritime education at a vocational school, community college, service academy, or maritime academy.

Contact the U.S. Department of Education or the Association for Career and Technical Education for information regarding maritime-themed schools. A list of high schools or associations with maritime-oriented programs can also be found at www.marad.dot.gov/aca-reerafloat/highschools.htm. See also related article in this edition.

While there is no requirement for graduates of such schools to enter the industry, the Maritime Administration expects these young men and women to have a good understanding of the rewards of a career afloat.

Part-time or summer employment is available in some sectors of the maritime industry, such as the passenger vessel industry. The level of seafaring employment is determined by the state of U.S. and world business conditions and improvements in ship technology.

Basic information on becoming a mariner can be found in the recently revised informational guide "Information Concerning Training and Employment in the U.S. Merchant Marine." It is available for free from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration. This guide provides information on shipboard employment and related maritime education and training programs. Primary shipboard employment categories include high seas, Great Lakes, inland and coastal waters, and offshore and mineral operations. Other areas of employment in the maritime industry include shipbuilding and ship repair, longshoring (cargo handling), port terminal administration, and intermodal logistics.

Getting the Word Out

Spreading the word about careers afloat is a challenging task. Most Americans have little exposure to the maritime industry. Informing the public about the opportunities available is one of the responsibilities of the Maritime Administration.

In cooperation with various partners, the Maritime Administration has produced public service announcements and supported research and various maritime careers programs. These programs are designed to raise the awareness of careers in the maritime industry and the important role these careers play in ensuring that our nation has adequately trained, reliable crews for our sealift support in times of peace and national emergency.

Improving Opportunities

These efforts come at a time when opportunities in the maritime industry are good—and improving. The demand for skilled mariners is high and the towing, passenger, and offshore operators are reporting shortages of mariners who are qualified and willing to work in these sectors of the industry.

Opportunities are also growing for U.S. mariners aboard LNG (liquefied natural gas) vessels. As the cost of petroleum soars and citizens pressure governments to encourage the use of cleaner-burning fuels, the future of importing liquefied natural gas has emerged as a major issue. Ports for LNG ships are now operating on the East Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, and more

are projected. The Maritime Administration has developed a voluntary deepwater port manning initiative to encourage the employment of skilled U.S. mariners to meet the forecasted demand.

Rapid growth in global trade has dramatically increased the worldwide demand for seafarers. Some industry associations estimate that the licensed officer shortage is currently at 10,000 and will grow as more ships enter the marketplace. This international demand provides new opportunities for U.S. mariners, but at the same time can attract U.S. mariners away from domestic employment.

The United States is currently the world's leading producer of third mates and third assistant engineers. This tremendous responsibility of graduating highly educated and skilled merchant marine officers is being successfully accomplished by, among other institutions, the six state maritime academies and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

The state academies and the Merchant Marine Academy graduate between 600 and 700 U.S. Coast Guard-licensed merchant marine officers annually. The number of graduates is steadily increasing, which replenishes the pool of new merchant mariners in the maritime industry. Many of the state maritime academies are expanding their campuses to accommodate the growth of their cadet population, but students need sailing time on working vessels to obtain the necessary licenses, and there are not enough opportunities currently available on U.S. ships. Consequently, the Maritime Administration has initiated a number of public/private agreements with various vessel operating companies, which have opened up new opportunities to cadets and active mariners aboard carefully selected foreign flag vessels.

A Maritime Nation

The future of our nation depends upon our ability to transport the goods and raw materials that are the lifeblood of our country's economy. The success of our nation's marine transportation system requires recruiting, training, and retaining professional mariners to ensure that our country's waterborne commerce flows with the highest levels of safety, security, and efficiency.

The United States has always been a maritime nation. To continue, we will need dedicated, high-quality people to sail the myriad ships, boats, barges, and other vessels that make up America's merchant marine.

About the author:

Ms. Anne Dougherty is the director of the Office of Maritime Workforce Development at the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration. She is a Texas A&M University at Galveston graduate and sailed eight years as a licensed deck officer aboard numerous commercial vessels. She subsequently spent six years working ashore for the U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command prior to joining the Maritime Administration.



Federal Service Academy

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
Kings Point, N.Y.
www.usmma.edu

State Maritime Academies

California Maritime Academy
Vallejo, Calif.
www.csum.edu

Great Lakes Maritime Academy
Traverse City, Mich.
www.nmc.edu/maritime

Maine Maritime Academy
Castine, Maine
www.mainemaritime.edu

Massachusetts Maritime Academy
Buzzards Bay, Mass.
www.maritime.edu

State University of New York
Maritime College
Bronx, N.Y.
www.sunymaritime.edu

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Galveston, Texas
www.tamug.edu

