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Champion's Point of View



By CAPT DAVID C. STALFORT
Commanding Officer

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Honor the Mariner

Mariners are essential elements of a safe, secure, economically efficient, and environmentally sound marine transportation system. Every time the National Maritime Center processes an application, provides information, completes an evaluation, produces and administers an examination, approves a course or an instructor, or prints a credential, a mariner is able to work. When mariners work, this nation's economy works.

In this edition of *Proceedings*, we focus on the mariner. Our intent is to provide readers with information to begin, continue, and advance a career in the maritime industry. We will also focus on the many ways the Mariner Licensing and Documentation (MLD) program serves the mariner—our customer. We can never forget that people's livelihood and the safety of others depends on all of us working together as a team to issue credentials to fully qualified mariners in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

The MLD program has taken audacious steps over the past several months to not only meet, but exceed mariner expectations throughout the credentialing process. With a renewed commitment to making significant improvements to the program, the momentum with the centralization efforts across the nation has started, and we are fully engaged. Several initiatives have already been accomplished using a three-pronged strategy of increasing throughput, reducing inventory, and improving quality, including:

- a "live person" help desk, toll-free phone number, and e-mail center established to assist mariners with their inquiries;
- capabilities for mariners to submit applications in electronic format, pay fees, and check the status of their applications online;
- electronic fingerprinting technology for processing criminal records checks, which has been employed by all of the Coast Guard's RECs since early 2005.

Mariners have told us that they want consistent results with an efficient program that produces credentials in a timely manner, at low cost. In just a few short months, we've already moved toward faster, more efficient operations and improved customer service, as evidenced by testimonials we've received from delighted mariners and marine industry representatives. Their comments are a sure sign that the centralization of the MLD program is working!

I would like to thank our dozens of authors and contributors, many who have worked with the National Maritime Center for years and have valuable first-hand "before and after" insights to share. We hope you will enjoy this issue of *Proceedings*, and, as a result, better understand our commitment to making the Mariner Licensing and Documentation program a world-class operation.