



Erika Amon, who works as a mate for McAllister Towing, monitors a towline from the bow of *Ellen McAllister*. A shortage of qualified mates is one of the most serious problems facing the towing industry.

Courtesy McAllister Towing and Transportation Co.

Training programs launched to counter shortage of qualified mates on tugs

by David Tyler

Professional Mariner Magazine - Journal of the Maritime Industry
Issue # 103 - April/May 2007 - Pages 62 thru 68 - Trends & Currents Article

New training programs are being created to meet the chronic shortage of qualified individuals for the tug and towing industry and to help unlicensed mariners become officers.

On the West Coast, Pacific Maritime Institute (PMI) has created a two-year, full-time program for those new to the industry interested in becoming officers. PMI is also offering a 20-week AB-to-mate program.

On the East Coast, the Global Maritime and Transportation School (GMATS) and McAllister Towing and Transportation Co. have created a two-year mate program that provides training to mariners while they continue to work. GMATS is the graduate and continuing education arm of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point.

The first six students started the PMI program in June 2006 and another class of 17 began on Jan. 1, 2007. The

first GMATS class began Jan. 29, 2007.

In addition, the Seafarers International Union has a 20-week program called Officer in Charge of a Navigational Watch to help seamen become mates. The training is conducted at the union's Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education in Piney Point, Md. The first class to complete this program graduated in December 2006.

Crowley Maritime Corp. graduated six employees from the Piney Point program in December and sent another six in February. Crowley will pay the cost of the course and provide some compensation to student employees, according to Tucker Gilliam, Crowley's director of marine crewing and development.

These new programs are all responding to an industry-wide shortage of qualified officers and entry-level mariners. In the past, officer vacancies would be filled by crewmem-

With the advent of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) and other requirements, it has become extremely difficult for mariners to come up the hawsepipe because of the formal classroom time and money needed for training.

"There has not been a clear pathway for people who once went the route of the hawsepipe without expending a lot of their own personal time and resources," said Chris Peterson, director of operations for Crowley Marine Services, the contract and harbor towing division of Crowley Maritime Corp.

The shortage of qualified mariners is causing operating problems for many companies.

"We have not had to tie up boats yet, but it has been close," said John Torgersen, quality and safety director for McAllister.

The towing industry "is facing a critical shortage of vessel personnel," said Dale Sause, president of Sause Brothers, in congressional testimony last year. "We are having difficulty in finding an adequate number of licensed individuals necessary to crew our vessels. We are having difficulty in



Alan Hahn Brown/Proton

Above, Phil Saltsman, a chief engineer with Crowley Maritime, describes the complexities of the engine room aboard the tug *Sea Cloud* to a group of Pacific Maritime Institute trainees. Right, Steve Cooke, a Crowley captain, explains the workings of *Sea Cloud's* anchor windlass.





attracting new people to the industry and convincing those who do begin employment aboard vessels to make their career on the water." Turnover at the entry-level is over 50 percent, Sause said.

This need for trained officers has not been fully met by the traditional maritime academies. On the East Coast, maritime academies "had not really been a steady source of mates for the commercial towing industry," said Torgersen.

On the West Coast, Pacific Maritime Institute has come up with a two-year program designed to recruit and keep entry-level personnel in the tugboat, towing and offshore sectors. The program is part of an overall PMI training effort aimed at these industries called The Workboat Academy.



Courtesy, McAllister Towing and Transportation Co.

The Global Maritime and Transportation School conducts classroom training for the mate trainees aboard a converted coffee barge provided by McAllister Towing.

The two-year mate program combines classroom time at PMI with sea time on vessels run by participating companies. So far, the following organizations will be taking on Workboat Academy students: Dunlop Towing, Sause Brothers, Crowley Maritime Corp., Foss Maritime, Harley Marine Services, Maritrans Inc., Vane Brothers, Sea Coast Towing, Western Towboat, Sirius Maritime LLC, Edison Chouest Offshore, Moran Towing Corp., and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Some companies will offer financial aid for the program, which costs \$27,000.

Students began the tugboat course on Jan. 17. The classroom training takes place at PMI's facility in Seattle, which includes a towing simulator with tug-specific equipment. Sea time is quite varied. A student in the January class will ship out on a tug towing two barges from Seattle through the Panama Canal to Louisiana, said Peterson. Another student could take an oceangoing tug from the Gulf of Mexico to Angola.

Page 64

Edison Chouest Offshore has 19 students starting in May. Unlike the GMATS program, the Pacific Maritime mate program is seeking students who are not already working in the industry. "We are not targeting high school kids," said Gregg Trunnell, PMI's director. "We are targeting the second-career dislocated worker and retired military. We want people who have been referred from another mariner." Current students include the son of a pilot, a former history professor and a retired Coast Guard officer.

Trunnell said one of the program's goals is to address problems with retention of entry-level mariners. "We need to build a very strong workboat mate with all the fundamental and technical skills to become a good officer," he said. "We need to focus on leadership and safety, and put systems in place to ensure that we will retain students."

Participating companies help screen students. Trunnell

Widely ranging ages and backgrounds

This January, 17 students from their teens to their 40s began a two-year mate's training program at Seattle's Pacific Maritime Institute. Their reasons for selecting this training are as varied as their ages and backgrounds.

For 19-year-old Thomas Montalvo it offers a way out of the tedium of his warehouse job in the small Washington town where he recently completed his secondary schooling. He is being sponsored by Dunlap Towing, which gave him the opportunity to make a week-long trip on one of the company's tugs to Southeast Alaska. The trip added to his ambition, and he is looking forward to a career that will be more exciting and pay much better wages.

For Dave Russell, who is in his forties, the decision to take the training represented

one more career change. At times he has worked in the computer industry and more recently in forestry and forest firefighting. Russell will now bring that maturity and experience to his next career. Russell is being sponsored in the program by Crowley.

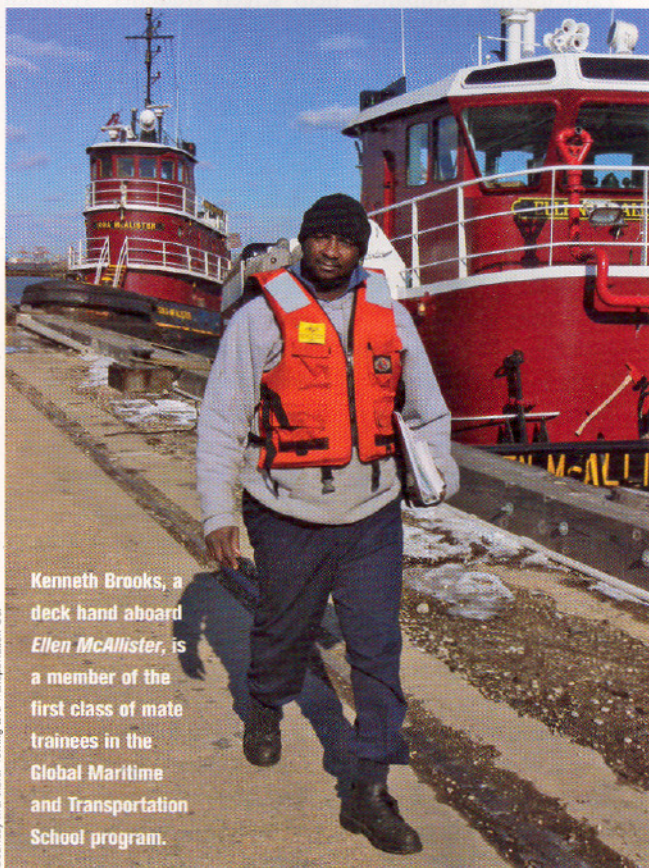
Francis Lozier from Eureka, Calif., is also in his forties and has been working on smaller boats for some time with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Now he has decided to take advantage of an NOAA sponsorship to go back to school and work his way up to a mate's position on one of the agency's larger vessels. He has taken PMI courses in the past, but this two-year program will mark his commitment to a professional maritime career.

Alan Haig-Brown



talks to all prospective students, who then interview with a representative of a participating company. If the company rejects the candidate, they're out, said Trunnell, although each candidate can talk to two companies. After acceptance, students complete a two-week orientation course at PMI. Then the students go to sea for two months. After that stint, if the company does not like the student, they're dropped from the program. "We want to make sure the people who stay are dedicated and in this for the long haul," he said. "We're making this very challenging." Trunnell expects to lose as many as 30 percent of the students in those first two months.

Once the two-month probationary period is finished, students alternate between 10 weeks of classroom time and four months of sea time. The students are not part of the billet, so



Courtesy McAllister Towing and Transportation Co.

Kenneth Brooks, a deck hand aboard *Ellen McAllister*, is a member of the first class of mate trainees in the Global Maritime and Transportation School program.

they won't displace other workers. But they will be trained in lookout skills and basic tasks. "We want them to work on deck. We don't want them to just watch," Trunnell said. PMI plans to expand this program in June at PMI's East Coast affiliate, the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies in Maryland.

Page 66

McAllister's Torgersen began thinking about the manpower problem two years ago after a company barge grounded in the Hudson River. Among the many factors contributing to this casualty, "one of the things we were concerned about was the level of professionalism amongst the marine crew," he said. It was Torgersen's sense that many people viewed their work as a job, rather than a profession.

With increased training requirements, McAllister was already paying for much of a mariner's education. So why not devise a program that recognizes work experience, provides on-the-job training and allows workers to get a two-year degree? "When you look at what we had for training, that's almost a college degree," said Torgersen. "The only thing missing is the general education subjects."

In addition to teaching skills, he continued, a degree program would help mariners understand that this field requires expertise, that they "had something to lose, that they were invested in this industry."

In November 2005, Torgersen called Kelly Curtin, manager of the Nautical Science Program at GMATS, and the two began working on a plan. "I thought it was a great idea," Curtin said. The two came up with a towing program that will allow mariners to earn an associate's degree.

Although designed for all companies, the first class, which started Jan. 29, consisted of just McAllister employees. Employees from another company, which Curtin could not name at press time, began classes in February.

All McAllister deck hands will be enrolled in this new program, which the company refers to as "Tugboat U," said Torgersen.

In the program's first year, students are taught nautical sciences, towing and safety. At the end of the first year, students take a seaman's aptitude test. Their score determines whether they continue with the two-year mate program. At the end of two years, students can sit for their 500/1600-ton mate's license and they will have a towing endorsement. They can also earn an associate's degree from American Military University, based in Charles Town, W.Va. An additional 30 credits of general education courses, which can be taken online, are needed for the associate's degree.

Rather than have students travel to a school, the program is designed so mariners can stay on the job. McAllister captains are being certified as instructors and teaching will occur on board the vessels. About 80 percent of the classroom instruction will take place on a barge moored at McAllister's Staten Island location. The barge was renovated for teaching. Some classes, such as radar, bridge resource management and electronic navigation, will be taught at Kings Point, since



these courses require an advanced simulator, Curtin said. The barge will include a classroom for 30 students and berths for students. Every month, students will show up for two days of classroom time before going aboard their vessels for their regular rotation.

“What makes this program unique is that it’s not a cadet program. It’s designed for guys who are working on the tugs that can’t really afford to take time off to go to school for two or three years,” said Curtin.

Torgersen said the company’s next goal is to run the program out of the Hampton Roads area of Virginia and Charleston, S.C., possibly cooperating with other companies. “We have a solution now that can work anywhere up and down the coast,” said Torgersen. “We have eliminated the travel time and the logistic difficulties of getting all the people to the training center.”

As students move through the courses, companies are making some changes. Crowley employees who finished the SIU Piney Point program talked about the challenge of the math sections of the course. From now on, Crowley employees will get a math refresher course prior to attending programs, said Gilliam.

Companies have to be planning now to cope with the training problem, given the time it takes to promote mariners.

“It’s a very daunting task that is facing us,” Gilliam said.

Crowley is also offering assistance to the traditional maritime academies in gearing the curriculum more toward industry needs, said Gilliam. Crowley’s senior leadership has identified employee recruiting and development as one of its top issues in the next five years. “We’re somewhere between one or two years behind where we would probably want to be, but we’re making up ground quickly,” said Gilliam. •

Page 68

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