



Dan Brazelton, a cadet in PMI's mate program, takes a turn on the school's tug simulator.

Bruce Bulis

Fast Track

New training program turns out a 500/1600-ton mate in two years.

BY BRUCE BULS, TECHNICAL EDITOR

Like many Gulf OSV operators, Edison Chouest Offshore is on a boatbuilding binge. Over the next few years, the Louisiana company will launch around 30 new boats. And with all this new steel in the water, the company will need lots of good deckhands, engineers, mates and masters.

However, like many Gulf OSV operators, Galliano, La.-based Chouest doesn't have a surplus of experienced mariners. Furthermore, "There aren't a lot of people coming into the industry with the qualifications they need," said Justin Getzinger, the company's national recruiter. "The big push for us is to

be able to have a good amount of qualified personnel coming into our company right towards the end of our big build program."

To help fill this need, Chouest has agreed to take 19 cadets from Pacific Maritime Institute's newly created Mate 500/1600 Tons Program.

The new two-year, Coast Guard-approved course will produce licensed mates trained at PMI's Seattle facility and onboard participating companies' vessels. Edison Chouest's cadets will begin their two-year training program next May.

The program's first class of seven cadets started this past June. The sec-

ond group will begin training in January.

Gregg Trunnell, PMI's director, said the program was developed with the encouragement and cooperation of a group of major West Coast tug-and-barge companies, including Sause Bros., Sea Coast Towing, Western Towboat, Crowley Maritime, Foss Maritime and Dunlap Towing.

FOUR PARTS

The two-year program is comprised of 25 weeks of classroom/simulation training and a minimum of 52 weeks of onboard training. It is divided into four phases. Phase 1 begins with two weeks of class at which the cadets learn survival skills and how to be a certified lookout. After that, they go to sea for two months on a company boat.

Then it's back to PMI to begin Phase

2 — eight weeks studying survival craft, terrestrial navigation/compasses, radar, firefighting, cargo handling and able seaman skills. Each PMI classroom phase concludes with two days in one of the school's two simulators.

Sea Phase 2 is 18 weeks, during which the previous classroom work is emphasized, followed by another seven weeks of classroom work (PMI Phase 3) that focuses on celestial and electronic navigation, meteorology, watch-keeping, ARPA and more simulation training. After that, it's back to sea for another 18 weeks (Sea Phase 3) before the final seven weeks of classroom work (PMI Phase 4) that covers ship construction and stability, GMDSS, first aid, search and rescue, emergency response, visual communication and basic shiphandling.

The final eight weeks of Sea Phase 4 is followed by a week or two of license

preparation and a week of Coast Guard exams. If the cadet successfully completes the shoreside training, logs the 52 weeks of sea service and passes the Coast Guard exams, he or she will be issued a Mate 550-ton Oceans or 1,600-ton Near Coastal license, receive a STCW-95 Officer in Charge of a Navigation Watch certification, and also have an AB Limited rating.

Working independently, according to PMI, a mariner would need about five years to get the same certifications.

Getting into the program is mostly a matter of attitude and aptitude. The prerequisites are a high-school diploma or equivalent, a Merchant Mariner's Document and a minimum age of 19. But most importantly, you must



Hands-on training is a big part of the PMI program.

Pacific Maritime Institute

demonstrate that you want a career in the workboat industry. "We're targeting second career, dislocated worker, retired military," said Trunnell. "We do not want people to 'find themselves' on a tugboat."

Beyond convincing Trunnell that they aren't looking to 'find themselves,' interested prospects must

exhibit a sincere interest in a maritime career. Then Trunnell tries to talk them out of it.

"I tell them all the horror stories I possibly can about the industry. They're going to get seasick, they're going to get beat up, they're going to be cleaning toilets even when they're an officer. You're going to be sharing a room. And when you think you're going to go home, all of a sudden you're going to be stuck at sea and all the plans you made are gone. You're going to think you're working six months a year, and the next thing you know you're working eight or nine months a year.

"And if I can't talk them out of it, they go to an interview with the companies, because a company has to accept them as a cadet."

SPONSORS

Each potential cadet must have a sponsoring company that provides a berth for the sea phases and pays them

\$845 a month while onboard. In addition, most companies have agreed to reimburse the \$24,000 tuition if the successful cadet stays with the company after getting the license.

Edison Chouest's deal with PMI is slightly different. The company won't pay for tuition but it will pay cadets \$150 a day during onboard training, which will total more than \$50,000 over the two years.

"Edison Chouest is paying wages as trainees," said Trunnell. "And it's very important to note here is that these are extranumeraries. They are not part of the crew compliment. Because companies are going to read this article and say, 'I need an ordinary seaman, I'll just grab one of these guys.' No. They are a trainee. A student observer. They do not fill a billeted position.

"However, Edison Chouest has positions for extras, and these people will be placed as extras and they will be paid, but it is not a billeted position. They are not part of the crew compli-

ment because the Coast Guard will not recognize onboard training if they are doing onboard work."

The companies can have them handle lines, wash dishes and do other jobs, but they cannot replace anybody normally on the crew.

Onboard training generally includes a Training Record Book and a Towing Officer Assessment Record. ECO cadets, however, won't need a towing endorsement, so that part of the program will be adjusted accordingly. ECO's focus is on finding good mates to work on its Gulf of Mexico OSVs.

Getzinger said ECO and its captains are ready to make the program work.

"I've spoken with some of our captains, and they are very ready to accept this," he said. "The reason being is that a set, regimented program like this is going to allow individuals to get the training they need, to learn the leadership skills they need. If there's some uniformity that we can put into the fleet, they're very ready to accept that,

especially the company.

"This will allow us to increase the quality of wheelhouse personnel. And as far as the old birds on the vessels are concerned, the majority that I've spoken to look forward to the training. Some of these guys have more knowledge than any of us could ever want working on vessels, and they are ready to share it."

So far, the cadets are happy to get the training and are working hard to succeed. One of the cadets, a military veteran, said the program is more rigorous than anything he's ever done. "The military is more like high school than this," he said.

Another cadet said, "The program is extremely fast paced. You definitely have to be on your toes, you can't be spacing out and staring at the walls. You have to be self-motivated."

A third cadet has a bachelor's degree in history but said the material being taught at PMI is more demanding than his college work. "The courses aren't



The mate program alternates at-sea training with intensive classroom study.

subjective," he said. "Either you know it or you don't. You have a voyage plan or you don't. It's not interpretive."

Trunnell is pleased with the accessibility of the program. "The beauty of it is that we can now target somebody who doesn't have the means. You can get a loan, pay \$10 a month to maintain

that loan, and then get the company to pay it back."

Trunnell also knows that the program's real success won't be realized for several years. "The future of the program will be the retention of our students. Finding the right people is everything."