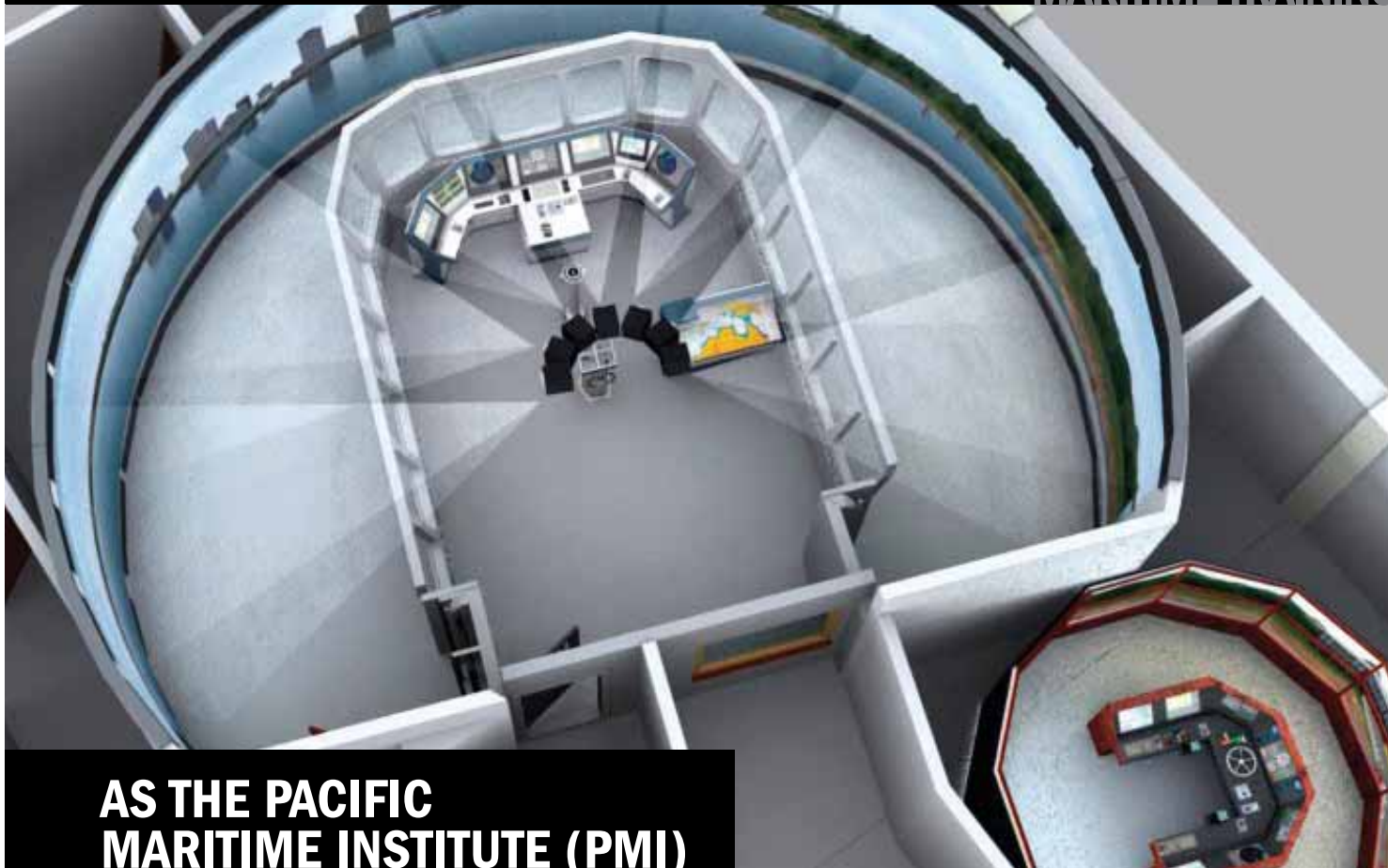




PACIFIC
MARITIME
INSTITUTE'S
WORKBOAT MATE
(500 / 1,600 TONS)
PROGRAM
PUTS OFFICER
CANDIDATES
ON THE
FAST TRACK

Partnering With Industry, PMI Provides
the Solution to Recruitment &
Retention Problems

By Joseph Keefe



AS THE PACIFIC MARITIME INSTITUTE (PMI)

GOES ABOUT ITS DAILY BUSINESS OF TRAINING AND CATERING TO A WIDE RANGE OF MARINERS, THE MARITIME COMPANIES WHO SEND THEIR PERSONNEL TO PMI ALL SEEM TO HAVE A COMMON COMPLAINT. THEIR DISSATISFACTION HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION BEING PROVIDED BY THE PREMIER PROFESSIONAL MARITIME TRAINING FACILITY ON THE U.S. WEST COAST. INSTEAD, THE UNIVERSAL – AND VERY SERIOUS, ACCORDING TO MOST OFFSHORE SUPPLY, SALVAGE AND TOWING FIRMS – PROBLEM FACING TODAY'S EMPLOYER OF MARITIME PROFESSIONALS IS THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALITY OFFICERS AND RATINGS.



BEYOND BELLYACHING: DEFINING THE PROBLEM

The United States Coast Guard regularly tracks the numbers and demographics of the credentialed U.S. mariner pool. According to figures published by the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center in October of 2006, the total population of credentialed mariners stands at almost 210,000. That's up a whopping 8.7%, or 16,800 mariners, since 2001. STCW-qualified mariners increased at an even



faster rate, almost doubling the certification numbers in 2001, the last year when STCW was not a mandatory requirement to go to sea.

Despite all of the seemingly good news, offshore companies, tug and tow operators and a host of other firms involved in the 500 to 1,600-ton vessel markets are experiencing marked difficulties in attracting and keeping quality officers. This is because the full array of talent which comprises the 500 / 1,600-ton Mate and Master component of credentialed mariners is just 5% of the total population, and the numbers are shrinking. Last year alone, 215 Mates and Masters disappeared from the employment picture with seven of the eight 500 / 1,600-ton license classifications showing losses or remaining essentially static. The only license classification to show gains was the 1,600-ton Masters' group, and this was largely a function of unlimited tonnage Mates sitting for the extra endorsement.

PMI says that they are here to service the maritime industry – the offshore and towing industry, in particular. Gregg Trunnell, Director of PMI, doesn't need to read statistics to tell him what he's known for a long time: the hawse pipe option for the upwardly mobile mariner is virtually gone. Uniquely positioned to get firsthand feedback from his clients, Trunnell also has his finger on the pulse of his target market. Together with Captain John Scragg, PMI's Training Director, Trunnell has listened to the calls for a viable solution to what is now a full-blown manning crisis in the tug, salvage and offshore markets. What they've developed in response is the most innovative and collaborative officer training program to be introduced in

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this country in more than a century.

INTRODUCING THE SOLUTION: INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Millions of dollars have been spent to ensure that PMI's brand new, two-year Workboat Mate Program has the best possible equipment and course curriculum. The multi-million dollar, interactive, 330-degree Full Mission Tugboat Simulator is an important part of the new curriculum, but only one of many unique components of this new and exciting training vehicle. Trunnell says, "None of this is possible without the support of our clients. This is a partnership – and perhaps this is the most important part of what sets PMI's Mate Program apart from all the others. Partnership, collaboration, call it what you want: It adds up to a happier seaman and a happier employer."

PMI's industry collaboration debuted in June of 2006 with a class of seven cadets and marine operators Dunlap Towing, Seacoast Towing, Sause Brothers and Western Towboat. The second class, now increased to 18 cadets, is set to kick off in January with other industry players joining in, notably Foss Maritime, Crowley, Sirius Maritime and Harley Marine Services. PMI will be running another two-year program in May 2007 for Edison Chouest Offshore (ECO). ECO is relying on PMI to recruit, train and provide 19 workboat mates in 2009. Some of the ECO billets provided to PMI will also be used to "fast track" certain of their entry-level mariners into the wheelhouse. The cadets, coming from all over the country, stay with the same company for the full two-year program. The work platforms are as varied as the students themselves. Some work on West



Coast to Hawaii runs or perhaps from the West Coast to Alaska, usually involving barge and tow or OSV operations.

PMI's partner / sponsor companies are deeply concerned about recruiting and retaining qualified and motivated talent. It's a serious issue, and they are serious about addressing it. The program represents a viable alternative for prospective students who do not have the resources or time to attend a four-year academy. By focusing on "what it takes to be a good mate," PMI students become fully qualified and licensed 500 / 1,600-ton Mates in two years.

PMI'S WORKBOAT STUDENTS: CADETS AND OFFICER CANDIDATES

John Scragg says that the initial idea of the program was to attract individuals who were motivated and wanted to go to sea. Unlike the traditional four-year programs, PMI isn't interested in the 17- or 18-year olds who make up the bulk of the maritime academies' freshman classes. Gregg Trunnell says, "A good percentage of these kids don't necessarily know what they want right out of high school, and we are not looking for people to 'find themselves' on a workboat. Additionally, they can't get their license before the age of 21, so the minimum starting age of this program is 19."

PMI is targeting three groups for the program: second-career persons, the dislocated worker and retired military. There's also the younger cadet – not just out of high school, but a couple of years down the line, more mature, somewhat sure of where they want to go. PMI's officer candidates don't necessarily want a degree; in fact, some already have one. All were prepared to pay the \$27,000 to go to school for two years while their company sponsors pay only a cadet stipend of \$845 per month for their participation on board. In this way, the PMI Mates Program is unique to the tug and workboat industry: companies sponsor "cadets" in an effort to train and retain good talent. Retention and brand loyalty will hopefully be the key down the road.

After firmly defining PMI's goal of recruiting a diverse, mature student body that is first and foremost focused on going to sea, MarEx asked: who are PMI's students? As it turns out, the demographics of the first class are as varied as their commitment to starting and continuing a career at sea is strong. They include a history teacher, movie cameraman / editor, tugboat shipyard worker, son of a port captain, son of an owner of a tugboat company and the son of a marine pilot. In essence, none has any formal or significant seaborne training. PMI is taking all of them from ground zero – just like, for example, the maritime academies – with a key difference: PMI focuses on a different demographic than what the academies target.

The philosophy at PMI is that anyone serious enough to spend two years in the program is probably serious about going to sea. If they are serious about both components, then there's a good chance they'll stay at sea for a while. Companies need good people, good people who want to stay.

While there is a commitment to hiring these people at the end of the program, PMI doesn't make any promises to the people who apply or enter the Mates Program. Instead, this unique curriculum fosters a familiarity between the sponsor company and the cadet. The company, which has been involved in training a cadet on one or more of its vessels for two years, is probably going to want to keep him or her around once they get their ticket. On the other hand, both have the option to say good-bye. That being said, all of the West Coast company partners have agreed to repay the majority of tuition at the end of the program. For every year that a graduate works for the company, the company will reimburse one-third of the tuition. This is just one more incentive that the PMI Program Advisory Committee (comprised of the companies taking PMI cadets) has put in place to focus on retention.

SOLVE THE PROBLEM: BENCHMARK THE SOLUTION

The Workboat Mates training curriculum is primarily Captain John Scragg's labor of love. Scragg comes from the British regimen, where the cadets spend a great deal of time at sea prior to earning their first license. They also focus more on the maritime aspect of learning and less on academics. In the British system, a cadet will spend two years at sea during a four-year period, whereas the typical U.S. mariner can spend as little as six months during that four-year time span.

A large component of Scragg's life and professional experience is directly reflected in how the Mates course is run. It differs in many ways from that taught at U.S. maritime academies – and the differences are intentional. To be fair, says Scragg, "While a good deal of how we do things here incorporates much of the British system of training, we looked at programs from around the world, as well as here in the United States, and incorporated the best of all of them."

The two-year program involves time at PMI and time spent working onboard vessels. It's a full-time program, whether the students are in class or at sea, with a total of at least 360 days clocked onboard the vessel and six months of actual class instruction time. Curriculum is necessarily tied to U.S. Coast Guard requirements, but the program exceeds USCG training standards in many aspects. John Scragg says, "The initial planning process included quite a bit of back-and-forth discussion during the formulation stages of curriculum development. It wouldn't be fair to say that this is the first program of its kind in the country, but it may very well be the first to get companies excited about a real recruitment option."

It is important to first define the differences between PMI's approach to officer training and that of other schools. Back in 1980, for example, the Massachusetts Maritime Academy offered just two majors: deck and engine. A graduate came away with a Bachelor's degree and sat for a



COMPANIES NEED GOOD PEOPLE, GOOD PEOPLE WHO WANT TO STAY.

Third Mate or Third Engineer license. Hopefully, the graduates went to sea – at least, that was their focus. Since then, Mass. Maritime and, indeed, all of the other academies had to change in order to survive. As the seagoing billets went away, there needed to be other training specialties, which have the marine component but not necessarily the license component. These fine academies have also gotten much more focused on academics, which really isn't what the PMI program is all about. PMI's Workboat Mate Program is a focused trade program.

According to PMI's own course syllabus, the program is specifically designed for the entry-level person interested in becoming an officer. It is comprised of 25 weeks of classroom / simulation training and a minimum of 52 weeks of onboard training, which will be documented in a 'Training Record Book.' Segmented into four distinct phases of instruction, each consisting of time at sea and classroom learning, the program culminates with a supervised license preparation seminar followed by exams given by the U.S. Coast Guard.

THE CURRICULUM: FRONT-END LOADED = BACK-END DIVIDENDS

Phase 1 of the Workboat Mate (500/1,600 Tons) Program involves two weeks of indoctrination, during which the new officer candidates come in to talk about watchstanding, how the program works, and what's expected on the boat. The sponsor-company representatives also come in at this time to discuss their policies, safety, etc. Says John Scragg, "We want them, first and foremost, to be safe. And, really, what will a history teacher know about safety on his first day at sea? Not much." The initial, Phase 1 safety orientation is evolving every day. During the first week of the January 2007 program, for instance, Western Towboat and Crowley Maritime Services are going to provide harbor tugs for a day of orientation on the water.



Sea Phase 1 closely follows the PMI Phase 1. Cadets will need eight weeks of sea time during this phase, and PMI gives them about 12 weeks to get that done. In theory, there's time for a break as well. The cadets will take their sea record and training book with them, through which they'll need to demonstrate seamanship, steering the boat, securing cargo, standing a watch, etc. All of this needs to be signed off while at sea.

Every sea phase reinforces what was learned in the classroom. There is company feedback on each cadet. There's even a formal name for it: the Program Advisory Committee. Specific tasks, such as taking on fresh water, for example, are also targeted. The training book contains a module, which matches up to every single one of these tasks and then serves as an assessment tool as well.

The initial eight-week sea phase also has another purpose. Deliberately front-end loaded, it helps identify those who may not like going to sea. Maybe an individual gets really seasick, or they decide that "this just isn't for me." The opportunity to figure this out, early in the program before a large financial outlay has been made, is critical. From the sponsor-tug company's point of view, this also occurs before the real investment in an individual through a designated billet has been made. This is the probationary phase, where PMI and its sponsors are looking at washing



Mates License and AB Limited

CADETS WHO STAY WITH THEIR SPONSOR COMPANIES AFTER FINISHING THE PROGRAM WILL HAVE THEIR TRAINING LOAN PAID OFF OVER A THREE-TO-FIVE YEAR PERIOD.

U.S. Coast Guard Exams	1 week	2
License Preparation	1 week	
Sea Phase 4	8 weeks	Y
PMI Phase 4	7 weeks	
Sea Phase 3	18 weeks	E
PMI Phase 3	7 weeks	
Sea Phase 2	18 weeks	A
PMI Phase 2	8 weeks	R
Sea Phase 1	8 weeks	
PMI Phase 1	2 weeks	S

out unsuitable candidates. Gregg Trunnell points to Kirby Inland Marine’s training models and says, “We very much like the Kirby model, whereby they have approximately 30% retention from their students in the program and 90% retention from the graduates.” Trunnell went on to say, “Everything we are doing is based on retention strategies.”

In September, PMI’s first class of Workboat Mate cadets returned from their first taste of sea. Scragg says, “We don’t expect that everyone who starts this program will finish it. But we do want to identify early on who is well suited for a career at sea and, if they are not, then they can move on and we can get another individual into an available slot.” He adds that they’ll get most of their money back if it’s not for them.

Perhaps the most important reason for the timing of the initial sea phase involves PMI’s maritime partners, the employers. For their part, the sponsor companies are trying to identify people within their own firms – at sea – who are the best suited to train the cadets during the seagoing mode. Perhaps Gregg Trunnell puts it best when he says, “We’ve all been on ships where the guy above you had absolutely no interest in bringing you along through the ranks. This program at least aims to be different in that regard. A ship can be an unfriendly place and these are, relatively speaking, small boats. Finding a good match for the cadet is an important part of the program.”

THE KEY LINCHPIN: GUIDING AND ASSISTING THE CANDIDATE

It is a fact that STCW requirements, implemented at the beginning of this decade, changed significantly how an AB could hope or aspire to become a Mate. Before that, it could be done by achieving the applicable sea time, taking the necessary radar training and passing the Coast Guard exams. Today, a total of twenty weeks of specific course work is required, including firefighting, flashing light, GMDSS, etc., costing as much as \$18,000. All of this and more, of course, is included within the PMI Mates course. If, however, an established AB already possesses the necessary sea time, then all he or she would need is the STCW training and passing of the test. In this case, the PMI Mate class might not be the best option, and PMI therefore offers a twenty-week program for these individuals.

On the other hand, for those who haven’t gotten their start already, the PMI program is not only a fast-track solution to a career at sea, it’s also a verifiable bargain in terms of both time and cost. With PMI, it’s a two-year program in which the candidate is fostered and guided through the documentation process. On your own, the road to a license could take five years or more, navigating what can be a very difficult paper shuffle.

As the option of trying to become an officer through the hawse pipe route becomes increasingly more difficult, PMI has sought ways to enhance the appeal of its nascent training program and methods. While all of this is not without cost, John Scragg points out that “We started off with the idea that individuals would pay, and we still like that idea because it shows commitment.” He went on to explain that PMI has a loan program available through a Sallie Mae company and portions of PMI’s program are also approved for the GI Bill. As noted earlier, sponsor companies have introduced a program whereby cadets who stay with their sponsor companies after finishing the program will have their training loan paid off over a three-to-five year period. Edison Chouest is even paying wages and creating billets for PMI trainees. “It’s a great incentive,” adds Scragg.

Not everyone who applies to the program will be accepted. There are still interviews to be taken and merchant mariner documents to be obtained, drug tests and physicals to be passed. Each candidate will need a Z-Card (MMD), which requires a drug test and a background investigation, as well as a current passport and high school diploma or GED equivalent. The interview process includes a meeting with Greg Trunnell and an interview with the company which will sponsor their cadet billet.

ON THE HORIZON: MORE INNOVATION TO COME?

The possibilities for PMI and the program are endless. For example, two or more classes in various stages of completion could be scheduled for the school – one at sea and the other ashore. But John Scragg says that this type of scheduling has its limitations because of the cyclical nature of the tug and workboat businesses and the small circle of companies currently involved in the program. In theory, though, if the demand were there, the scheduling of multiple classes, each staggered to coordinate alternating sea and



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PLATFORM SUPPLY VESSEL**



**US NAVY (LCS)
USN LITTORAL COMBAT SHIP**

**USCG 87' CPB
COASTAL PATROL BOAT**



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class phases, could be done.

At this point, Scragg and his partner Gregg Trunnell say that they have a cadet for every slot available and more banging on the door. PMI's next class starts in January 2007 with 18 cadets enrolled and scheduled to participate. The only limits on this innovative and exciting program are the number of sponsoring companies willing to put a cadet on board. Gregg Trunnell takes it a step further when he says, "The future of this program will hinge on our ability to demonstrate to the workboat industry that this program is a viable source of quality mariners. If we do this right – and we are – then there is no reason that a new graduating class of qualified and competent workboat officers can't enter and remain within the industry every six months."

Meanwhile, PMI's parent and partner training facility on the East Coast is building its own Full Mission Tug Simulator. The Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies (MITAGS) will very soon emulate the new training program that PMI already has in place. It is an exciting time at both institutions.

The two-year, \$27,000 (at 2007 tuition prices) program will eventually lead to jobs which pay as much as \$102,000 annually, as Master of a 1600-ton work platform. Although there was no consultation with the U.S. Maritime Administration on this cutting-edge training scheme, the Workboat Mate Program fits in well with MARAD's desire to foster mariner retention and availability.

There will be more innovations to come from PMI. Still in the development stage, but very much on the minds of Captains John Scragg and Gregg Trunnell, is the possibility of starting up a three-year program to turn out Unlimited Third Mates. The program would be done in conjunction with another maritime training academy, Seattle Maritime Academy (SMA), combining PMI's Two Year Program with SMA's one year "deck technology" component. The Coast

Guard, according to Scragg, has said that this would be favorably regarded, depending on the makeup of the course curriculum.

Taking a license route which spans just three years instead of the four needed at the traditional academies may be an attractive alternative for those not necessarily interested in a four-year degree – or, in other words, the non-traditional student. The question to be answered is whether there is really a need for this product. The other academies already crank out hundreds of Third Mates each year. Scragg says, "The advantage of this program is that it gives students options along the way. A particular individual might choose to stop after getting his AB's ticket and decide to sail for a while. Then he or she could return at a later time to complete the program. MSC and / or NOAA could very well be PMI's best future customer."

THE CULTURE OF CHANGE

The final component of the PMI Mates Program involves changing the mindsets of the crewing managers at the off-shore logistics, towing and salvage companies. Everyone knows that the process of taking the guy out of the bayou, putting him on the boat and bringing him up in the system from roustabout to mate to captain is a long, arduous task. During that period, the typical seaman will switch companies three or four times, motivated by pay and work conditions. In actual practice, then, it translates into repeating the process over and over again, sometimes with no back-end payout for these firms. As a new generation of sophisticated equipment starts to be introduced to the industry, so too must a new way of recruiting, training and retaining mariners.

Achieving brand loyalty from mariners who traditionally have little or none must become a priority. Already the quality and character of the so-called brown water or lower tonnage mariner has improved greatly in the past decade. STCW has had a lot to do with that – and PMI's Mates Program could be the next building block to bring this part of the marine industry into parity with deep-sea mariners – and perhaps even exceed that standard. As PMI has already shown, it is possible to do this in a cost-effective manner, allowing less-affluent candidates to aspire to a wheelhouse view of life at sea and to work at jobs and companies they love.

PMI aims to change a lot more than the way the workboat officer is trained. Trunnell points to the U.S. trucking industry, where a workforce of 3.1 million drivers experiences as much as 140% turnover. Workboat employers can no longer afford to lose their seasoned mariners on a similar scale. Through PMI's Workboat Mate Program, Trunnell says, "We have an opportunity to change the culture of the tug and barge and brown water officer." As their innovative officer training program gets underway, there's little reason to doubt and every reason to believe him.

MarEx