

Mate-Training Program Provides Opportunities for Young People and Fills a Growing Need for Towing Companies

A little over a year ago, **Michael Mann** was in career limbo.

He spent two years at the University of Hawaii but got island fever and wanted a change. Becoming an officer in the maritime industry looked good to him, but he didn't want to take the four-year academy route.

And then his dad saw an ad for the Pacific Maritime Institute (PMI) in Seattle, and everything changed. Today, the 21-year-old Anacortes, Wash., resident is enrolled in a two-year PMI program that will land him a workboat mate's license in January, 2009. In conjunction with the program, he's accumulating the required sea time as a deckhand with Foss.

"Without this program, I wouldn't have taken the step forward or known how to start," Mann said recently before going about his chores on the *Emma Foss* in Seattle. "I was trying to find a path, and this is exactly what I was looking for."

The mate program — offered by both PMI and by the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies in Maryland — aims to help fill a shortage of workboat deck officers that has grown more serious since federal training requirements were tightened in 2002.

The shortage has been aggravated by growth in the industry, much of it in the offshore supply sector, and by an aging current group of deck officers near retirement, according to **Gregg Trunnell**, PMI Director.

"With the new federal standards," he said, "someone who wants to be a mate following the traditional route would have to work about seven years and have 20 weeks of classroom training costing \$20,000, and individuals see that as too daunting."

But the regulations also provided other pathways, including maritime academies or an approved training program linked to just one year of sea

time, which is the niche that the PMI mates program is filling.

"We see the PMI program as an important way to add deck officers," said Foss Human Resources Vice President **Gil Graham**. "It provides great opportunities for the cadets and fills an important need for the industry."

Applicants must have a high school diploma, its equivalent, or must pass writing, reading and math tests. They also must have a merchant mariner's document, a passport and be at least 19 years old. (Cadets at PMI currently range from 19 to 48 years old.)

Successful applicants are paired with one of a number of workboat companies, including Foss, that are supporting the program. Among other supporters are Sause Bros., Dunlap Towing and Crowley Maritime. (Foss Marine Transportation Vice President **Bruce Reed** is on the PMI Program Advisory Committee.)

If the cadet successfully completes initial phases of the program, he or she becomes an employee of the company and begins a sequence of classroom training periods and sea time.

The first class of six cadets started in June 2006, and Mann entered with the second, numbering 16, in January 2007. He soon embarked on a trip through the Panama Canal to Massachusetts delivering a new Dolphin-Class tug and another tractor tug to Foss subsidiary Constellation Maritime.

Foss has committed to taking two more cadets from the program beginning in January, when 24 are scheduled to start.

The growth of the program has dispelled what used to be a common notion in the industry — that not many people are interested in careers in the wheelhouses of workboats. Trunnell said PMI followed the example of the trucking industry, which



Foss Cadet **Michael Mann** has been working as a deckhand on the *Emma Foss* while training for a mate's position.



Cadets practice with sextants as part of their training at Pacific Maritime Institute. Those in the photo will work for companies other than Foss.

uses the internet to recruit more than a million drivers a year.

"Go to Google and type in tugboat and we're right there," he said, noting that the "huge" number of hits on the PMI web site more than offsets the \$1,500 a month cost of the Google ad.

"The number of people who want to be in this industry is impressive," Trunnell declared. "All we had to do was put the tools in place for them to get there."

For more information, go to workboatacademy.com.