

WORKING WATERFRONT

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Sweating on the Salish

INSIDE:



ON THE WATER, A STUDENT FINDS THEIR FOOTING

BY AVE ARROYO

My name is Ave and I'm a junior at Port Townsend High School, but I am also a junior attending the Port Townsend Maritime Academy. Being a student at PTMA has had so many benefits and I can safely say that I'll never forget the year I've spent learning all it offers to teach me.

Port Townsend Maritime Academy is a West Sound Tech extension right at the heart of our home port, it allows for juniors and seniors from high schools around the region to learn all things maritime; from wooden boat-building, to wilderness first aid, to seamanship skills such as sailmaking and using a marlinespike.

Each and every skill taught in PTMA will ultimately follow the students into adulthood. It may be a class about maritime, but one of its greatest attributes is its ability to teach us how to survive out in the world in every situation.

The program offers different career opportunities and treats its students as if they were in a professional atmosphere. We are able to choose and vote on what we want included in our curriculum. We also work on career-building tools, such as interviewing and constructing a resume. We also have the privilege to earn real credentials that will help us enter a wider range of careers in the future.



Port Townsend Maritime Academy student, Ave Arroyo, maneuvers Northwest Maritime's sturdy rowboat 'Ruby' through the choppy water after accepting a challenge to row a vessel while navigating the waves during a small craft advisory. Photo by Chrissy McLean

There is no average day in PTMA, because each day is different. We could be in the classroom with a project or learning about a new job opportunity, the next day we could be out on the water doing MOB (man overboard) drills or putting our skills to use on a Northwest Maritime sailboat (my favorite is Kai Lani, lots of freeboard but very cozy to sail on). So far we have been on several rowing, sailing and motor vessels, learned how to pay attention to detail and stay alert by learning 'rules of the road' out on the water as well as traditional navigation and we've had quite a bit of sea safety practice.

Recently we spent a week learning from the Washington State Ferries crew members aboard MV Salish, our very own Port



Retired Coast Guard officers instruct Port Townsend Maritime Academy students on safe dismounts from the dock in survival immersion suits during the AMSEA (Alaska Marine Safety Education Association) course in the 'Safety at Sea' unit. Photo by Winston Canfield

Townsend/Coupeville ferry. We were able to witness work on the car deck, passenger deck, engine room and even the pilot house.

This was just one of the many opportunities PTMA has given us as students.

I suppose that's what makes this class so unique compared to other classes and curriculum, the class and its instructors are genuinely invested in the students' futures and lives.

As we near towards the end of the year, the adventures haven't stopped. Even while everyone's finishing up and preparing for finals, we're still gathering experiences.

Port Townsend Maritime Academy has probably been one of the best experiences of my life. It taught me things

I never knew I needed to be taught. It improved skills just as much as it helped me earn them.

I even improved my social skills. At the beginning of the year, I didn't know anyone in the class at all. In this class, there were times when I had to work with people I didn't know nor agree with.

Every day, I had to work with someone new. Oftentimes we are out on the water in pairs or groups. I had to put a lot of trust in people I didn't always understand and I gained a lot of respect for them. A very unique thing about this program is that I am putting my safety in the hands of my classmates, and that creates a very rewarding dynamic between us, whether we know each other or not. In the end, I came out of it with good friends and many connections. I not only have gained more experience that will take me far, but I also learned a lot about myself.



The students and instructors of Port Townsend Maritime Academy sit for a photo on the deck of MV Salish during their last day aboard the vessel in their recent Washington State Ferries unit, 'Classroom On The Water.' Photo by Adam Dahl

The thing is, with these kinds of courses, you never really know what its impact is going to be. The unknown can be daunting at first. I came into the class not having confidence or trust in myself nor any trust in my skills, and through the different challenges PTMA had put me up against, I was able to trust myself and my confidence skyrocketed. I found myself being more comfortable leading my crew through the water and handling high pressure situations. And the class even led me to my current work in Olympia Oyster restoration.

If it had not been for Port Townsend Maritime Academy, I would still be feeling small in this big world. After a year with the program, I've learned that I can do whatever I want and do big things if I just believe in myself and go for it.

Port Townsend Maritime Academy really changed my life, in the best way possible.



Ave Arroyo is a junior at Port Townsend High School and attends the Port Townsend Maritime Academy. Photo by Danielle Raelson-Arroyo.