

High Schoolers Discover Career Paths In Maritime Industry

BY FRANK MCCORMACK

Close to 150 high school upperclassmen gathered on both banks of the Mississippi River in New Orleans March 23 for Who Works the Rivers, a hands-on career program sponsored by RiverWorks Discovery. The event was free and drew students from the parishes of Jefferson, Orleans, St. Charles, Plaquemines and St. Bernard.

The career discovery day was made possible by the support of local companies including Associated Terminals, Crescent Towing, Turn Services, American Commercial Barge Line, McGinnis Inc., Canal Barge Company, ADM/ARTCO, Delgado Community College Maritime and Industrial Training Center, the University of New Orleans Transportation Institute, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Port of New Orleans, Seamen's Church Institute, Canal Street Ferry, Cooper/T. Smith, the Aquarium of the Americas, Octopus Towing and Zito Companies.

As part of the event, students boarded the Canal Street Ferry from the east bank and traveled to Algiers, where they toured Crescent Towing's facility and were able to meet several Crescent Towing team members.

Roy Helmstetter, a 39-year captain with Crescent Towing and captain aboard the mv. Mardi Gras, stressed the immensity of working on the river. He also was honest with the students about the challenges and rewards of a career in the maritime industry.

"You miss a lot of things in this work—you do," he said. "But these are also very good paying jobs. They're also highly technical—so stay in school and get an education."

Students also toured Crescent Towing's machine shop, where electrician Robert Johnson and mechanic Brian Karl shared their experiences and advice.

"We love what we do," Johnson said. "It's more than just a job. And there's always something different, because it's the Mississippi River."

Back on the east bank, students



—photos by Frank McCormack

A local high school student practices throwing a line as part of the Who Works the Rivers career discovery day March 23 at Woldenberg Park in New Orleans.

gained some hands-on experience in Woldenberg Park as they donned life jackets and hard hats and tried their hand at throwing lines and tightening cables. There was an ADM/ARTCO towboat and covered hopper barge moored adjacent to the park, giving students the opportunity to see up close the sheer size of a typical towboat and tow. Inside the nearby Aquarium of the Americas, students interacted with representatives from local colleges, stevedores, the Port of New Orleans, governmental agencies and the Seamen's Church Institute.

Delgado Community College brought

the school's laser-guided fire simulator and Seamen's Church had a desktop vessel simulator on site.

Industry Cooperation

Errin Howard, director of RiverWorks Discovery, said it was amazing to see leaders from so many different companies come together to host the career day and give kids a taste of the maritime industry.

"What really impresses and amazes me about these events is the cooperation of companies who really are competitors among each other," Howard said. "How they come together, cooperate, participate and are supportive of this. Out of all the programs RiverWorks Discovery does, this is my favorite because of that."

Howard said this is the fourth Who Works the Rivers to be held in New Orleans, and by the end of the spring, the event will have visited a total of 15 cities across the country. And yet the March 23 career discovery event stands apart in its emphasis on hands-on experiences. In the past, students have interacted with industry leaders in a more traditional career fair setting, then boarded buses for a tour of the Port of New Orleans. This time, industry representatives partnered up to put real lines in students' hands and give them a small taste of what their future could hold.

"I think by changing it to this more interactive style it was a win," Howard said. "Instead of going to each one of those barge lines and hearing about captains and pilots and cooks from five different companies, you had those five companies

work together to bring what they think that job entails to life."

The Crescent Towing component has been a part of every Who Works the Rivers in New Orleans because of that invaluable interactivity, said Howard, who also pointed to the ferry ride as a powerful experience.

"We're talking about being on the river and jobs on the river, so being able to put them on the ferry and use that as a means of transportation across the river other than the bus was just an added experience for the day," she said.

Upcoming Who Works the Rivers events will be held in Louisville, Ky., on April 18; Pittsburgh, Pa., on April 20; Memphis, Tenn., on April 26; and Tulsa, Okla., on May 20. Who Works the Rivers will also be held April 24 in conjunction with the Inland Rivers, Ports & Terminals meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

"We've got IRPT exhibitors participating as well as other local companies coming in for that," Howard said. "That's a new venue and different style."

RiverWorks Discovery will also bring Who Works the Rivers to the annual Inland Marine Expo in St. Louis, Mo., May 22–24. Close to 20 exhibitors so far have signed up to lead the event, which will be held the last day of the expo and cater specifically to young people ages 18 and up.

For more information on RiverWorks Discovery and "Who Works the Rivers," visit www.riverworksdiscovery.org. RiverWorks Discovery is an education outreach effort of the National Rivers Hall of Fame, located at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa.



Robert Johnson, an electrician with Canal Barge Company, describes the benefits of working in the maritime industry to students from Chalmette High School.