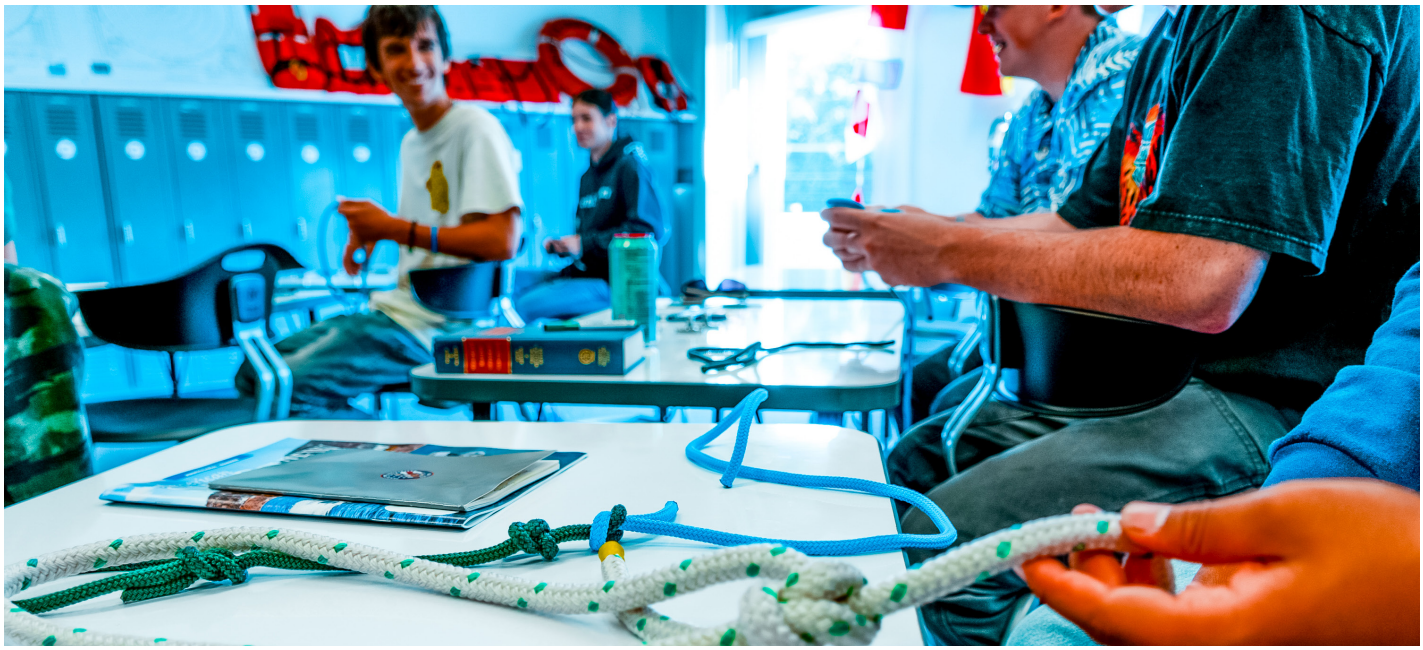
AAPA 2026 Lighthouse Awards

Submitting Port: Port of Everett
Entry Classification: Excellence in Community/Educational Outreach
Entry Title: Port of Everett Maritime Workforce Development Pipeline

Executive Summary

The Port of Everett's Maritime Workforce Development Pipeline addresses a critical challenge facing ports and maritime industries nationwide: building the next generation of maritime professionals. Through strategic partnerships with educational institutions, workforce development organizations, community groups, and local employers, the Port has created a comprehensive program that introduces young people to maritime careers, provides hands-on learning opportunities, and connects young people to industry-recognized training and employment opportunities.

In 2025 alone, the initiative reached more than 6,200 students, educators, and parents through career fairs, classroom programs, speaking engagements, maritime career exploration events, tours, and more. A cornerstone of the effort is the launch of the first-ever Maritime Vessel Operations program serving Snohomish and Island county high school students, a partnership between the Port of Everett, Maritime Institute, and Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center that enables students to earn professional maritime credentials while still in high school. By combining early career awareness with direct workforce training and employment opportunities, the Port is helping develop a skilled maritime workforce for the future.





An aerial of the Port of Everett on Port Garder Bay in Washington State.

1. Background, Purpose & Goals

The Port of Everett is located in Washington State on Port Gardner Bay at the mouth of the Snohomish River. For more than a century, the Port has grown and adapted with its community. In its early days, the Port supported timber exports and fishing fleets; today, it operates as an international shipping gateway, a thriving public marina, a steward of environmental restoration, and an economic development engine in Snohomish County.

The Port's central mission is to enhance commerce, create jobs, and support a healthy community in direct alignment with Washington ports' unique charter to support economic development and job creation. Port operations support more than 40,000 jobs throughout the region and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars annually in state and local tax revenues.

Maritime is a major economic driver for Washington State, and supports over 170,000 jobs, according to a 2022 study prepared for Washington Maritime Federation. A worker in the maritime industry can expect to earn an average salary of $112,000, according to the same study. Despite current and future opportunities, workforce shortages persist. An aging maritime workforce, tightening labor market, long-time push for traditional college over trade schools, and limited awareness of opportunities are all factors contributing to the shortage.

Without intervention, the issue is expected to continue — negatively impacting the resiliency of the state's economy and resulting in missed opportunities for the next generation. As the most trade-dependent county in the state with about 60% of jobs in Snohomish County tied to trade, supporting a skilled maritime workforce is been a priority for the Port. The Port has long supported workforce development through efforts like career fairs, tours, maritime education, internships and apprenticeships, and partnering with local groups to illuminate maritime career pathways.

A new partnership between the Port, Maritime Institute, and Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center, which launched in the 2025-2026

school year, took the Port's efforts to the next level by creating the missing link to directly launch young people into careers in maritime. The three partners piloted the first-ever high school-level maritime program to serve students in Snohomish and Island counties, creating a direct pipeline for young people to enter the maritime workforce.



Students in the inaugural cohort of the Maritime Vessel Operations program.

The pilot program was a key achievement of the Port's Maritime Workforce Development Pipeline, which is designed to introduce students to maritime careers, provide hands-on learning opportunities, and create direct pathways into maritime employment.

The Port's goals include:

- Increasing awareness of maritime careers among students, educators, and families;
- Building a sustainable workforce pipeline for regional maritime employers;
- Creating equitable access to maritime education and career opportunities;
- Strengthening partnerships between industry, education, and workforce development organizations;
- and retaining local talent by connecting students to local employment opportunities.

Specific objectives include reaching students across all grade levels, developing relationships among key players in the region's education and industry landscape, and establishing clear pathways from classroom learning to employment.

2. Implementation & Resources

The Port implemented a workforce development strategy focused on reaching students at every stage of educational development.

Throughout 2025, Port staff participated in school career fairs, job fairs, tours, information sessions, speaking engagements, and classroom educational programming. These efforts reached more than **6,200 students, parents, and educators.** Staff from nearly every department at the Port participated, including communications, human resources, marina operations, seaport, and leadership, underscoring its deep committment to workforce development.

The Port has had a longstanding agreement with Imagine Children's Museum to support 4th grade curriculum about global trade. The program was originally only offered to students in the Port District. The curriculum seeks to increase students' knowledge and understanding of local and global seaports, the impact ports have on the students' personal lives and the lives of people throughout the world, and increase awareness of career opportunities at seaports. Lessons, including a fun "Tag

Challenge" encourage students to engage with the material in ways appropriate for the age group. In the 2024-2025 school year, the Port expanded the coverage area to include students in all of Snohomish County. In addition to the mobile curriculum, the Port supports a in-person exhibit at Imagine Children's Museum that showcases maritime careers and expanded that exhibit in 2025 to go further in depth into job opportunities. An annual update from museum staff noted that it had reached **2,235 students at 20 schools** throughout the county. **"This is by far the largest reach that the program has had in its history,"** according to the report.

The beginning of the 2025-2026 school year also started off strong with the program reaching **975 students at 14 different schools.** The partnership has also been able to offer discounted Museum admission for students participating in the curriculum; the project is ongoing and its impact has not yet been fully measured.

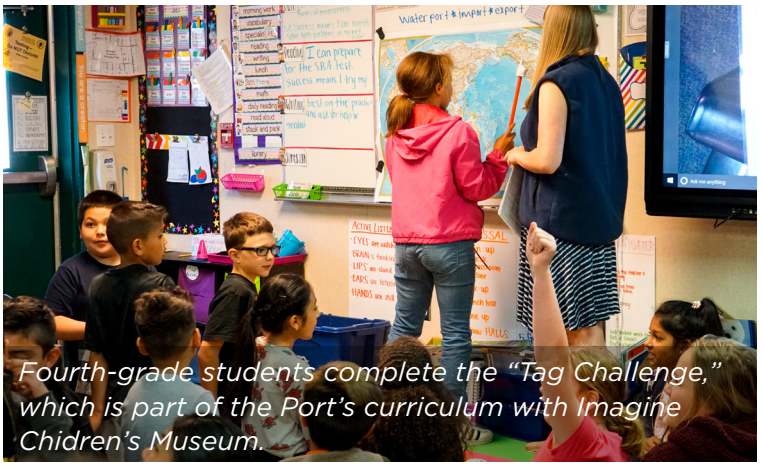
A new element of the Port's workforce development efforts was the **Maritime Vessel Operations** program that launched in September 2025 through a strategic partnership between the Port of Everett, Maritime Institute, and Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center. This first-of-its-kind program for students in Snohomish and Island counties adapted Maritime Institute's U.S. Coast Guard-approved adult Mariner Bootcamp curriculum into a year-long high school program. The first cohort graduated on June 10, 2026.

The inaugural cohort welcomed 10 high school students and combined classroom instruction, hands-on training, industry site visits, and internship/externship/apprenticeship opportunities. Students who successfully completed the program were eligible to join a U.S. merchant vessel at the entry level, having earned industry-recognized credentials including:

- Transportation Worker Identification Credential (**TWIC**)
- Merchant Mariner Credential (**MMC**)
- Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (**STCW**)

The Port contributed facilities, industry connections, and program coordination resources. It also hired three students for its marina maintenance team; a key aspect of the course was the requirement for on-the-job training. Maritime Institute provided approved curriculum and the use of its training equipment. Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center provided the instructor and adapted it to fit the needs of a high school student's schedule, and ensured curriculum met Washington state high school graduation standards for career and technical education.

The inaugural cohort was years in the making. The Port had to find the right industry and educational partners, and develop the relationship with both to establish a cohesive, complementary team. Maritime Institute first opened its Everett campus at the Port in 2024. The Port had already dreamed of a formal program for high school students, and Maritime Institute's arrival moved planning discussions forward. Though Maritime Institute had not previously offered a high school program at any of its campuses across the nation, its experience as an industry leader in adult mariner education was the foundation for the three



Fourth-grade students complete the "Tag Challenge," which is part of the Port's curriculum with Imagine Chidren's Museum.



Maritime Vessel Operations students and their teacher work on a sailboat during class.

partners to develop a high school program.

Through collaboration among all partners, the program successfully adapted adult workforce training into a format accessible to high school students

3. Innovation & Relevance

The Port's Workforce Development Pipeline addresses a critical challenge facing ports nationwide: attracting and training the next generation of maritime professionals.

The most innovative component is the Maritime Vessel Operations program, which is the first U.S. Coast Guard-approved the first-ever maritime program for high school students in Snohomish and Island counties, and is among the first of its kind across the nation.

Rather than asking students to discover maritime careers after graduation, the program embeds the process of earning credentials and on-the-job training with local employers directly into the class. Students were required to complete 100 hours of on-the-job training through "internships" to complete the program. Through site visits at local companies (many of which were in walking distance from the classroom on the Port's campus), career fairs, and industry connections, each student found a role best suited for them. Three of the students were hired for the Port's marina maintenance team and learned from the experienced operations crew — some of whom started their decades-long careers at the Port in the same role as these young maritime students.

In addition to the high school program, the Port innovates by creating a complete workforce pipeline that begins in elementary school and extends through graduation and early career opportunities.

Examples include:

- Fourth-grade global trade curriculum delivered through a partnership with Imagine Children's Museum;
- Port tours and speaking engagements with youth organizations like Sea Scouts and Boys & Girls Clubs;
- High school career exploration through field trips, career fairs, career days, and port tours.

This approach addresses several barriers simultaneously: lack of awareness, limited exposure to maritime careers, and insufficient entry-level workforce pathways. The Port's layered efforts to engage with students of all ages, in multiple settings and activities, strengthens workforce development by creating multiple touchpoints across different stages of learning. This sustained engagegment ensures that key messages resonate over time, increasing awareness of career pathways within the maritime industry, in ways that students will remember as they approach starting their own careers.

The model is highly relevant to the port and maritime industry's workforce needs



Port of Everett Commissioner David Simpson addresses the room during a career fair hosted at the Port.

and aligns with broader national efforts to build up the maritime industry, enhance competitiveness, and improve workforce development and retention.

4. Results, Evidence & Impact

The Port's efforts have been a driving force behind creating awareness of maritime careers throughout the region, while creating direct connections between students and employers. The launch of the Maritime Vessel Operations Program provides students with an impactful opportunity to graduate from high school already holding tangible professional qualifications for entry-level employment. Its success was bookended by the expansion of th elementary school student partnership program with Imagine Children's Museum, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to the Port's efforts to increase awareness of maritime careers. The Port's has also strengthened relationships among industry, education, and workforce development partners while increasing visibility of maritime careers among students who may not otherwise have considered the industry.

By the numbers:

- More than **6,200 students, educators, and parents** reached in 2025 through career fairs, speaking engagments, tours, and more
- **2,235 elementary students** reached in 2025 through global trade curriculum through partnership with Imagine Children's Museum
- **17 career fairs and information sessions** attended by Port staff
- **9 graduates** of Maritime Vessel Operations high school program; program is expected to grow to 36 students in the enrollment process as of June 2026

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of impact is seen through student and parent testimonials about the Port's efforts. Feedback was gathered through surveys, interviews, thank-you notes and more throughout the year.

From the High School Maritime Vessel Operations Program

"Initially, I knew I wanted to do welding, but I didn't know where I wanted to go. This class changed that — now I'll be working in a shipyard. I think there are so many opportunities on ships, and I think that it's a great field."
- Dylan Rose, graduate of Maritime Vessel Operations program

"I wouldn't know anything about this; it's kind of a hidden industry. I didn't know just how much work there is, and how many workers we need. I was thinking that I was going to be a security officer, and now that I've gotten to be on boats, I think this is going to be my career."
- Sidney Nash, graduate of Maritime Vessel Operations program

"The class really showed me that there are so many things you can do on the water — you can be an engineer, you can be a chef, you can captain a boat if that's what you want to do. I didn't realize that before I took the class."
- Luca Conti, graduate of Maritime Vessel Operations program

"This will be the best decision you've made in a while, and there are hundreds of different paths you can go on. You can dive into stuff you like — research ships, mechanics, Coast Guard cutters — you do pretty much anything you like on the water."
- Wesley Wise, graduate of Maritime Vessel Operations program

"The only way that this program was successful was because of the Port of Everett's support, along with Sno-Isle



The inaugural class of the Maritime Vessel Operations program, a strategic partnership between the Port of Everett, Maritime Institute, and Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center, pose for a class photo at the Port of Everett Marina.

TECH and Maritime Institute; we were all able to come together and make a cohesive plan. I hope that other Coast Guard-approved education facilities take the hint here that this is a good way to bring our children into the maritime field. The average mariner is in their late 50s, and we need a new generation to get out there and take to the seas."

- Brian Hennessy, Maritime Vessel Operations Instructor

From the Elementary School Student Program with Imagine Children's Museum

(gathered from anonymous surveys)

"I loved the geography connection with the port of Everett program. Thank you!"

"Our presenter did a wonderful job engaging with students and making sure they thoroughly enjoyed the presentation."

"Staff did a wonderful job validating students' ideas — everyone felt a part and learned something along the way.

5. Integration, Adaptability & Scalability

The Port's Maritime Workforce Development Pipeline is intentionally scalable. Once begun, outreach efforts can expand to additional schools, youth organizations, and educational partners, while the Maritime Vessel Operations program was designed as a pilot cohort expected to grow over time.

The partnership framework allows new employers, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to join the model as industry needs evolve. Curriculum can also adapt to emerging technologies, changing workforce requirements, and evolving maritime industry demands.

Because the model leverages existing educational institutions, industry expertise, and Port facilities, it can be replicated by almost any ports seeking to support



The Port's Workforce Development Pipeline includes engaging with students in elementary school; this group from the local Boys & Girls Club came for a Port tour. Right: Port staff at career fairs throughout the year.

workforce development and leverage industry connections.

6. Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

Collaboration is the foundation of the Port's success. The Port brought together stakeholders from education, workforce development, industry, and community organizations to ensure programming aligns with both student interests and workforce needs.

Industry partners provide career exposure, site visits, internship opportunities, and real-world perspectives. Educational partners contribute curriculum development and instruction. Community organizations help connect students and families with opportunities they may not otherwise access. This collaborative model has created lasting relationships that strengthen both the educational system and the maritime industry.

Key partners included:

- Maritime Institute
- Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center
- Workforce Snohomish
- Imagine Children's Museum
- Youth organizations (Sea Scouts, Boys & Girls Club)
- Local school districts
- Port tenants, regional maritime employers

7. Conclusion

The Port of Everett's Maritime Workforce Development Pipeline demonstrates

how ports can move beyond traditional infrastructure and operational roles to serve as catalysts for workforce development, economic opportunity, and industry sustainability. Recognizing a growing need for skilled maritime workers and a widening awareness gap among young people, the Port took a proactive approach to building a talent pipeline that begins in elementary school and extends all the way to industry-recognized credentials and career placement opportunities.

Through partnerships with educational institutions, workforce development organizations, community groups, and maritime employers, the Port has created a pipeline of engagement that has introduced thousands of students to maritime careers while providing tangible pathways into the industry. From classroom lessons on global trade and hands-on career exploration activities to the launch of the region's first high school Maritime Vessel Operations program, each component is intentionally designed to prepare the next generation of maritime professionals.

This effort reflects the Port's commitment to investing not only in infrastructure and economic development, but also in people. By creating opportunities for students to discover meaningful careers in maritime, the Port is helping ensure a strong and resilient workforce that will support the region's economy, maritime industry, and communities for generations to come.









Appendix - Port publication shows recent workforce development efforts

CHARTING A COURSE TO MARITIME JOBS

Each year, the Port of Everett team sets off on an adventure across Snohomish County and beyond to reach our next generation workforce with tales of careers in maritime. In 2025 alone, Port staff reached more than **6,200** students of all ages, educators and parents. Read on for an inside look at just some of the ways the Port works to connect our future leaders with careers in maritime.



SCHOOL CAREER FAIRS

Port staff met with students across Snohomish County to talk about current job opportunities and ideas for future careers.

Students reached: 3,000+



SNOHOMISH COUNTY TRADE UPS

High school juniors and seniors got hands-on experience and talked with Port staff during unique interactive events that showcased trade careers.

Students reached: 220



MARITIME CAREER DAY

Port staff met high school students interested in maritime careers at this inaugural career day hosted by Greater Marysville-Tulalip Chamber of Commerce.

Students reached: 300

WITH MORE THAN 60% OF ALL JOBS IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY TIED TO TRADE —AND WITH WASHINGTON BEING THE MOST TRADE-DEPENDENT STATE IN THE NATION — IT'S CRUCIAL THAT WE CREATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT POUR INTO OUR LOCAL WORKFORCE TO KEEP JOBS AND TALENT LOCAL.

LISA LEFEBER | PORT OF EVERETT CEO/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



MARITIME CAREER EXPLORATION TOURS

The Port hosted an event with WorkForce Snohomish allowing high school students to explore maritime careers, talk with local employers and take Port tours.

Students reached: 100+



IMAGINE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM PARTNERSHIP

The Port partners with the Imagine Children's Museum education team to deliver 4th grade curriculum about global trade at elementary schools across Snohomish County.

Students reached: 2,000+



SEA SCOUTS DOCK TALK

Port staff met with students involved in Sea Scouts Ship 226, Totem Middle School, and NJROTC from Marysville-Pilchuck High School to highlight future maritime opportunities including at the Port.

Students reached: 50



SNO-ISLE TECH MARITIME FAIR

Port staff shared job opportunities and maritime career pathways at this annual local high school skill center event with students pursuing skills pathways in maritime-related fields.

Students reached: 530



CONNECTING OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

The Port of Everett has also been making waves outside the classroom, engaging students from the Granite Falls, Lake Stevens, and Cascade Boys & Girls Clubs to spark interest in global trade and maritime careers. Through interactive lessons, behind-the-scenes tours, and Q&As with Port staff, students gain a well-rounded look at maritime careers.

PORT, PARTNERS LAUNCH FIRST HIGH SCHOOL MARITIME PROGRAM IN SNOHOMISH AND ISLAND COUNTIES

In September, through a strategic partnership between the Port of Everett, Maritime Institute, and Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center, the first-ever maritime program for high school students in Snohomish and Island counties launched in the North Puget Sound Region.

The inaugural 2025-2026 Maritime Vessel Operations program kicked off on Sept. 8, 2025, welcoming a cohort of 10 students for the pilot year of course work and on-the-waterfront training, marking a milestone moment for local workforce development.

Now, high school seniors throughout Snohomish and Island counties enrolled at Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center have an opportunity to become fully credentialed and professionally trained mariners by the time they graduate — forging new career pathways for a strong and resilient maritime workforce now and into the future.

For Sno-Isle TECH Skills Center — a cooperative effort of 15 local school districts throughout the counties offering students preparatory training, certification, and post-high school credit — this partnership represents its first-ever maritime-focused career pathway.

The curriculum adapts Maritime Institute's U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved "Mariner Bootcamp" program for adults into a year-long program tailored to fit the schedule of the high school skill center programming and aligned with core competencies required for graduation.

The curriculum is being taught at the Port of Everett by a Sno-Isle TECH instructor following Maritime Institute's USCG approved guidelines, blending classroom, hands-on and field instruction to prepare students for real-world maritime careers. The year-long course and subsequent pairing of on-the-job "internship" experience with local maritime companies offers students a blend of instruction in traditional and modern seamanship. The program is expected to grow year after year.

"When the prospect presented itself to partner with two outstanding organizations, Maritime Institute and Port of Everett, it would be silly of us not to take this opportunity," Wes Allen, Director of Sno-Isle TECH noted. "There is a need to train young adults to fill this growing gap in industry. The first USCG-approved class at the high school level, Maritime Vessel Operations, is meeting the directive of our state to train students for the high-need and high-wage careers of the future. We look forward to growing the Maritime program and strengthening our partnerships well into the future."

> **"THE PORT OF EVERETT IS HONORED TO COLLABORATE IN THIS INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP, BRINGING TOGETHER THE COLLECTIVE RESOURCES OF OUR THREE ORGANIZATIONS TO LAUNCH SUCH A MEANINGFUL PROGRAM. OPPORTUNITIES LIKE THIS HELP PREPARE STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS AND CAN HAVE A LASTING IMPACT ON THEIR CAREER PATHS."**
>
> **PORT COMMISSIONER DAVID SIMPSON**



Instructor Brian Hennessy with two students from the first cohort of the Port of Everett, Sno-Isle TECH, and Maritime Institute's new high school maritime program.

Students who successfully complete the program will be qualified to join any U.S. Merchant Vessel at the entry level, will be internationally certified, and will receive necessary credentials, including a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC), a Merchant Mariner Credential (MMC) and Certification of Watchkeepers (STCW-95).

An industry leader in maritime education, Maritime Institute Everett is providing the curriculum guidance and equipment, and in partnership with the Port, its facilities and maritime employment experiences for the course. Maritime Institute's Port of Everett location, housed in the Port's Maritime, Exploration and Innovation Complex at Waterfront Place, is the company's fifth U.S. campus and the first Maritime Institute location to welcome high school students into the fold.

"This initiative is more than just education — it's an investment in the future of our maritime workforce," Sarah Scherer, General Manager, PNW, of Maritime Institute said. "By equipping students with hands-on experience and industry-relevant training, we're building a strong pipeline of skilled professionals ready to support and grow the maritime sector for years to come.

The partnership comes at a pivotal moment in the industry. The need to create direct pipelines into maritime careers and training programs is at an all-time high with a growing skills gap due to a waterfall of retirements now and on the horizon in maritime, combined with a long-time push for traditional college pathways over trade schools.

THE PROGRAM IS LOOKING FOR LOCAL MARITIME BUSINESSES WILLING TO OFFER SITE VISITS, GUEST SPEAKERS, INTERN/EXTERNSHIPS, AND/OR APPRENTICESHIPS.

LEARN MORE AT PORTOFEVERETT.COM/MARITIMEPROGRAM.