

## Women on Water Profile: Amanda Hurley

When most people see a five-foot-tall woman in her mid-20s, they don't think of a relief captain on a boat that pushes two 30,000-barrel barges through the Mississippi River System.

That's just fine with Amanda Hurley.

Since graduating from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in 2009, Amanda has become Kirby Corporation's youngest relief Captain, helping lead crews for the premier U.S. inland tank barge operator.

A native of Massachusetts, Amanda says she fell in love with the ocean as a girl and has known since high school that her career path would not lead her to a 9-to-5 job. At first she was drawn to a military lifestyle, and considered attending West Point to pursue a life with the United States Armed Forces. While a commitment to West Point proved too daunting for Amanda to make as a teenager, another school soon emerged as a perfect fit for the young woman: the Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA). Once she got there, Amanda was off and running.

"MMA has the regimented life style I wanted and also satisfies my love of the water," Hurley said. "Once at MMA, my interests grew in small boats and boat handling. I wanted to learn more about small boat life, so I took a summer to intern at a tow boat company and never looked back."

For Amanda, the internship's appeal was simple: "The job was to die for," she said. "I got to live on a boat and run a boat all on my own."

Ever since, Hurley has spent her entire professional life working aboard vessels. Upon graduating from MMA, she applied only to tow boat companies, and in at least one case was offered a job before she even interviewed for the position. Two years later, she has completed a year-long training program and gone from a vessel pilot to relief captain.

Her rapid ascension has garnered some attention along the way, especially among her fellow crewmembers. Amanda says that one of her greatest professional challenges is earning their respect. "Most of the men [I work with] I would say are scared of me or just don't know what to do," Hurley said.

"When I walk onto a vessel for the first time I get a lot of turned heads and hardly any handshakes. However, the young relief captain takes great pride in her ability to win her co-workers over with her hard work and professionalism, and relishes the opportunity to change their perceptions.

"It is very frustrating I have to prove myself to every single person I meet," Amanda said. "But I see it more as a challenge. I really enjoy changing people's opinions of a tow boat captain and of a woman in a male dominated field. I have yet to meet someone who by the end of our hitch has not shaken my hand."

Although she often finds it difficult to explain to her family why she spends more time on a tow boat than she does at home, Hurley is happy with the life of a relief captain, challenges and all. With an already-impressive list of accomplishments and a deep love for the water, Amanda's future looks incredibly bright.