

Women on Water Profile: Katie Haven

Born in the great maritime city of Seattle, Katie Haven was destined from childhood to become a great mariner. She just didn't know it yet.

Now a Chief Engineer on the M/V Kennicott of the Alaska Marine Highway System, Katie had little exposure to sailing until she joined Sea Scouts at age 13. Soon, what started as a recreational activity sparked a lifelong interest that would lead to a career on the water.

"Although my interest [in Sea Scouts] was mostly social, I soon found that I was having a lot of fun just working on the boat," Katie said. "I was very fortunate to have extraordinary leaders who encouraged both the boys and girls to participate to their fullest potential."

As a result, Katie spent much of her teenage years working on a United States Coast Guard inspected training vessel, and eventually received her 100-ton Master's license at age 18.

While her studies continued on land at a local university, Haven's career progressed at sea. She used her new license around the Seattle harbor when she wasn't in class.

"After a couple of years of this I realized that I liked working on the boat a lot more than staring into a microscope, so I quit college and worked full time for a year," Katie said.

While she worked, Haven researched her options for continuing her education, and eventually decided to attend the California Maritime Academy. Katie began her time at CMA training to be a deck officer, but soon switched to engineering.

She graduated the academy in 1986 and landed her first job at Exxon Shipping, where she stayed for several years. After a stint sailing out of the Union Hall, Katie was offered a permanent position with the Alaska Marine Highway as a 1st Assistant Engineer in 1993. Six years later, Katie was promoted to Chief Engineer, and has held that position on the M/V Kennicott since 2000.

Even with all of her current success, as with any young professional, Katie faced difficult challenges upon starting out in her field. At first, she found it hard to handle being away from home for long periods of time as she worked at sea.

Soon, her promotion to a leadership position presented her with a new set of tasks that demanded her focus to remain on the ship when in port.

"Disciplining crew members and handling problems between members of my department... it's always difficult and affects everyone," Katie said. It's definitely the most challenging aspect of my job. Dealing with the mechanical problems is easy!"

With so much responsibility, Katie has little time to worry about gender issues. Although seafaring is a male-dominated field, she works with two other women on the Kennicott and believes that women have a bright future in the industry.

"I think it's gotten to the point that nobody even comments on it anymore," Katie said of the increased female presence in her profession.

Male or female, the seafaring industry is a difficult career path for those who choose to take it. Katie encourages others to go for it – if they're up to the challenge.

"If you have a taste for hard work and adventure and want to make a decent living, then don't hesitate to try it," she said.