

Q & A WITH CANDY NIGRETTO

TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.

This month is the 10th installment in the series: Candy Nigretto, the executive director of the Tacoma Propeller Club.



“I feel our future is in good hands,” says Candy Nigretto as she reflects on the young people she meets through her work as executive director of Tacoma Propeller Club, a 250-plus-member organization composed of a comprehensive representation of the marine industry core companies in the greater Puget Sound area. . “I love asking them after they go up onto a crane at the port, ‘If you could choose any maritime career, what do you think it would be?’ It gets them thinking.”

In her work, Candy wears three hats. In addition to the Propeller Club, she serves as the billing technician for the Port of Tacoma and as the secretary for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. Our conversation ranged from events launched by the Propeller Club to raise scholarships, to the place-based maritime curriculum newly planned by the Port Townsend schools to Tacoma’s publication for its own students *Gateway to the World; the Story of Pierce County’s Port*.

Q: From where you sit, what are the largest challenges in this work to maintain a continuing education program of public relations, education and good will among exporters, importers and the public?

A: The various maritime entities around Commencement Bay pulling together in one direction rather than duplicating efforts or competing with one another for loyalties. And bringing our maritime history to the forefront.

Q: What distinguishes our waterfront from others?

A: We are close to a residential area, very different from Seattle’s working waterfront and that of many others.

Q: What is your role in these efforts locally and nationally?

A: I’ve learned much about other ports in the U.S. and those in other countries through my experience with Propeller Club national. Meetings have taken me to locations like Athens; Paris; Savannah, Georgia; Brownsville, Texas; Buffalo, New York; and Louisville, Kentucky. We learn how we’re both similar and different. I serve as president of the national Women’s Propeller Club.

Q: What would people be surprised to know about the Propeller Club?

A: That it is a grassroots organization that supports the maritime industry at large. That funding scholarships is key to our work.

Q: What are your hopes for the future of the waterfront?

A: That the restructure and remodel of the Foss Waterway Seaport Museum will entice more people to come down to the waterfront and to engage in maritime activity.

Q: What gives you the most joy in this work?

A: Education is an important component of our activities. The Tacoma Propeller Club is the charter partner of the Charles N. Curtis Sea Scouts and has provided funding support to them over the last 10 years. We also arrange the Lelli Memorial Scholarship Program where member companies in the international trade and maritime community sponsor high school students for an all-day event that includes tours of the Port of Tacoma and local businesses. We have provided approximately \$30,000 in college scholarships over the past five years.

We participate in the annual Tacoma Maritime Fest where we organize a Salmon Bake, telling ourselves we serve the best barbequed salmon in the Pacific Northwest while we talk to the public about what we do.

And then there is the annual Chowdown in May, a large labor of love and work by volunteers for local scholarships. Two thousand members of the maritime community and the public come together to feast on our barbecued salmon and halibut, deep-fried cod, shrimp salad, steamed prawns and spicy tomatoes, cracked crab, oysters, kippered salmon, steamed clams and the world-famous Croatian octopus salad. It is a way to make the local and U.S. community more fully aware that Tacoma is a first class harbor and port