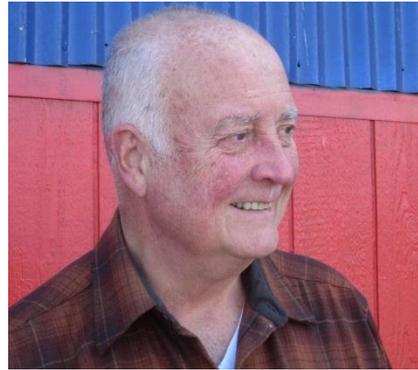


## Q & A WITH TOM ROGERS

*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 second installment in the series: Tom Rogers, founder of the Tacoma Youth Marine Center.*



At first glance, Tom Rogers, the president of the Tacoma Youth Marine Center (opened in 2012), seems like a man with several things on his mind: Welcoming a Port of Tacoma commissioner on an unannounced morning visit to the facility, fielding calls from people who might be able to repair the head in a former US Coast Guard patrol boat in time to take 45 Sea Scouts on a voyage to Seattle in two days, receiving a personal walk-in donation of a 6HP outboard motor from a boater, and running two maritime businesses that flank the center's site and provide training opportunities for participants.

But what puts the fire in his eyes is how the graduates of the center's youth programs manage their lives as adults. "They can tell me what success is for them," he says. "They frequently come back after college to report that from the rowing, paddling, sailing, motoring or boat repair and maintenance they have gone on to join the maritime industry, or maybe to become a photographer, or to raise a family."

### **Q: Who are the youth who participate and where do they come from?**

A: Young people, male and female, with a mixture of interests and abilities, including those authorities often refer to as "at-risk." Organizations like Tacoma Public Schools, the Puyallup Tribe, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Sea Scouts, the Port of Tacoma, and Metro Parks partner with the center and its programs because of the direct relationship to the maritime industry which is so important to this community and because 85 percent of our community's youth never get out onto the water on a boat or even a ferry.

### **Q: What draws the young people themselves?**

A: They watch birds, seals, otters, whales, and fish; they learn how to fix a crack in the deck, repair a small engine, rebuild a diesel engine, navigate, safely, operate a boat and do many other things that are not taught on TV. They get access to the water via three large training vessels—The 78-foot motor vessel Charles N. Curtis; the 90-foot sailboat Odyssey (with Tacoma's tallest mast); and the 38-foot Verite, outfitted with 11 oars—plus a motor lifeboat, 11 small sailboats and 16 kayaks. Youth will try something if they think it's going to be fun. But the boats aren't the program; they are simply the platform from which we can teach.

### **Q: What are you teaching?**

A: Through experience, how to be good boaters, good mechanics, and good citizens. The very immediate lessons of hard work, responsibility and teamwork go hand-and-hand with boating.

**Q: Why is the center's location (on East D Street very close to the east end of the Murray Morgan Bridge) important?**

A: About 15 years ago, it was clear that the west side of the Thea Foss Waterway would be gentrified. It was also clear that for future uses, it would be best to separate youth from adult activities. This site gives Tacoma an established place for many groups to use--a kind of community center on the water. Public school marine biology students have sailed, motored, and rowed out to catch and study plankton. University of Puget Sound students have launched research expeditions. Tacoma Metro Parks specialists have put together water-based summer camps. High School Navy ROTC cadets practice here. And the 150-plus Sea Scouts have settled in after their move from a base across the waterway. Thinking we'd have a new marine center operational in a year, it took five-and-a-half with special challenges for installing the docks for the Curtis, Odyssey, and Verite. This location also keeps the young people and their safety on the water in our small boats visible to us for a very long distance—in both directions.