

Q & A WITH TARIN TODD

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 sixth installment in the series: Tarin Todd, Bay Patrol director for Citizens for a Healthy Bay and bosun for the Charles N. Curtis with the Tacoma Sea Scouts.



“Being on the water brings out things in people,” says Tarin Todd. “When you’re working with youth, once you all are on a boat and in the middle of the bay, you cannot distinguish between someone from a foster home and one from a private school.”

This is a man who readily admits “I don’t know because of what I don’t know.”

“The learnings from the water are self-respect, respect for others, increased leadership abilities, and clarity of purpose.” Tarin was born and raised in the Tacoma area and grew up on the shores of Puget Sound. A longtime member of the Sea Scouts, first as a youth at age 14 and now as an adult leader, he has cruised extensively on the Salish Sea. He enjoys sharing the beauty of our local waters with youth. An avid scuba diver, Tarin well understands the need to protect Puget Sound. He holds a 100-ton Masters (Captain’s) License and volunteered with CHB for many years before joining the staff. We traveled on Tarin’s patrol boat for this conversation along the bay’s shores and then motored into each waterway of the Port of Tacoma. At one point, a Coast Guard message interrupted us, and we quickly cut out across the bay to the Tye Marina to review its reason for issuing a No Wake Zone in the area that day. While exploring the Port of Tacoma, we came alongside the 1096-foot Glovis, out of Germany and a ship that originated in the Marshall Islands.

Q: What is that special quality of being on the water?

A: On a boat, everyone’s hands are on the progress for getting from point A to point B. If it is youth I’m dealing with, a lot of society’s problems in them come indirectly to the fore in the course of the travel—hurt, pain, and parents who may not care.

Q: What have you learned in your work?

A: All of our youth could really be called “at risk,” much more so than when I graduated from high school in 2000. The major influences on them are social media, cell phones, bullying, and growing up too quickly. We see it in the challenge for those in our Sea Scouts Program to give up their cell phones while on watch. Youth want to be adults, and they look closely at those shepherding them for cues. What goes on nationally is in their face because of social media, and it can create fear in them, for example a question of, “What’s going to happen to me?” It is a much tougher world.

Q: Given this reality in our time, what is your strategy?

A: I tell them, “you’re better than that.” They tell me I get to them when I don’t get mad but I get disappointed. I do let them know that someone, me, cares about them.

Q: What are your time priorities?

A: I spend one-quarter to one-half of my time on the water and the other time creating reports. Citizens for a Healthy Bay has contracts with the City of Tacoma, the Port of Tacoma, and Pierce County for environmental efforts. A current focus is derelict vessels in Commencement Bay. One place you’ll commonly see those is anchoring illegally off Old Town. That means likely sewage sent overboard and live-aboards who are not in compliance with Commencement Bay regulations. Tacoma’s assistant fire chief, who is Commencement Bay’s harbormaster, and the Department of Natural Resources are also involved in finding the solution to this.

Q: What is a difficult work day?

A: When there is an ice or wind storm. Boating is about knowing limits and vessels. I enjoy both the stormy days and the tranquil sunny ones on the water.

Q: What energizes you?

A: The relationships we’ve built at CHB, the recurring challenges with the superfund issues with Asarco, Occidental Chemical, and the re-emerging PCBs in the Hylebos Waterway—finding where the pollution is today.

Q: Is Commencement Bay better today than it was in the past?

A: Clearly yes. Salmon are returning in the past three or four years. Companies have bought sites and cleaned them up. The bay is definitely healthier than it was—because of efforts of the Port of Tacoma, industry, business, and individuals.

Q: What would you like others to know?

A: A healthy bay is not only salmon or people. It is not good for anyone for a business to shut down. It is in everyone’s best interest that a business remains open. There are 24 restoration sites on Commencement Bay; Citizens for a Healthy Bay manages 16 of those—including Skookum Wulge, the Place of Circles, and the Gog-La Haite sites.

Q: How do you and your efforts best succeed?

A: We assume that there is not automatic gross negligence on the part of any business or individual. We like to have a previous relationship already built so that when something unexpected happens on our waters, we have a base from which to move forward. Businesses may not know that something they are doing is detrimental, and the solution may be long, expensive, and requiring serious engineering. We assist with that.

Q: Is this scope of work limited to only Commencement Bay?

A: I also monitor for Pierce County, including Anderson and Ketron islands, and Lucy and Wollochet bays. I am focused here but believe it would be great to be able to expand the effects of the work throughout the Salish Sea—the Strait of Juan De Fuca, the Strait of Georgia, and Puget Sound. This would recognize that all these regions are part of the same interests.

Q: Who are your customers?

A: Commencement Bay, those who will live here in the future, young people.