



Port Townsend Junior Max Villagran works on packing up his immersion suit during a lesson of the Maritime Academy Skills Center class at the Port Townsend Maritime Center. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

PORT TOWNSEND

Maritime Academy course allows students to gain professional credentials

High-schoolers get hands-on experience in Port Townsend

By Zach Jablonski

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PORT TOWNSEND — Students in the Port Townsend Maritime Academy Skills Center learned how to abandon ship last week.

On Friday morning, the class was taught how to correctly put on an immersion suit — a specially designed waterproof suit that is designed to protect against hypothermia if the person is immersed in cold water.

Kelley Watson, course creator and instructor, told students they had 60 seconds to don the suit and let them to practice in pairs before gathering the group and timing everyone simultaneously.

The results were encouraging.

“I think that the entire class getting into their suits in a minute and a half is impressive,” Watson said.

Port Townsend Maritime Academy students practice abandoning sh...



The class is part of a partnership among the Northwest Maritime Center, Port Townsend School District and West Sound Tech to create a new program — one that is unique in the state — that focuses on maritime skills needed for vessel operations.

The course is “the first accredited Career and Technical (CTE) skills center program in Washington state to provide students with a year-long underway vessel operations maritime curriculum taught by professional

mariners and offering high school youth the opportunity to earn professional mariner and U.S. Coast Guard credentials,” said Anika Colvin, communications director of the Northwest Maritime Center.

The Port Townsend Maritime Academy Satellite Skills Center has 18 students enrolled now. Three are from Chimacum High School, three are from Coupeville High School and 15 are from Port Townsend High School.

The students meet 2.5 hours a day, five days a week until the end of the school year, to learn about maritime operations.



Instructor Kelley Watson speaks with West Sound Tech Director Shani Watkins during the Port Townsend Maritime Academy Skills Center class. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

The students participate in a weekly job shadow program, maritime networking opportunities, and Washington Sea Grant workshops, Colvin said.

Students will have the opportunity to log U.S. Coast Guard required sea time and graduates will earn maritime credentials such as their Washington State Boaters Card, Basic Safety Training (minus firefighting), Wilderness Advance First Aid and CPR certification and other credentials, Colvin said.

Watson said Friday that the program allows instructors the ability to “immerse students in learning at a level that wouldn’t be possible at the school away from the water,” she said.

“It’s a really exciting development for public schools.”



Maritime Academy Skills Center students celebrate after completing an exercise to put on their immersion suits within 60 seconds at the Port Townsend Maritime Center. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)

The students appeared to enjoy the class since many wore smiles as they were putting on the suits.

“I love almost everything,” said Max Villagran, Chimacum High School junior.

“Having hands-on experience to do maritime things is a wonderful opportunity.”

The students will have the opportunity to work and learn from emergency officials from such agencies as East Jefferson Fire-Rescue and the Coast Guard, Watson said.

“It’s really fun. I like being out on the water,” said Vincent Cruz, Chimacum High School senior.

“It’s nice to get out and do things that regular school kids can’t do.”

The class opens for registration in the Spring, Watson said.

For more information, see <https://tinyurl.com/PDN-ClassInfo>.

Jefferson County reporter Zach Jablonski can be reached at 360-385-2335, ext. 5, or at zjablonski@peninsuladailynews.com.



Chimacum Junior Zoe Justis packs up her immersion suit after her class had a test to see who could put on the suit within 60 seconds as part of a lesson of the Maritime Academy Skills Center class at the Port Townsend Maritime Center. (Zach Jablonski/Peninsula Daily News)