

National advertising campaign could educate, remove fear

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into the industry, or the trend will get worse," she said.

One of the problems to recruiting is that many Americans don't even know about the industry as a career choice.

"I've been encouraging a friend from Canada to get his feet wet, get a deckhand job, make some money, travel," Black said. "His family fussed at me and said, 'Don't put pipe dreams in his head. He'll never get a job on a yacht.'"

Many young men don't believe they could ever land a job on a yacht, he said, so they don't even try.

"They've never been on a boat before, they know nothing about it," he said. "The guys have huge confidence doubts and are intimidated."

"Most Midwesterners have never seen a yacht in their life," said Kristen Cavallini Southill, owner of American Yacht Institute in Ft. Lauderdale and an Ohio native. Southill's school trains interior crew.

"Most Americans don't have a clue. Some that are aware of crewing as a job have nervous concerns," she said. "Mothers from Nebraska and Oklahoma have issues due to lack of education. Many actually say white slavery and prostitution rings make them nervous about recruiting their 18-year-old daughter as a steward."

Another reason the pool of qualified Americans is small is because the lifestyle can be hard. By the time some crew members, especially stewardesses, gain enough experience to be moved into management positions, they get burned out and leave.

While that is true of many nationalities, the hit to the already-small American pool hurts a bit more.

"After a while, you just get too old for the bunk bed," said Dawn Kuhns, an American stewardess.

"In these positions, no contact [with friends and family] is probable. How long can you just be with crew and live on a yacht? You don't get time to put down a home base, have a life, build relationships."

"I could never imagine doing this job if I were married, had a kid, had a house," Black said. "I live full time on the yacht, year round. It gets lonely."

Southill noted that while millions of Americans work in service-oriented jobs in places such as restaurants, bars, hotels and airlines, yachts provide a unique challenge.

"The difference with other service occupations and yachting is [in yachting], you never leave your job," she said. "There is nowhere to go. Airlines don't make three-month trips."

Several crew members and agents noted that the United States is a large country and many of its citizens have not traveled outside its borders. More exposure to yachting in Europe, with

many countries touching an ocean or near a major port, promotes the profession there.

"Europeans just seem to handle boats better than Americans," Black said. "It's more familiar, there's more tradition and professionalism. That's why there's more foreign crew."

While a shortage of crew may boil down to an owner's problem — or by extension perhaps a broker's or captain's concern — it is crew agencies and training schools that have taken on the challenge of recruiting more American crew.

Of course, their livelihoods depend on a constant flow of qualified job candidates.

Several have begun expanding their traditional recruiting efforts in schools to include more exposure through marketing and advertising, targeting more cruise ship employees, and branching out to commercial ports and cold-weather climates.

"Many cruise line workers are not aware of the jobs in yachting, the number of opportunities," Kuhns said. "They work for \$30 a day plus tips. They have the skills and personalities needed for success in yachting. The industry could pick up many chefs from the cruise lines."

The solution, many sources said, is to advertise.

"Our industry needs to promote the pluses of these jobs," Southill said. "We need to recruit at colleges, at all levels, better. Everyone who doesn't get seasick, butlers, chefs, masseuses, bartenders, waiters, should seek their fortunes and try crewing."

"Someone ought to run a huge, national recruiting ad for the yachting industry," Black said. "Some guy on a big, shiny yacht, talk about how you could get this job and the benefits. That would inform the masses and remove

some fear factor, too."

Even without a dedicated plan, agencies acknowledge the impact recruiting has on their businesses. "I have four crew coordinators," said Connor of Luxury Yacht Group. "We do not allocate a budget toward recruiting. However, our agents spend 15 percent of their time sourcing American crew, and about a third of their time recruiting."

Still other crew agents didn't see the added effort improving the small pool of American crew anytime soon.

"There will always be a lack of U.S. crew," said Crowe of Carole Manto. "Nothing is going to change. Owners are not going to change their flag over this."

Or will they? The onus may shift to owners to sponsor foreign nationals to get their green cards in the United States. Some have already flagged offshore not out of convenience, but out of necessity.

"The yacht I'm on is foreign-flagged with American owners," Kuhns said. "Their previous yacht was American flagged. They flagged through the

Marshall Islands strictly to have more crew options, be less restricted."

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It's the law

The laws that govern manning on U.S.-flagged vessels are found in Chapter 81 of Title 46, United States Code.

Section 8103 basically specifies that a U.S.-flagged vessel must be under the control of a U.S. citizen.

The crew can be up to 25 percent aliens; that is, people lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.

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