

Women in maritime - the focus at career fair

Women in the South African maritime sector were the focus of an inaugural career fair hosted by the South African International Maritime Institute (SAIMI), which attracted high school pupils, tertiary students, educators and women in the maritime industry on Thursday, 6 September 2018.



Source: pixabay.com

Presented in conjunction with partner African Marine Solutions (AMSOL), the fair hosted about 120 students and pupils from Nelson Mandela Bay high schools, Nelson Mandela University, the University of Fort Hare and Rhodes University. While experts from the sector addressed pupils and students about their experiences of the maritime industry, other issues such as marine tourism and entrepreneurship were touched on by academics.

The aim of the event was to link women already working in the maritime sector with university students and high school pupils, to share information on careers and opportunities in the industry.

The event was also used to announce a new merit bursary scheme for female students wanting to pursue maritime qualifications, in honour of the late Sindiswa Nhlumayo. Nhlumayo, who was the executive head of the Centre for Maritime Excellence at the SA Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), was directly responsible for spearheading and implementing the National Maritime Cadetship Programme and creating awareness of maritime careers, jobs, business and recreational opportunities – and in so doing, introducing youth to the sector.

Samantha Venter, SAIMI spokesman, said the inaugural maritime women's event was part of a wider campaign targeted at all South Africans, to raise awareness of the wide scope of the "blue economy" and attract talented women and men to the nation's thriving oceans economy. SAIMI was embarking on a National Maritime Awareness Campaign to "ensure that the many job and business opportunities in the maritime sector are conveyed to the public through various strategies that include career guidance and mentoring", Venter said.

"We want to celebrate women working in the maritime sector through acknowledging their contribution and providing a platform for them to influence, promote, support and mentor other young women in a maritime-related career. We want to ensure that women are equally included in career opportunities across the maritime sector," she said.

AMSOL's Pumla Makubalo told attendees how the organisation – the leading employer of South African seafarers – comprised 80% black employees, 14% female staff and a 35% "youth" workforce.

"AMSOL is aiming to bring as many women into this technical and male-dominated space as possible. Women in the AMSOL workforce have increased from 8% to 14% over the last three years," said Makubalo.

According to SAMSA's Wilna Kapp, a career in maritime was one "that is never the same; it changes every day. The maritime industry ebbs and flows constantly.

"Some days you feel like you are sailing with calm seas and fair winds, and you have the sense that you are on top of the world – only to be brought down to size by force 10 gale force winds!"

Kapp related her career journey and told attendees to pursue computer literacy and become diversified in their skill sets.

"Technology will change the industry. Autonomous ships will require more diversity from seafarers, in that navigation and engineering will only be a small part of the job scope. We will have to diversify to remain relevant. IT will become the cornerstone of development of the industry."

Taking advantage of the career guidance and expo component on the day, Grade 10 pupil Fagen Prinsloo of Alexander Road High School, said she had learned a lot.

"I want to study economics and one of the speakers inspired me to branch out into other areas I never thought of, like the maritime industry."

Estee Vermeulen, who is studying towards her PhD in marine spatial planning at Nelson Mandela University, said the event had exposed many young women to opportunities across the maritime sector.

"Opportunities within the industry have a lot more to offer than just shipping and logistics. The maritime sector integrates all the social and ecological facets within the South African ocean space."

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