

Faces of Success in Maritime: David Tong

If you want a living definition of the word “dedication” it’s David Tong. David immigrated to the United States in 1995 from Vietnam. “My father was an electrical engineer who was sponsored to work in the U.S. as a carpenter,” explains David. “When we arrived I didn’t speak any English so I began working as a dishwasher at a local restaurant.” For the next 14 years David worked tirelessly. “I worked my way up to cook then maintenance/repair and eventually becoming manager.” After a full day at work David took night classes to learn English. When the restaurant’s management changed hands everyone lost their job. David wasn’t worried.

“A friend’s cousin worked at Auxiliary Systems and told me about the company’s apprenticeship program. I had learned a lot of skills on the job as the maintenance and repairman so I applied for a job as electrician.” Today David is one of four employees enrolled in the registered apprenticeship program at Auxiliary Systems, a depot level ship repair facility in Norfolk, Virginia. Through the program David earns a full-time salary and benefits while receiving on-the-job training in skilled trades vital to the maritime industry. He also attends Tidewater Community College (TCC) for classroom instruction as part of the program. He began the program in October, 2010 and will graduate “with two college Career Studies Certificates (in maritime technologies and marine electrical) from TCC and credits toward an A.A.S. degree in Maritime Technologies,” beams David. In addition to obtaining credits toward his college degree, he will also earn the nationally-recognized DOLI (Department of Labor and Industry) Journeyman’s certification which ensures a higher rate of pay and increases his marketability to employers nationwide.

John Moore, Director of Training for the firm, explains why his firm invests in workers like David by paying for a college education as part of the registered apprenticeship program. “Workers who are dedicated to learning not just the ‘how’ of doing a job but also the ‘why’ are valuable to a company. These employees work hard on the job and in the classroom which demonstrates commitment and dedication,” he explains. “With the majority of skilled tradesmen retiring in the next 5-10 years we need people to be able to fill those positions and we want them to come up through the ranks.”

These days, instead of washing dishes David is most often working on Department of Defense contracts that support the U.S. Navy. “I love my job. It’s very hands on and it’s a much better schedule than



David Tong
Electrical Apprentice
Auxiliary Systems
Norfolk, Virginia

Industry Segment:
Shipbuilding and ship repair

Education:
Tidewater Community College
student through the Auxiliary
Systems registered apprenticeship
program

Quote:
“If you’re mechanically inclined
and care about your work you can
do just about any job!”



working in a restaurant so I have more time with my family,” he says. I also I have the opportunity to do different work almost every day!”

In addition to working as an electrician David is now trained to work as a rigger and boiler mechanic. He enjoys working with different people in each shop; a typical shift for David is 6:30 am to 3:30 pm and he occasionally works on weekends. He regularly encourages others at his company to become an apprentice. “It’s a great opportunity that’s changed my career,” he says. John says that the apprenticeship program is for workers who are willing to take on more responsibility and who want a promising career pathway. “We offer our workers who come on board in entry level positions the opportunity to apply for the apprenticeship program after demonstrating a good work ethic for their first 90 days. This program is a great pathway to a promising future. Typically, employees that can manage to work full time and graduate from the program show that they have what it takes to become a future leader in the industry.”

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) affirms John’s prognosis for registered apprentices. A 2012 DOL study found that:

“over a career of 36 years, participants who completed the Registered Apprenticeship program had average earnings gains of nearly a quarter million dollars (\$240,037 increasing to \$301,533 with employer benefits added) compared to nonparticipants.”

-An Effectiveness Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis of Registered Apprenticeship in 10 States

Maritime and transportation industry employers are eager to hire more employees like David who are looking for a career pathway that provides opportunity for earning a college credential and industry certification. Learn more about the industry and registered apprenticeship programs on the SMART Center website at www.maritime-technology.org.