

BAE Systems Ship Repair Apprentice Profile: Megan McCullar

Like many students, Megan McCullar didn't know what she wanted to do after high school. "I was always told the goal was to go to college so I figured that was what I'd do," says Megan. After graduating from Grassfield High School in Chesapeake, Virginia she enrolled at Tidewater Community College (TCC) but "wasn't sure why I was going."

Megan was 19 and working at restaurant when she heard about the registered apprenticeship program at BAE Systems from a friend. "I didn't know anything about the program or shipyards but when he said I could do hands-on work there I was interested."

After submitting an online application Megan was invited to take a placement test at TCC and then complete a physical exam. Alan Walker, Manager of the Apprentice Program at BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair explains, "The placement test allows us to determine if apprentice applicants meet the minimum requirements we have for math, reading, and writing, and the physical ensures they're ready for the physical environment they'll be working in."

During BAE's four-year registered apprenticeship program Megan works a regular shift learning a trade at the shipyard and then takes classes at TCC at night. She has taken four classes at TCC already and is currently taking AutoCAD. Going through the program guarantees that Megan will earn a Career Studies Certificate in Maritime Technologies from TCC as well as a Journeyman Mechanic card, which is a registered credential from the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) that is recognized by industry employers nationwide. "Having a Journeyman card means I can move and work anywhere in the U.S. and get paid a competitive salary," explains Megan. As an apprentice BAE will also pay for her to continue schooling if she wants to take additional courses to complete her A.A.S. degree, Bachelor's degree, or even graduate degree.

Megan sees her future as filled with possibility. "Every day I see people at the shipyard moving up quickly to positions of greater responsibility and pay. I know I'll have the same opportunity." Alan notes that within the last four years more than 50% of apprentices program graduates have been promoted within a year of their graduation. "It's really a career path that Megan's on, and apprenticeship graduation is just beginning," he says. Megan encourages students to look into the maritime and transportation industry and registered apprenticeship programs. "It used to be that getting a four-year college degree guaranteed you a job, but now it's a gamble," she says. "You invest a lot of time and money but after graduation you might not have anything to show for it." She encourages students, teachers, and parents to expand their thinking about career pathways. "Too many kids think that you're not going anywhere in life if you don't go to 4-year college straight out of high school, but that's not the truth. Becoming a registered apprentice means you have a job, earn a paycheck, and have your education paid for. It's a great path for a lot of students and workers looking for better opportunities."

