



Holly Saunders at the helm

# Spotlight on Holly Saunders

Holly Saunders is looking to blaze a trail for other young women keen to forge a maritime career, writes master mariner **Captain Peter Martin**

## THIS MONTH WE WANT TO

highlight the trajectory thus far of an amazing young industry participant whose passion for the maritime industry is already bearing fruit. For the past three-and-a-half years, Holly Saunders has gained experience in the maritime industry which has led to her present position of master on Fantasea Cruising's 12-metre passenger vessels on Sydney Harbour. She is the only female skipper in the company and is keen to share her passion for the maritime industry, where her daily routine consists of safely transporting passengers on one of the world's most beautiful harbours.

## A LOVE FOR THE SEA

Holly's love for the sea began when she was 12 years old when she obtained a boat license. She would often take friends out in Pittwater in her five-metre tinny. Holly was fortunate to grow up with a mother, who worked as a steward on a 35-metre vessel and with whom Holly would often go to

work. When she was 18, unsure of what career path to take, her parents suggested she work on the water.

Her story highlights a lack of information available in the schools on the various maritime career paths that are available. Holly sought information on the maritime industry through a school career advisor at school and found there really wasn't much available. Together, they stumbled onto a raft of diverse opportunities in the maritime industry such as ships, tugs, ferries, superyachts, port operations, the Royal Australian Navy, as well as a pathway via the University of Tasmania and the Australian Maritime College. Still unsure as to what course to take, Holly made further enquiries with different maritime organisations. She determined that to be a boating safety officer and then skipper of a vessel of up to 12 meters for which she needed a coxswain's certificate: 240 sea days and an oral examination.

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Before completing high school, Holly's maritime career received a boost with the completion of a radio and general-purpose hand course and successful achievement of a coxswain's license. These qualifications, and her existing on-water experience, provided the opportunity to be engaged in volunteer work with Marine Rescue Terrigal and deck work with Starship Cruises and Central Coast Ferries. Those opportunities enabled her to consolidate knowledge and experience to confidently execute her role today as the skipper of eight and 12-metre vessels on busy Sydney Harbour.

Holly would like to pursue career options in what has been a traditionally male dominated domain to further her passion for a life on the water. As a master on Sydney Harbour, Holly inspires young women who seek her out to indicate their own interest in a career on the water and being a captain.

Based on her own experience, Holly stresses the need for on-water and seafaring opportunities to be promoted at schools. This means that there is a need for maritime professionals to visit schools and talk about their field. To support this, she advocates for "a dedicated maritime recruitment centre advertised through social media, newspapers and web pages that would attract more women to the industry".

## INSPIRING OTHERS

Recruiting more women in executive positions is, in Holly's view, a crucial step towards encouraging more women to continue a long-term career in the industry. To qualify more women for executive positions in the maritime industry, Holly thinks the recruitment process should be inviting and well supported to involve women in work experience days and mentoring programs to help provide a better understanding of the workplace.

Holly's enthusiasm for the industry led her to seek additional experiences, including the opportunity to view a pilot transfer and sea-ride on a large vessel. This single day of industry activity provided a unique insight into the maritime sector. Holly's passion for seafaring, coupled with a determination to map out a career path has set her on course to be a successful skipper, with an eye to the future role as master and ultimately an experienced port officer. ■

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