

NWSWB Launches Search for Next Executive Director, Delivers on Key Initiatives to Improve Student Learning Experience and Expand Programs

After 10 incredible years as Executive Director of the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding, Betsy Davis is planning for a joyful handoff of her leadership responsibilities in June 2025. This handoff will include bringing the new Executive Director up to speed on the many projects and improvements currently under way at NWSWB, including multi-year initiatives focusing on program growth, curriculum development, campus improvements, and a greater presence in the digital space.

Doubling the Size of the Marine Systems Program

Recognized as one of 38 schools in the country to be named a 2024 Center of Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education by the federal Maritime Administration, the school is working to double the size of its Marine Systems programs in partnership with the North Olympic Peninsula Recompete Coalition. Davis notes “I’m looking forward to getting our Recompete project up and running before I hand off the baton this summer.” The school’s Marine Systems program was created by Program Director Kevin Ritz, who is nationally recognized for his contributions to boating safety. Each student learns to install, maintain, and troubleshoot systems using state of the art equipment, thanks in large part to a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and support from leading manufacturers. Learning takes place in a purpose-designed 4800 square foot dedicated shop completed in March 2021. The school is expanding both its 9-month program to train entry-level marine technicians and the one-week Intensives courses.

Side-by-Side Build Captures Range of Boatbuilding Techniques

Tradition and innovation continue to mark the school’s Boatbuilding program as they have throughout its 40+ year evolution. Boatbuilding Program Director Sean Koomen has lined up a unique learning experience for students over the next few years in which they will construct two daysailers side-by-side using a range of building techniques.

Students will learn plank-on-frame construction on a traditional boat, designed by local naval architect Jim Franken, while concurrently learning cold-molding techniques on a more contemporary design from Brooklin Boat Yard. Video recordings of the side-by-side build will capture the experience for future teaching purposes and will share the project with a wider audience through social media. The project reflects Koomen’s experience in the trade on both coasts, 14 years’ teaching experience at the Boat School, his degree in Adult Education, and input he’s gleaned from the school’s Program Advisory Committee, employers who provide input to keep the school’s curriculum relevant to today’s jobs.

Campus Improvements Support Expansion of Programs

Since 2015, the Boat School has invested more than \$5.5 million in facilities and equipment to enhance hands-on learning and support program growth at the now 8 acre waterfront campus. This work was accomplished incrementally as funding became available. This year, in addition to the new sewer coming to the campus, the school is creating a self-guided walking tour, rehabilitating the newly acquired cottages which provide student housing, and piloting an AmeriCorps position to develop the campus hardscape by replacing invasives with native plants. The recent installation of

rooftop solar on four buildings is saving expense, supporting environmental goals, and re-enforcing what students are learning about solar technology in the school's Marine Systems program.

Use of the Digital Space

The school is leveraging new online marketing tools and revamped financial reporting tools to continue a multi-year focus on building organizational sustainability. A Learning Management System allows students with different learning styles to review information and preserves institutional knowledge about curriculum for instructors and staff. Digital communication is transforming the path to enrollment at NWSWB.

“The Boat School is the best of what a non-profit can be: focused on a compelling mission and run with the robust planning and metrics of a successful small business,” says Board President Sonja Mathews. “We’ve built a strong foundation for future growth while at the same time preserving the unique education the school offers. Many Boat School graduates describe their hands-on learning experience as life changing. They’ve developed a skillset and a confidence that is transformational. The organization has been experiencing the same sense of possibility and transformation as we move forward on these initiatives.”

To learn more about these initiatives and the Executive Director position at the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding, **visit www.nwswb.edu/employment/**. The NWSWB Board has begun a search for its new Executive Director and invites those interested to apply.

Photo Caption: NWSWB Executive Director Betsy Davis aboard *GloryBe*, her 110 year old classic double-ender. *“The school’s staff and board have big plans for the coming year,” says Betsy. “I look forward to staying actively involved in day-to-day operations until I pass the baton to the school’s next executive director and embark on some cruising this summer.”*