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Shipyard sees 128 apprentices graduate as new leaders

Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard Public Affairs



A total of 128 men and women graduated from Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard's apprenticeship program during a ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam on Aug. 13.

"Welcome to your role as leaders," said Rear Adm. (Select) Gregory Thomas, shipyard commander, to the graduates as they transitioned in status to journeymen. He recalled that earlier in August, the Secretary of Defense recognized the shipyard as being the best of the best in the Department of Defense for depot maintenance. Only one other Navy command has won this recognition before.

"I thank you on behalf of the entire shipyard, graduating apprentices, for what you did in winning that award," Thomas said. "You represent – and are – the people the Navy needs today."

Hawaii Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona Jr. pointed out the economic and security significance of the apprentice program and the shipyard. The shipyard infuses \$700 million annually into the local economy and "keeps our local talent here at home in well-paying jobs," he said. The graduates also bear a tremendous responsibility in regard to national security to keep the U.S. Navy the best in the world.

Other speakers remarked on the great challenges the graduates overcame to become journeymen. Following the shipyard's annual job fair in March 2005, more than 4,000 people applied to be part of this graduating class of 2010. Only 593 scored high enough on a math and English test to continue with the selection process. Individual interviews narrowed the field even further to 140 selectees.

In January 2006, they began their four-year apprenticeships, which combined full-time paid employment with a minimum of 7,200 hours of on-the-job training and classroom instruction.

"You have much to be proud of ... (but) with this pride comes duty and obligation," wrote U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye in a message delivered by his representative. "Exceed your expectations. You are guardians of American military power."

U.S. Sen. Daniel Akaka said, "Keep this national treasure that we call Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard always no ka oi (the best.)"

U.S. Rep. Mazie Hirono said, "You will play an integral role in upholding our national security by helping to maintain the finest Navy in the world. This is a responsibility of great significance."

U.S. Rep. Charles Djou recalled a recent visit to a military hospital where the patients were all young men missing one or more limbs. "Your job ... is more than just a job," he told the graduates. "You are also here to work for that 19-year-old sitting on a ship to make sure that he or she doesn't wind up in Walter Reed (hospital.)"

Two graduates, Steve Ikeda, marine machinery mechanic, and Monica Annino, metals inspector, addressed the audience during the ceremony. Annino said, "I thought it was too good to be true when I first started because the shipyard paid me to go to school, earn a degree, and learn a trade.

"Changing careers can be tough because most times, you have to start all over again from the bottom," said Annino. "With the apprentice program, you are getting the education and training you need to do a new job, and all along the way, you're still getting paid."

Ikeda shared that working at the shipyard was "a growing process."

"I mean, you come into the program as a 'grown-up' and find out that you have so much you have yet to learn, so much more you could still grow," he said.

Ikeda's father, who works at the shipyard, encouraged him to apply for the program.

"I spent nine years at various colleges while working part-time, trying to figure out what I wanted to do," said Ikeda. "Now I have a great job that I am proud of."

Apprentices started out with an average pay of \$17.03 an hour. Upon graduation, they now average \$29.27 an hour. In addition, graduates earned a tuition-free applied trades degree from Honolulu Community College and U.S. Department of Labor journeyman certification.

"Looking back on the last four years, it was mentally and physically challenging, but also life-changing and so rewarding," said Annino.

"It was an amazing experience," said Ikeda, reflecting on his journey. "I came into the program as one person and now as I graduate, I have become a part of the bigger shipyard picture. I'm now part of something bigger than just me and it feels great."
