

## Educators At Sea

Preserving US Navy maritime superiority will require the maintenance of a STEM oriented and knowledgeable workforce that is able to innovate and apply scientific thinking and skills to both routine assignments and unusual situations. In a Naval Research and Development Framework document published in 2017, the Navy identified “Competitive advantage belongs to the naval force that best captures the power of data, leverages the global technology base, disruptively innovates across technical disciplines and develops/adopts new capabilities at the speed of innovation”. A fundamental element of attracting students into and preparing them for Sea Service STEM careers that require transformative thinking and innovation is Educators who can actively engage middle and high school students in programs of study which are current, relevant and promote the application of technical skills. An important factor is providing Educators throughout the United States with the knowledge and understanding of the role of the men and women of the Sea Services through their exposure to Naval operations at sea.

In the spring of 2018, the Navy League, working in collaboration with the Navy Chief of Information, Office for Community Outreach and Navy Recruiting Command, the feasibility of establishing an Educators At Sea Program was studied. An important factor of the study was NAVCRUITCOM data that identified individual areas of the US where the lack of general knowledge of the Navy may have contributed to lower recruiting success. The challenge was to develop a standing program that would identify individual Educators from those identified areas that were receptive to spending some time as Navy League and Navy guests aboard a CVN. Not a problem!

Navy League was able to incorporate our plans into an established Navy Community Outreach Office program that identified community and business leaders for an approximately one and half day exposure to at-sea operations aboard a CVN. The concept was to select and screen volunteering Educators from identified Navy League Regions and offer them the opportunity to be Navy League guests as we integrated them into the Navy program. Although the Navy Outreach Program includes other Navy homeport areas, our Navy League Educators At Sea Program was focused in US Pacific Fleet Aircraft Carriers (CVN) homeported in San Diego, CA. Accordingly, in December 2018, the initial group of six Educators selected from the Great Lakes Region was flown to San Diego, provided hotel accommodations near the waterfront within view of Naval Air Station North Island, hosted by Commander Naval Air Forces Public Affairs Staff and integrated into a group that was flown by C-2 Greyhound to the USS Carl Vinson (CVN-70) operating at sea. After experiencing the excitement of an arrested landing, the Educators were able to observe a number of fleet aircraft, including the F-35 Lightning, in the landing pattern and completing carrier landings. After a brief introduction call on the Commanding Officer, during the remainder of the day, the Educators were afforded the opportunity to tour operational areas of Carl Vinson and talk with crewmembers in their workspaces. Of special interest to the Educators was the high levels of complex STEM-related work being performed. Add to that was the passion and determination of the Sailors to do their work as well as

expected. A wide cross-section of Carl Vinson working spaces were toured, including flight/hangar deck, flight deck control, Medical/Dental, the Bridge, mess decks for meals with crewmembers, aircraft approach control and crew berthing. During each stop, Sailors were eager to talk with the Educators about themselves, their individual career/family desires, and their dedication to doing well for the ship, their shipmates and themselves. Zak Dray, a HS Math/Science Teacher from central Wisconsin said, "As impressive as the USS Carl Vinson was, it was the men and women that proudly serve our country that made this a valuable and unforgettable experience".

The tour of USS Carl Vinson gave the Educators a short but comprehensive observation into the magnitude and complexity of Navy operations at sea. They came away with a new appreciation for their role as advisors of life goals for their students as well as teachers. One of the Educators was so inspired by her Educators At Sea experience, that she joined the Navy League and is currently the Madison Council VP for STEM.

As we headed into 2019, a new group of Teachers was selected from the Navy League Midwest Region for a planned June Educators At Sea aboard another Pacific Fleet CVN. However, operational requirements necessitated the cancellation of that opportunity. The Educators were disappointed but very understanding. Their flexibility and desire to become involved in the program paid off as they became the core group for two Educators At Sea opportunities in USS Theodore Roosevelt CVN-71 in November and December. To increase the base for the program, we expanded selection opportunities for two at-sea periods to include the Rocky Mountain Region. Both the November and December events were completed without a problem. And the Teachers from these groups were as equally impressed as the first group. Kelly Frey, an Overland Park, KS High School Counselor said; "The diligence and determination of the Sailors was awe-inspiring. All seemed thrilled to help us understand their jobs and training, which is so helpful for those of us working in the schools. They were proud of their work and made me so proud of our Armed Services".

Many of the Educators from all the groups have reported back to Navy League that they returned to their respective schools and incorporated some of their observations and experience into their classes and discussions with students. To date the Educators At Sea program has selected Teachers from High Schools serving smaller communities in diverse locations such as Laramie, WY; Yankton SD, Jordan UT, Papillion, NE and eight other States. Shortly after her return to Yankton, Shanna Lbarolle-Koenig was interviewed, and her account of the experience aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt was featured in the Yankton Daily Press newspaper.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic issue necessitated the cancellation of all at sea periods for this program in 2020, the Navy League is coordinating with NAVCRUITCOM to restart the program as soon as possible in 2021. Educators At Sea accomplishes one of our core missions of informing the American people and advocating that the United States of America is dependent upon strong sea services for its economic well-being and national defense. Teachers can

become very instrumental in providing students with information regarding opportunities in the Navy.

For additional information about the Navy League Educators At Sea Program call Navy League SVP Field Services Operations, Gerald Saunders at 703-312-1573 or email NVP for STEM and Youth Programs, Thomas Pruter at [tpruter27@gmail.com](mailto:tpruter27@gmail.com)