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Port Townsend official details maritime academy plan

By Charlie Bermant
Peninsula Daily News



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PORT TOWNSEND — The plan to form a maritime academy through a partnership between the Port Townsend School District and the Northwest Maritime Center begins in earnest this week with the creation of a new website and the commencement of a fundraising campaign.

"When people ask me if we can pull this off, I say we can, and if we don't, we've missed the boat," said school district Superintendent David Engle in an address to the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce on Monday.

About 70 people attended the presentation, which Engle made in conjunction with Jake Beattie, maritime center executive director.

The presentation was rife with maritime puns and references.

"When you cast a boat into salt water, you need to have leadership," Engle said. "There can be nothing more uncertain than when you go out to sea."

Maritime curriculum

The plan is to infuse all educational programs with maritime elements, increasing the offerings for high school juniors and seniors to offer more specialized and specific instructions for those who want to enter the maritime trades.



Charlie Bermant/Peninsula Daily News

Port Townsend School District Superintendent David Engle addresses the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce on Monday about a proposed maritime academy.

Engle said schools are facing an ongoing budget squeeze and that fundraising for the program is an essential element that will begin with the establishment of a website, www.maritimediscovery.org, to provide information and channel contributions.

The site, which is expected to go online by the end of this week, will provide links to the schools and information about the project, as well as fundraising information, Beattie said.

A target fundraising goal is \$750,000, which translates to \$125 a year for each of the district's projected 1,200 students over a period of five years.

The program will seek grant funding and small contributions "through living room conversations," Beattie said.

Engle is hoping to raise a substantial amount as soon as possible in the hope that some aspects of the program will begin in January.

"The funding will be like rocket fuel," Engle said.

"It will take a large amount to get off the launching pad, but then it will stabilize."

Investing in the program is an investment in the community, he said.

"There is a correlation between the health of the community and the quality of education," he said.

"We had this idea about the relationship between economic development and education as to which is the chicken and which is the egg, and I said it was OK if we are the egg.

"If we use our schools to attract young families with kids to the community, then it will have long-term positive effects."

Engle said the program needs to begin as soon as possible.

"We have to do something really fast," he said. "This is a window of opportunity.

"Our county has an average age of 55 and the smallest youth quadrant in the state, along with a growing poverty rate, so if we don't change things now, it will be harder in the

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future," Engle said.

Proposed a year ago

Engle thinks the idea will fly, or sail, as evidenced by the increased acceptance from when the idea was first proposed one year ago.

"As long as this was Jake's vision or my vision, this was one thing, but now the pronouns are starting to shift," Engle said.

"I was downtown and overheard someone discussing the idea in relation to 'our schools.'

"The fact that people are taking ownership means a lot."

Engle said Port Townsend is perfect for location-based education and can provide a leadership role in the development of similar programs around the country.

"When you are surrounded with water, it becomes part of your identity," he said.

"We have some unique resources here, and if we can teach kids what's precious, they will develop a sense of value.

"If we can pull that off, we will be a community renewed."

Jefferson County Editor Charlie Bermant can be reached at 360-385-2335 or cbermant@peninsuladailynews.com.

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Castell Insurance: 'Bout time! It only took 15 months of full time employment for Boris to get his business cards. Whatcha think of his title? ([View photo](#))

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09:56AM



Port Angeles Baby Store: A big thank you to our veterans. ([View photo](#))

09:04AM



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06:00AM

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