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Pollock Conservation Cooperative donates \$100,000 to NACTEC

Tax credit contribution will fund programs that prepare students for fisheries-related careers

NOME—Built by students, a shiny aluminum boat sits in the shop at the Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center (NACTEC) in Nome, awaiting a few final touches. Representing more than just an opportunity to travel rivers, the boat and the program behind it present the region's youth the chance to gain valuable skills that could lead to job opportunities in a number of fields.

Among those potential career paths, the Pollock Conservation Cooperative (PCC) would like to see the seafood industry high on the list. With a recent \$100,000 donation to NACTEC, the PCC is helping to provide the training and education that will prepare students for employment in one of Alaska's most vibrant job sectors. The PCC, an arm of the At-sea Processors Association, is an industry trade group made up of companies that harvest pollock in the Bering Sea. NACTEC is a vocational training center in Nome that serves students from throughout the Norton Sound and Bering Strait region.

During a check presentation ceremony at the NACTEC Governing Board meeting Dec. 12 in Nome, NACTEC director Doug Walrath detailed how the \$100,000 donation will support programs to prepare the region's students for careers in the commercial fishing industry. Walrath said students will complete the 16-foot aluminum boat in the NACTEC shop and fabricate a trailer to haul it—a process that will teach welding, construction and engineering skills. The training will not be limited to high school students, Walrath said, noting that a welding simulator will be rotated throughout the region to provide welding training to both youth and adults.

Walrath also noted plans for marine safety training that will provide high school students with the skills to return to their home communities and teach safety courses to younger students. Students will be able to earn Red Cross CPR, First Aid and AED (Automated External Defibrillators) certifications.

“As a result of this funding, high school students and adults alike will receive skill-specific training in preparation for workforce entry into fisheries-related careers,” Walrath said. “This funding will begin building a strong and viable program at the high school level that will expose students, from the sixteen communities of this region, to at-sea, on-shore, harvesting, and corporate career pathways in fisheries related vocations.”

Stephanie Madsen, Executive Director of the PCC and At-sea Processors Association, presented the donation on behalf of the PCC at the December 12 gathering. Madsen told the NACTEC Governing Board that the seafood industry presented a wealth of opportunity for jobs at all levels, whether it be for entry-level processors and support staff like cooks and cleaners, or more career-type jobs like engineers,

cooks, mechanics, marketing or human resource specialists. “We have a goal to hire every eligible Alaskan,” she said.

Through a State of Alaska program designed to provide funding for vocational education, the PCC is able to direct funds toward an educational institution that would otherwise be spent on taxes. The connection between NACTEC and the PCC was established thanks to Glacier Fish Co., a PCC member and Norton Sound Economic Development Corp.’s harvesting partner. Glacier Fish Co. brought NACTEC to PCC board members’ attention, some of whom were in Nome during the June North Pacific Fishery Council Meeting and had a chance to tour the NACTEC facilities. “Through NSEDC we got the opportunity to meet Doug [Walrath] and see the NACTEC program. We came away very impressed,” Madsen said.

Using tax credits to make donations to educational programs is not a new practice for the PCC. For approximately a dozen years the PCC has made contributions in excess of \$10 million that support research and students in the realm of marine science at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Alaska Pacific University. Madsen said the PCC’s board of directors was excited that changes in the law allow for the tax credit to now apply toward vocational education programs at the high school level.

This is not the first tax credit donation to benefit NACTEC, which has previously received funding from NSEDC subsidiary Siu Alaska Corporation and Bering Straits Native Corporation.

At the December 12 ceremony, Bering Strait School Board Chairman Albert Washington welcomed the donation and the opportunities it will create. “It is going to make a world of difference,” he said. “It is going to help our children in the years to come.”

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