

### **Who Needs a Textbook?**

Puget Sound is our western edge and Lake Washington defines our east side. Lake Union is the middle and the Duwamish River runs through it. Our community is navigable. There are maritime stories to tell about our city and its many ocean connections. The stories are as complex and tangled as kelp and seaweed on a windward shore.

Our citizens want to learn the stories, whether they are historical or contemporary. When a traditional tall ship or high-tech Navy vessel appears, the public is drawn to the waterside to stare and wonder. We are awash in maritime stories yet to be told in a way that will give our community pride of place about its maritime culture.

The best means of learning is direct experience. We learned to talk, walk and ride a bike through direct experiences. Using hands and mind together awakens a wide span of intelligence. A learn-by-doing experience is long remembered and bonds the participant to the learning place.

Offering direct experience is needed for our youth. Too many are dropping out and even the high achievers find wider horizons through hands and mind instruction. Most schools are not yet ready to handle direct experiences, but it is a great opportunity for museums.

An investment in direct experience youth programs will bring great dividends. The museum gets the long-term loyalty and support. The participants will have been introduced to the values and teamwork and leadership, insight into the skills, ingenuity, commitment and courage of our maritime forbearers. "We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

The programs should be more culturally comprehensive than just boats, their designers, the builders and the users. They should include the social, economic, political, technical and environmental aspects of their time and their ties to literature, visual arts and music. The programs should be built on partnerships. The resources of other institutions can expand and enhance the depth of the programs. Partners should include public and private schools, park and recreational departments, historic and contemporary museums, museums of history, art, science and technology, corporations, local businesses and social service agencies.

There is no textbook on how to create and maintain an all-embracing hands-on maritime heritage center. But there is a close approximation: The Center for Wooden Boats. We are recognized and admired from England to Australia (east to west) as an historic museum that is an integral part of the community fabric. They ask us how they can establish their own CWB. Several have already begun their versions, modeled on our vision and strategies.

Just because we invented the wheel doesn't mean we should bask in our success. We are obliged to let our programs grow in response to public demand, based on the sound foundation we have built; just as our city is growing in size and diversity, so should we. And we should continue to guide other communities and museums to reach their potentials in serving the public the richest menu of maritime heritage. - **Dick Wagner**