



Comité sectoriel
de main-d'œuvre
de l'industrie maritime

PORTRAITS OF WORKERS IN THE MARINE INDUSTRY

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2018-2019
PORTRAIT N° 1

Virgil Légaré Deckhand

Learn together to recognize the workers who provide us the routing of 90% of our consumer goods, thus supporting our Quebec maritime industry both at sea and ashore!

Tribute for our maritime ambassadors!

Discovering a trade

► We all had that moment, in secondary school, when we had to think about the future and what career to choose. It all seemed so far off, but we had to make decisions about it right away. Then came further schooling and studies, a path that was not always linear, with obstacles and successes, but also questions. Things were no different for Virgil Légaré, a deckhand with **Groupe Océan**, who, in his mid-twenties and about to start a family, made a career shift to the marine industry.

Unhappy in his construction job, this former concrete finisher had a friend who talked to him about marine-sector careers: "He had a lot to say and was so excited about it. It got me interested. I didn't like what I was doing at the time so I said to myself "Why not?"

TAKING A CHANCE...AND LOVING IT

Virgil knew very little about being a deckhand before beginning his training: "I had to believe in myself. I didn't know anything about what seamen do. I knew I was comfortable on the water and I was motivated to learn on the job. But my family and friends were very concerned about marine-sector careers and the image we have of them." The first step for Virgil involved training, in safety and other preparatory courses, at the Institut maritime du Québec's Centre de formation en mesures d'urgences (CFMU) in Lévis, at his expense.

Then, he looked for a steady job where he wouldn't have to travel long distances since his first child was one the way. He contacted the Seafarers' International Union of Canada, through which many seamen find their first job in the industry. "I really wanted to stay in the sector even though my circumstances had changed and I found out that Groupe Océan allowed workers to work on the wharf,



in Québec City. That meant I could be home every night. It was perfect," he says. Keeping in close touch with the union, he finally succeeded in getting a position as a substitute deckhand with Groupe Océan. After a few days, he got good news: he had a permanent job!

COMBINING WORK AND PLEASURE

After six months working as a deckhand, Virgil is already very enthusiastic when talking about his job. "I love that there's no routine and that there's always something new to learn or do! You never get bored! This job is amazing. I don't always know when my workday is going to end but it's easier knowing that I'm going home afterward."

Combining manual tasks and resourcefulness, the job of deckhand requires practically the same aptitudes as the construction sector, according to Virgil. You need to be proactive, observant, detail-oriented, comfortable on the water and good at manual work. "Everything can be learned. You don't have to worry about making mistakes. There's always someone to help you at the beginning. Physical strength is an asset because some of the moorings are pretty heavy! But it's worth it. The industry pays well and I'm lucky enough to be working year-round", says the young seaman.

What is a seaman's typical day at Groupe Océan? It depends a lot on the season, but what never changes is that no two days are the same! In addition to vessel maintenance and mooring handling, seamen work on



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pilot boats, which carry pilots to and from the wharf and big cargo or passenger ships. “We’re the captain’s hands. I follow his instructions and manage unexpected situations on deck”, says Virgil. Groupe Océan tugboats also help ships with docking maneuvers, on arriving and leaving, and break the ice many times over the winter season. There can be as many as seven seamen on a tugboat, depending on the maneuver to be carried out, its duration and its complexity.

« Being a deckhand at Groupe Océan means having a steady job. »



At Groupe Océan, about 20 seamen hold permanent, stable jobs near home. They get along very well: “The team spirit is great and, at Océan, we help each other out. I took my first 24-hour voyage a few months ago—a round trip to Isle-aux-Coudres. It was different and full of challenges. I was with two experienced seamen and I learned a lot. We learn things every day!”

A FUTURE WITH A DECIDEDLY MARITIME FLAVOR

Virgil’s family and friends have changed their minds... the marine industry no longer means danger, long periods away from home and instability. “People know so little about it. The number of potential careers would surprise them as well as the stability that is possible. Being a deckhand at Groupe Océan means having a steady job”, says the young man proudly.

In the coming years, in this company where upward mobility is always possible, he sees himself in a daytime seaman’s position with a regular schedule—seven 12-hour workdays followed by a week off. In future, he may also want to become a Captain-60 tons or less: “I’m proud to have dared to make the move to a new career, to have finished my course and, especially, to have a job with Groupe Océan, the company I was hoping for. Now, it’s up to me to get more experience and to follow my dreams”.

The marine industry offers a great many career opportunities on land and at sea—all very different from one another. In Québec, the sector represents approximately 14 300 direct jobs, on ships, in ports and in shipping company administration. “You just have to dare to make the move”, says Virgil. Who knows, by taking a chance in this new sector maybe you’ll find your dream job, one that you’re really passionate about...



Since January 2018, a 735-hour DEP in seamanship has been offered at the Institut maritime du Québec’s Centre de formation en mesures d’urgences (CFMU) in Lévis, in collaboration with the Commission scolaire des Navigateurs. For more information, click [here](#)!