

## NR conference opening address: Stavanger, November 2010

Partnership for the future ... partnering for success. That is the theme of our conference this year, and those of you who have read the introduction in the conference programme will know that this is at the heart of pretty much everything we do. And it applies to just about everyone in this room. In one sense or another, and in different ways, we regard each of you as a partner with us in one or more of our activities – whether it is as a host port for one of our events, a sponsor such as the city of Szczecin, a vessel operator, a member of our Class A Tall Ships Forum or our International Youth Forum ... and there are others too, a couple of whom you will hear from later during this opening plenary session.

We have a partnering relationship also in many of the things we do with our member national organisations from 26 countries around the world, but their role in Sail Training International goes way beyond that ... they are in effect our 'shareholders'. And very lively they can be sometimes!

2010 has been another pretty good year for Sail Training International.

We ran four events involving 11 host ports in nine countries, 150 vessels in all, and some 10,000 trainee crew members ... This was a testing schedule for us, with some particular challenges in the Mediterranean where we worked with five new ports. The Garibaldi Regatta brought in Sicily for the first time and the Historical Seas Regatta, which did what the United Nations has tried to do for years in bringing together Greece and Turkey in an international youth event, also introduced Tall Ships races to the Black Sea for the first time. These events have stimulated a great deal of interest in areas previously unexplored by us. The Mediterranean and its adjacent seas is a vast area ... we are keen to expand our influence there, provide new opportunities for young people to go sail training, and we plan soon to be running an annual event there in the Spring or Autumn.

More generally for the future, we currently have contracts for events through to 2013 and there are some exciting new opportunities for events emerging in various parts of the world for 2012 and well beyond. Races and regattas are very important for us. In the first place, they provide young people with all the value and benefits of the sail training experience, but with the added spice of international competition and the fun-and-games organised for them in host ports. But they also generate the income that enables us to do all the other things we do to support and develop sail training internationally.

We are fortunate to have secured a fairly stable level of income for the next few years to sustain our current level of activity. However, our big frustration is that we have far more opportunities than the resources to exploit them. Our Chief Executive Paul Reilly is leading an intensive search for new sponsorship funding ... and we will be putting some effort also into securing additional bursary funding to help young people participate in our events and sail training more generally.

We recognise that the next few years are going to be tough in most of the countries we deal with. The continuing economic squeeze is affecting sail training providers, and of course also the ports that host our events. This has encouraged us to focus on two aspects: 1) the promotion of sail training as a potent vehicle for developing important life skills in young people but also to enlarge the market for sail training. 2) to ensure the events we organise provide continuous improvements in their value for the host ports and vessels that take part in them.

Let me say something very briefly to illustrate this. Actually, two illustrations relating to the promotion of sail training.

First, a key to the promotion of sail training is that it must be able to demonstrate that it actually is a potent vehicle for developing important life skills in young people. There is some general research on this and we sponsored an important

piece ourselves a few years ago through the University of Edinburgh. But there is no generic or recognised sail training programme or even a definition of what a sail training programme should cover. So, for now anyway, the best evidence for a sail training vessel operator is to be able to demonstrate the value of its own programme. That is partly why we have this year funded the development of a 'self assessment toolkit' that individual vessel operators can use. It will enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes ... and also, very importantly, identify where improvements can be made. You'll hear more about this before we break for coffee. We regard it as a potentially very powerful tool for sail training vessel operators, it is the product of a team effort with good cross-section of sail training vessel operators around the world, led by Dr Kris von Wald of the Learn and Change consultancy, and will be launched this morning and at four work-shops during the conference for a wider pilot introduction next year.

Second, we have put a lot of effort this year into developing our strategy to secure a greater role for sail training in the programmes run for young people seeking a professional career at sea ... very much a global project for us. We have an international working group focused on this, led by our Vice Chairman Doug Prothero, and, related to it, we have made significant progress during the year in how we are viewed by key international organisations like the International Maritime Organization, International Shipping Federation and other industry bodies.

In terms of ensuring the events we organise provide continuous improvements in their value for the host ports and vessels that take part in them, we are doing two things. For the participating vessels we are putting increasing focus on in-port income for the big ships and the provision of trainees for the fleet as a whole ... and indeed we have decided to put some of our own money into a bursary scheme tied to our events which we also plan to pilot next year. For the ports we have revised our new host port contracts to identify more clearly the key cost areas, and we will work with host ports to keep these as low as possible while not damaging the essential qualities of the event itself for the trainees, ships and local community. One other significant action we took this year to assist us in this area was to appoint Anni Walther to one of our boards. Anni is from Aalborg, Denmark. She was chairman of the city's Steering Group for The Tall Ships Races in 1999, 2004 and again this year – all outstandingly successful events. Anni has been demanding of us, but a delight to work with and she will bring a lot of valuable experience from the host port side of the fence to the board's deliberations.

But we're going to kick off this year's conference with something that is a really good illustration of a partnership ... one that will help to enhance the reputation of sail training and of our events, as well as the relationship everyone in this room has in one way or another with the marine environment. We are launching today the Sail Training International Blue Flag Scheme. It is a collaboration with the Foundation for Environmental Education Blue Flag programme, specifically tailored by us for the sail training community.

To give this some context, we're going to start with a short presentation by the Foundation's international co-ordinator for its Blue Flag programme, Sophie Bachet. And then our own Paul Bishop, well known I am sure to all of you, will talk about the Sail Training International Blue Flag Scheme and how we plan to implement it. It is an exciting new project for us and we hope that every vessel operator here will want to sign up to it while you are in Stavanger.

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