Skippers program graduates receive Perseverance awards for working through pandemic

BY JEFFREY K. ROTH

BLUE HILL—Only seven students graduated from the 2021 Eastern Maine Skippers Program as a result of the pandemic, Tom Duym, Fisheries Education Specialist for the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries in Stonington, said during a June 17 Perseverance awards program at George Stevens Academy.

During the 2020-21 school year, about 30 students from the nine participating high schools that serve fishing communities encompassing 200 miles of coastal eastern Maine were enrolled in the Skippers Program. Of the seven graduates, six attended George Stevens Academy and one attended Deer Isle-Stonington High School.

"These students are being recognized for continued work in the program despite the effects of the pandemic on school schedules and formats," Duym said. "It's more of a cash award to seniors who are graduating because they stuck it out through the year, which hasn't been an easy task for either teachers or students—a lot of them shut it down for the year because they just didn't have the staffing to cover all of the required academics both online and in-house to do this. We've had a very small group this year."

Normally, the program serves between 60 and 100 students in grades nine through 12. Duym said the program began in 2012 to provide students with the basic knowledge and skills needed to pursue a career in fishing.

"We decided to do something special" for the awards, Duym said. "We asked a couple of schools who have supported our year-end activities to be here just to kind of share in the recognition of the students. This year, the only active classes offered were in GSA, Deer Isle-Stonington and Mount Desert Island high schools. Ellsworth High School had an after-school skippers club program."

Duym said that the core curriculum involves four content areas:
- on the water, which involves seamanship, fishing skills, etc.;
- at the table, which provides an overview of federal, state and local regulations;
- in the office, which focuses on business skills; and
- under the sea, which includes marine biology, ecology, etc.

In addition, MCCF staff and teachers get together to develop ideas for a broad collaborative project, which is introduced to students during a group meeting in the fall. In 2019, the project was to design your own fishery videos, "but we didn't because schools basically closed in March 2020; so, we're going to extend it into this year," Duym said. "We usually have four meetings a year—one in the fall, typically at a school science center. We try to do another one in the fall, sometime in November-Decem-

ber, where we get guest speakers and students get to present their ideas for addressing the topic. In early June, we usually have regional presentations by the many schools involved about what they've done on a topic and what their findings were."

GSA students Megan Haskell and Percy Clifford, both graduates of GSA's Skippers Program, received the Perseverance award at the ceremonies. GSA, Duym said, had the most students involved in the program for the year. Haskell will attend Eastern Maine Community College to study electrical engineering, and Clifford will attend Maine Maritime Academy, majoring in marine engineering.

"We really wanted to recognize the students...this year, because several of them stuck it out for multiple years, but especially this year, because it's an elective program," Duym said. "The teachers in this program have always been exceptional because they believe in what this program stands for, for what it's trying to do, and to keep young people interested in and maybe even staying in their communities."

For more information on the Eastern Maine Skippers Program, visit coastal-fisheries.org/collaborative-education-eastern-maine-skippers.

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Megan Haskell (second from left) and Percy Clifford (third from left) are two of seven 2021 graduates of the Eastern Maine Skippers Program who recently received Perseverance Awards, presented by Paul Anderson, executive director of Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries (far left), and Tom Duym (far right) representing the Eastern Maine Skippers Program.