

Volunteer Reflection

by Sally Somsel

Tom Kelly's dream of a Schoolship on the Great Lakes finally took place on the schooner *Malabar* in 1989. He rounded up some of his friends to come on board and volunteer to teach hands-on learning stations to the students who would come to Traverse City for a half-day field trip. Stations were navigation, benthos, plankton, seamanship, fish and the history/art station. On the first day of Schoolship, they met for a few hours before the sail to practice what they were going to teach. Over the years, the stations have evolved with some disappearing and others being added. (Water Chemistry was performed as part of the large group sampling and later became a teaching station.) Volunteers are the core of the Schoolship program. They teach about how things are connected in the Great Lakes ecosystem and the food web. In 1991 when I started volunteering, we showed up in the morning and shadowed one of the station instructors and by the afternoon you found yourself teaching the station.

In the early 1990's, instructor training classes were held at Norris School. We now had two schooners (*Malabar* and *Manitou*) to fill with students and volunteers. Tom was turning out about 30-40 new Schoolship instructors each year. Tom, Chip Franke, Don Gorski, John Schulz and Dr. Bill Weiss were the Lead Scientists on board and later recruited others to take on that position. This especially became important when we added *Inland Seas* to the schooner fleet.

In 1994, Captain Tom now had his own green hulled schooner with the red sails - *Inland Seas* "The Science Ship." Not only were volunteers needed to help teach the Schoolship stations, but they were also needed for office duties, crew positions, merchandise sales, and ship maintenance. Once we moved into the current ISEA Education Center, ISEA needed other volunteers for the boat building program, building and grounds maintenance, wetland walks, and upkeep. Volunteers shared their other talents with ISEA, some played sea music, and others helped with various tasks for the festivals and events.

Volunteers are still at the core of the organization and a very necessary part of ISEA today. We still hold training classes each spring for new Schoolship instructors and crew. The food web is still an important part of the program and we try to involve the students even more so that when they leave the ship, they will want to take care of our Great Lakes. The boat building and woodworking projects are open to those volunteers who are willing to work with the students. We need data input volunteers and other office help, merchandise sales and organization of the ships store. ISEA always has projects going on, and if you have some free time, please give us a call, we can always put you to work.