Inland Seas Education Association
Executive Director's Newsletter
October & November 2026

The Horizon Ahead

People often say that you can feel an organization's culture the moment you walk through the door. A positive culture and sense of belonging have always been hallmarks of Inland Seas. While culture is primarily created by people, it can also be influenced by design. As we focus on the final touches of our new education center, campus, landscaping, trails, art, and educational displays, we are doing so with deliberate purpose and intention.

Over the last year, we have shared a great deal of information about our new Education Center and Ship Maintenance Facility; you will find an update on the new building construction later in this newsletter. For my opening remarks, I would like to shine a little light on all of the exciting campus transformations you will see taking place over the spring and summer of 2027.

While construction crews stay focused on the Education Center over the winter, we expect a great deal of site work throughout the campus as soon as the spring frost allows. To begin, we will fully renovate and expand our outdoor learning pavilion. From our south lot, a new walking and biking trail will invite TART Trail users and the general public through the demonstration wetland toward the waters of Suttons Bay. This trail will feature interactive art and other elements designed to build Great Lakes literacy. Additionally, our landscape engineer has created a beautiful landscape plan that intentionally connects all three of our waterfront lots into a seamless campus. We anticipate that all of this, including the completion of our new Education Center, will be finished by the time that summer is over.

Once complete, our campus will be a place where students continue their discoveries after a day of sailing or a stay in the dorms. It will be a place for examining samples collected on board, exploring the watershed, and understanding how choices on land shape the health of our shared waters. It will also serve as a gathering place where students can share meals, teachers from across the Great Lakes can participate in training, and professionals can convene and learn together. All of this is set in an environment that reflects ISEA's role as the leader in hands-on, experiential Great Lakes education.

Thank you for your support, which is making this all possible. You are a big part of the amazing culture of Inland Seas Education Association, and we are working hard to ensure that your generosity impacts as many people as possible.

Happy Fall!

Fred Sitkins

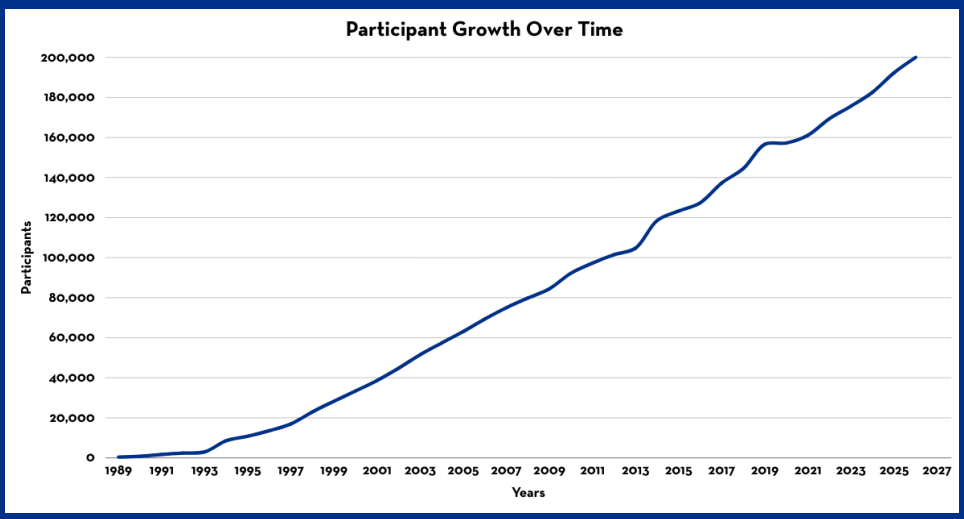
- Fred Sitkins, Executive Director

PS: In November, I get to set sail on the second half of my adventure across the Atlantic Ocean. This past spring I sailed across the North Sea on the 40-foot sailboat *Retriever*. If you would like to get regular updates during my late-November crossing, please sign up by going to schoolship.org/dispatchesfromfred.

The ISEA Executive Director's Newsletter is published monthly in digital format and delivered through email (Sign up at *schoolship.org*). This printed mailing is published each fall to update a broader ISEA audience.

Programmatic Milestone: Our 200,000th Participant

In 1989, ISEA began with a single chartered schooner and an inaugural class of 1,600 participants. Over the past 37 years, we have evolved into a regional leader in Great Lakes education. Through major milestones, including launching *S/V Inland Seas*, expanding our Suttons Bay campus, adding *S/V Alliance*, and introducing year-round Watershed Exploration programs, ISEA has dramatically broadened our reach across the Great Lakes Basin. This year, ISEA proudly celebrates welcoming our 200,000th participant as we continue inspiring future Great Lakes scientists, sailors, and environmental stewards.



Building Upward at the Inland Seas Education Center

We've officially cleared the site and transitioned from teardown to build! With demolition complete and site work behind us, our construction crew has begun building upward, raising the structural framing and wall support systems that will form the backbone of our new facility.

Work is progressing smoothly with no major site issues. We're on schedule to install the roof by February 2027 and open our doors for the campus grand opening in September 2027.

Seeing the physical structure start to take shape in Suttons Bay brings us one step closer to opening a year-round space that will expand hands-on Great Lakes education for generations to come. However, as we turn our attention to completing the full campus vision, including a new pavilion, trails, signage, and artwork, we still need help from our entire community. Help us add the finishing touches by contributing today!

Lessons from a Season of Stewardship

Emboldened by the changing climate and my unyielding, often tiresome inability to sit still, I set sail for the spring, summer, and fall aboard the Great Lakes nerd boats. Talking the ear off anyone willing to listen, I got to continue my mission of deepening folks' sense of responsibility and stake in their immediate, living environments. I had the complete privilege to do this in the field as an educator, surrounded by this planet's freshwater cathedral, using a sailboat as my classroom.

My time aboard the Schooner *Inland Seas* and the *Alliance* reintroduced me to a world of great depth and complexity, allowing me to remain a student while orienting me to a community of people whose mosaic of experience and beliefs further deepened my own sense of responsibility in this one-of-a-kind ecosystem.

Interning as an educator at Inland Seas allowed me to strengthen my abilities as a teacher and scientist in ways I couldn't have in a traditional classroom. Being able to see the students' progress from point A to point B on a daily basis was key. Students leaving with a new interest, a higher level of understanding, or a personal discovery was the most rewarding part of this process. The place-based nature of the program and its mission were what drew me to Inland Seas Education Association, and I'll be leaving having fully lived and practiced the tenets of both. I couldn't be more thankful for this opportunity and for an organization that fully embodies what it means to be a steward and a leader in the field.

Leaving the boat is hard, but walking away with a wealth of new experience and fresh ideas on how to apply this kind of place-based, hands-on curriculum to my own style of learning and teaching is priceless.

Thank you to everyone who made me a part of their work and community; this kind of work wouldn't be the same without a dedicated, creative, and forward-thinking team. **THANK YOU, INLAND SEAS!**

— **Joe Ramey**, *2026 Education Intern*

A Look at the Year Ahead

2027 is shaping up to be an extraordinary year of growth and impact at Inland Seas!

Next September, we plan to cut the ribbon on our brand-new Education Center. On the water, we are expanding our Great Lakes reach through partnerships with NOAA at the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast and Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuaries. Continuing our long-term partnerships, we look forward to once again collaborating with the Detroit River Story Lab to bring place-based education directly to students on the Detroit River. In addition, we'll reach over 120 schools, provide training for teachers, and explore watershed connections at Leo Creek Preserve. This continued growth is thanks to dedicated supporters like you!

Save the Date: 2027 Winter Lantern Walk

Mark your calendars for a magical evening with Inland Seas at **Leo Creek Preserve on Friday, February 19, 2027, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM!** Join us for our annual Winter Lantern Walk to experience the serene winter woods at your own pace along a trail lit by lantern light, followed by hot chocolate and a cozy fire. We can't wait to share this luminous winter night with you. Stay tuned for more details as the date approaches!

Inland Seas
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Inspiring Great Lakes Curiosity, Stewardship, and Passion

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Winter At ISEA

Stay connected to the Great Lakes and our mission all winter long! While our schooners are safely docked, ISEA is keeping hands-on education thriving through indoor workshops, community events, and **ISEA Cafes**. Whether you want to polish your maritime skills or join lively discussions on Great Lakes ecology, there are plenty of ways to learn and collaborate throughout the cold months. Visit ***schoolship.org/cafe*** to view our upcoming winter schedule.

What's Inside:

- Letter from the Executive Director
- A Season of Stewardship
- Construction Updates
- A Sneak Peek at 2027 Programming

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