

ALTON - Earlier this week, high school students from across the Metro East gathered at the [National Great Rivers Museum](#) to learn about career opportunities along the Mississippi River.

“Who Works the Rivers?” is a regular event sponsored by the [National River Museum and Aquarium](#) and [National Rivers Hall of Fame](#) through their program [RiverWorks Discovery](#). This career awareness event invites students to speak with employers in the maritime industry and learn about jobs that are supported by the river.

“Whether you’re looking to do a college career path, the trades or even the government agencies, there is a career for you in this industry,” explained Erinn Howard, RiverWorks Discovery executive director. “The mission of RiverWorks is commerce, culture, conservation and careers of America’s rivers, so we try to give a good perspective on all types of careers related to the river.”

Over 180 students from six local high schools were bussed to the event on Oct. 18, 2023 in Alton. Students watched a presentation, cycled through activity stations, chatted with employers and toured the lock and dam.

Howard explained that most students aren’t aware of the maritime industry and the variety of jobs it offers, many of which are high-paying and don’t require a college degree. The RiverWorks Discovery program and their “Who Works the Rivers?” events aim to show students some of the options available to them.

“make well over six figures a year, all without having that college debt behind you,” Howard added. “These companies bring you in at an entry level and they train you as you move up. They like to hire from within, and they like that you get that experience because the best way to run these companies from the top is to understand them from the bottom, and the best way to do that is to experience it yourself.”

This was echoed by many of the sponsors and employers who attended the event. Tessa Andres, who works with the trade association [Inland Rivers Ports & Terminals, Inc.](#), noted the wide variety of jobs within the maritime industry, most of which come with impressive salaries.

“We always like to say it’s kind of a hidden industry,” Andres said. “Our mission is to educate and promote the nation’s inland waterway systems and the use of them for commercial transportation and traffic and things like that. We are trying to build up the workforce of the inland water systems and the industries and companies that it serves.”

Environmental, commercial and federal jobs are all a part of this, Howard added. She enjoys organizing these events and meeting students through RiverWorks Discovery because it exposes them to so many options they didn’t know they had.

“A lot of careers that kids imagine and think about, they’ve heard about all of their life: firefighters, police officers, doctors, lawyers. But unless a kid has a family member in this industry, they probably have not heard about the industry,” Howard said. “It’s just a great career option, and people need to know about it.”

Howard encourages people to follow RiverWorks Discovery on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#), where they regularly post job openings. Check out their [official website](#) for more information about the RiverWorks Discovery program and upcoming [“Who Works the Rivers?”](#) events.