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USS Cape Cod needs a crew

Instead of making raw recruits walk the plank, the U.S. Navy is now giving them a chance to own it.

The navy is seeking recruits from the South Shore/Cape Cod area to enroll in an apprentice training and duty program aboard the new destroyer tender USS Cape Cod, now being built in San Diego.

Navy tradition says that every member of the original crew of a new ship owns a piece or a "plank" of the ship, according to a Navy press release.

"That tradition, perhaps even older than the Navy's apprenticeship system, remains popular with many former Navymen treasuring their 'plankowner certificates' for their entire lifetimes," the release said.

"We are offering two apprenticeship programs, Seaman and Fireman," Lt. Ned Lundquist said.

The seamen apprentices may train for advancement through competitive examinations to petty officer ratings in such technical specialties as boatswain's mate, gunner's mate, signalman, operations specialist, ocean systems technician, fire control technician, missile technician and sonar technician.

Fireman apprentices train for such specialties as engineman, boilermaker, boiler technician, hull maintenance technician, machinist's mate, gas turbine systems technician, machinery repairman, electrician's mate, interior communications technician and patternmaker.

The USS Cape Cod will be launched early next year. It weighs 22,000 tons and is designed to repair and supply the Navy's newest destroyers and frigates and their advanced missile, anti-submarine and electronics system.

The Cape Cod will have more than 50 shops, including facilities to service nuclear power plants. The new ship will be one of the few designed to accommodate both men and women.

Applicants for apprenticeships must be at least 17 years old and not more than 35 and must meet Navy character, mental and physical requirements.