

Shipping starts to connect

09 Jun 2016 ANALYSIS

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Greek companies have become more active in charitable work, mentoring, internship and encouragement of young entrepreneurs



CONNECTING has always been something that shipping has done rather well, whether bearing passengers across stretches of water small or vast, or feeding, heating and generally supplying the world.

But its attempts to connect properly with the society it serves have often been uneasy, sometimes excruciatingly so.

That is so the world over, but there has been more than the usual ill-informed and unflattering comment on this in Greece's case recently, since professional commentators have taken it upon themselves to ask if shipping is "doing enough" to aid countrymen caught in an eight-year economic and social crisis.

Generosity is a subject too nuanced to generalise about, but many individuals, companies and organisations in Greek shipping have become more active in charitable work, as well as areas such as mentoring, internship and encouragement of young entrepreneurs. There has been an upsurge of such efforts.

Earlier this year, for example, Suzanna Laskaridi launched Real Time Graduates as a non-profit organisation to help graduates connect with the industry. Although she emphasises it is early days yet, the idea is to bridge the gap between young people's academic career and professional life and give them a better grounding in an industry it can be tough to break into.

The effort builds on an existing internship programme offered by family company Laskaridis Shipping and aims to involve companies across the maritime cluster.

Another non-profit company, Project Connect, was begun in 2015 by Irene Notias of Prime Petroleum Services, together with two HR experts. She says the project addresses “the current problems of high youth joblessness and hopelessness in Greece”.

A future aim is a simulated shipping office to help prepare students “in the soft skills that are necessary before they ever come for internships”.

A pioneer in responding to the Greek crisis has been Libra Group, the diversified parent of Lomar Shipping. Chairman George M Logothetis has been in town for Posidonia and was featured speaker in the first of a planned series of Women in Business Dialogues under the auspices of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce.

Libra’s Global Internship Programme began with 20 interns and has risen to 120-130 per year, covering a number of countries including Greece. Since then, Cyprus and Haiti have been among countries asking Libra to help develop internship programmes for them.

After the programme began, five more companies followed it, according to Mr Logothetis. “Of those, four did it because they were inspired by what we had done and the other confessed it did because it was a bit ashamed.

“So we need to inspire — and to shame sometimes — to build momentum,” Mr Logothetis said.

Libra’s internship programme offered “the oxygen of possibility” to participants.

“People who give in life are always happier than the people who take,” he said. “There is no ceiling on the goodness we can do.”