

## Rob Munier comes aboard as new head of marine operations

Sometimes, a career change has the feel of deferred destiny.

“I was in the Caribbean,” said Rob Munier, “at Grand Cayman Island, doing graduate work in the mid-1970s, and one day, there was *Alvin* at the dock with its tender ship, R/V *Lulu*. It always stuck in my mind as an exciting image of oceanography and science.”

Now, Munier has responsibility for the submersible *Alvin*, as well as the rest of the deep-submergence vehicles, ships, and ocean observing systems at Wood Hole Oceanographic Institution. On March 1, 2010, he became WHOI’s vice president for Marine Facilities and Operations. He succeeds Susan Humphris, who had served as acting vice president since November 2008.

Munier came to WHOI from Tyco Telecommunications, a company specializing in

large-scale undersea technology. During a 30-year career in ocean engineering, he has worked on cable systems for telecommunications, oil and gas exploration, ocean observing, military applications, ocean energy, and oceanographic research. Most recently, as managing director for Tyco, he developed transoceanic fiber-optic systems, the underlying infrastructure for the global Internet and voice communications.

“For the first half of my career, I was frequently aboard ships and have spent more than 500 days at sea—mostly putting things in the ocean and taking them out,” he said. “I look at this job as cutting down on travel! But no matter what, I plan to periodically get out on the WHOI ships to be sure I appreciate what’s going on at sea.

“The challenge of this job is very different,” he said. “I come from an environment

where the pressure’s on to deliver a product. In a commercial venture, failure is not an option. Here, the process is part of the objective, because you’re doing experimental work.”

Nevertheless, as a service provider for the scientists using WHOI ships, vehicles, and tools, the Marine Facilities and Operations Department “needs to be reliable, so the scientists have leeway to try things,” he said. “If we don’t do well, the ramifications are different, but reputationally it’s the same.”

The first weeks of his new job demonstrated some of the challenges.

In his first week, a WHOI deep-submergence vehicle called *ABE* was lost (see Page 42). “And then a diver was injured [on a private dive in the Galápagos] before joining R/V *Atlantis*. Fortunately, he was all right, but we had to operate one man down on the ship for a portion of the cruise.”

“The way I look at it, one of my main jobs is to be a problem solver and a planner,” Munier said. In the latter category, he will help formulate long-term strategies for ship replacement and also be involved in the ongoing operations of the Ocean Observatories Initiative, a major national effort to establish long-term networks of sensors to provide real-time data on ocean conditions.

Munier grew up in the suburbs of New York City but spent summers at his grandparents’ home on Peconic Bay in Mattituck, Long Island.

“I grew up in boats and swimming,” he said. “I’ve had a passion since I was 12 years old for the ocean.”

At that age, he learned to scuba dive. Ever since, he has been diving all over the world for both work and pleasure. He is frequently joined by his wife, Jan, whom he met at Mattituck and who has the same love for the water.

“I am an avid outdoor person,” he said. “My most transportable activity is running, but I like to boat and kayak, and I am looking forward to kayaking around the Cape.”

The Muniers have two grown sons, Robert and Steve, and a golden retriever, Ursa, named for the mascot bear at Stratton, Vt., where they like to ski.

—Kate Madin



Tom Klenndinst, WHOI